

EPHESIANS

INTRODUCTION

None of the epistles which are ascribed to Paul have a stronger chain of evidence to their early and continued use than that which we know as the Book of Ephesians.

The epistle carries the affirmation throughout that Paul is the author of it; the general style and form of it are absolutely Pauline.

There are many good reasons for holding that Ephesians was written from Rome, during Paul's imprisonment there. The year 58 A. D. or thereabouts, may be assigned as a likely date.

The words "at Ephesus" are missing from certain manuscripts; but the very fact of Tychicus being chosen by Paul to convey this letter to the addressees would suggest that it was surely addressed to some congregation in Asia and, as Ephesus was the principal congregation of the entire province, there is no way that the Ephesians would not have received it, either as addressed directly to them, or along with other congregations as fellow-recipients of a kind of circular letter intended for Christians throughout the area. There is certainly no harm by calling it the letter to the Ephesians.

This letter is one of the most magnificent in the New Testament, containing the very essence of Christianity, and bearing in every line of it the most convincing evidence of its vitality, authenticity and relevance to the Christian faith.

Thirty times, the expression "in Christ," or its equivalent, is used, providing the most definite and specific statement of the blessings "in Christ" to be found in the New Testament.

Some scholars have objected that Ephesians is closely parallel to Colossians; but this is not really an objection. Paul wrote both letters at or very near the same time, and dispatched both of them to their destinations by the same person, Tychicus.

Why would they not have been nearly verbatim copies of the same message?

CHAPTER 1

Paul began here in the manner of all writers of his times with a salutation (verses 1-2); and, pausing a moment to consider the sublime and heavenly theme upon which he was about to write, penned the noble words of a grand doxology (verses 3-14), and then a fervent and beautiful prayer for those who would receive his letter (verses 15-23).

Verse 1

“Paul an apostle . . .” Paul’s use of the title of himself was always in the highest sense of a plenary representative of Christ who in harmony with the will of God had personally commissioned him; and as in the instance of the twelve (Luke 6:13) the “Lord named him” an apostle.

“To the saints . . .” This frequent designation of all Christians in apostolic times regarded what they were called to become more than it did any perfection of their achievement.

Francis Foulkes, Tyndale Commentary, Ephesians, p. 43, wrote, “The word expresses at once the privilege and the responsibility of the calling of every Christian, not the attainment of a select few.”

“Who are at Ephesus . . .” Some early copies left the words “at Ephesus” out on purpose so that other churches might insert their own names, since the purpose of the writer to include all Christians everywhere is clear enough in the very next clause.

If, as has been widely supposed, Paul had a number of copies of the letter made, dispatching them by hand of Tychicus to a number of churches.

The early centuries of Christianity found no difficulty in receiving this as Paul's letter to the Ephesians; and certainly there is no logical reason for refusing to do so now.

"Who are faithful in Christ Jesus . . ." The very fact of its being addressed, not only to the specific group, but to the "faithful in Christ" shows Paul's purpose of addressing the entire Christian world in this epistle.

"In Christ Jesus . . ." D. A. Hayes, *Paul and His Epistles*, p. 393, wrote this phrase, or its equivalent, "Occurs one hundred seventy-six times in the Pauline writings, thirty-six times in Ephesians alone." It must be agreed that the cornerstone and foundation of Paul's theology is "in Christ."

Verse 2

The linking of the Savior's name with that of the Father as the source of grace and peace indicates the apostolic certainty of our Lord's oneness with deity itself.

"Grace and peace . . ." "Grace" with variations was a typical Greek greeting, and "Peace" was a Hebrew greeting. Paul combined the two.

In the Christian concept, grace is not merely "cheerio," but the joy unspeakable flowing outward to men from the foundation of God's gracious and overflowing love, forgiveness and mercy.

Peace is not merely the tranquility and equilibrium of a soul in harmony with the Creator, but the word also anchors and symbolizes one of the great value-judgments of Christianity, namely that peace is better than war.

PEACE BETTER THAN WAR

It is the word of God alone that creates and binds upon men the judgment that peace is better than war. Take the Bible away, and men will automatically revert to pillage, plunder, rape and bloodshed in the same manner as the sow returns to her wallowing in the mire. The preference for peace is not a desire that flows out of unregenerated hearts; but it comes from the benign influence of the Prince of Peace, who constantly challenges men and makes them

ashamed as they move over grotesque moonlit battlefields at night, covering the faces of the dead as they advance.

It is the light that shines in the Bible that allows men to see the atrocious ugliness of war.

Verse 3

“Every spiritual blessing . . .” There are no spiritual blessings of any kind whatever, other than “in Christ.” F. F. Bruce, op. cit., p. 27, said, “Paul here struck the keynote of Ephesians at once. The writer and his readers are “in Christ,” members of Christ, sharers of His resurrection life.”

“In the heavenly places . . .” James Macknight, Apostolic Epistles and Commentary, Ephesians, p. 28, gave the meaning here as “in the Christian church;” and although the blessings “in Christ” are certainly those of His spiritual body, which is the church, it seems evident that more is intended here.

F. F. Bruce, op. cit., p. 27, expressed it, “Christ is exalted to heavenly realm, and thus those who are “in Him” belong to that heavenly realm also.”

The expression “in Him” was evidently used by Paul to convey the idea that the totality of all blessings of a spiritual nature and having eternal value are to be found exclusively “in Christ.”

With this profound verse, Paul begins a doxology which runs through verse 14. Some of the grandest and most perplexing words in the vocabulary of Christianity are used in these verses, such as adoption, redemption, foreordained, heritage and sealed.

Verse 4

Inherent in this verse is the fact of God’s calling and electing men before the foundation of the world; and very few theological questions have demanded more attention and interest than this.

Clearly revealed in this is the fact that the coming of Jesus Christ into the world for the purpose of taking out of it a people for Himself and redeeming them unto eternal life was no afterthought on God’s part.

Before the world was ever created, the Divine plan of the Son of God's visitation of the human family existed in the eternal purpose of God. That body that Christ would gather from the populations of earth existed in the eternal purpose of God.

That body that Christ will gather from the population of earth is destined to receive eternal life; because what God purposes is certain of fulfillment.

Every man may decide if he will or will not become a part of it and receive the intended blessing.

"Before the foundation of the world . . ." All attempts to get rid of the plain meaning of this phrase have been futile. F. F. Bruce, op. cit., p. 28, wrote, "Whatever be the interpretation of Genesis 1:2, it is certain that *katabole* can mean nothing but "laying down" in the sense of "establishing" or "founding;" the phrase used here and in ten other New Testament passages is unambiguous and denotes the creation of the universe."

"In love . . ." standing squarely between verse 4 and verse 5 may in fact belong together. If it goes with verse 4, it would refer to the love of God for those whom He will redeem from sin unto eternal life. Note: It might even be inferred that he intended a double meaning, true either way it may be read.

"Holy and blameless . . ." The thing in view in this is perfection, descriptive of the state of being "in Christ." This verse is not an affirmation that Christians achieve such holiness and perfection, but a declaration that they are credited with it!

PERFECTION OF CHRISTIANS

The requirement of Almighty God was bluntly stated by the Lord Himself in the Sermon on the Mount: "Therefore you are to be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect." (Matthew 5:48)

This is the master imperative demanding perfect faith, perfect love, perfect obedience and perfect holiness. This eternal demand of the Father upon the part of those who would be His children has never been repealed.

Christ found no man upon earth who could keep them all. All of the apostles were weak and sinful men; Christ found no perfection in humanity.

The personal ministry of Christ, the writings of the apostle Paul and the universal experience of man reveal the inability of any mortal ever born to achieve perfection and to stand clothed with his own merit and without blemish before God Himself! This being true, how can the perfection God demands be accredited to man?

There are a number of ways in which it may not be accredited.

- (1) It is not accredited by God's merely scaling down the requirements of holiness and perfection.

The ethical and moral requirements of Christianity are higher and stricter than the Law of Moses, because the intention and motivation of men are considered.

- (2) It may not be accredited through any man's achieving it.
- (3) It may not be accredited upon the basis of what any mortal man ever believed or did.

Man in his own identity, man as himself is wicked and sinful; and absolutely nothing that sinful man can ever believe or do can change that. In his own identity, he can never be anything else except sinful and wicked. The most preposterous heresy of all ages is that a retched sinner can "believe in Christ," and BINGO, God accredits that stinking sinner with RIGHTEOUSNESS AND PERFECTION!

Before any man can be saved, he must renounce himself, get rid of his own identity in the sense of its ever being perfect. Notice what Jesus said in the following verses: Matthew 16:24-25; Mark 8:34-35; and Luke 9:23-24.

"Deny . . ." In the above Scripture references, the word translated "deny" is from the Greek word *antilego*, a much stronger word and Vines Bible Dictionary defines it as: "To deny utterly or, to affirm that one has no connection with a person, as in Peter's denial of Christ."

The meaning of our Lord is thus clear enough, a man must not predicate his hope of eternal life upon anything connected with himself. The faith that saves is not of sinners but of Christ. How is the sinner's identity renounced?

- (1) He confesses not himself, or how saved he is, or how blessed he is, or what God has done for him; he confesses not himself but Christ!

A lot of so-called "witnessing for Jesus" in these times is no such thing. It is, on the contrary, a witnessing of the prideful egotism of persons who are obvious glorying in how wicked they were and how gloriously they are now saved.

- (2) Identity inevitably involves a name; and a change of identity means a change of name.

No man ever denies himself, until he has accepted the name of Christ. The Great Commission required that people of all nations be "baptized into the Name," there being revealed no other way by which one may lawfully wear it. In his baptism, the person who would be saved renounces himself and denies himself totally and completely, allowing himself to be buried out of sight completely in the water. It is precisely this that makes the God-given ordinance of Christian baptism repulsive to many men and many churches who have no intention whatever of ever denying themselves!

- (3) Through faith, repentance and baptism "into Christ" the penitent rises to walk in newness of life (a new identity), being no longer himself, but Christ. (Galatians 2:20) Here then is the secret of that perfection required of all whom God will receive.

What kind of righteous perfection, then is in Christ? It is total and complete. Christ's life was sinless, perfect, beautiful, holy, undefiled and glorious. The righteousness of Christ is not relative but absolute like that of God; and that is the only righteousness that could ever save any person. How may sinners acquire it?

How might such righteousness be accredited to mortals? Salvation is achieved in the only way possible by identifying the sinful mortal with Christ

who is righteous, and upon the prior condition of the sinner's renunciation of himself. This is accomplished by transferring the sinner "into Christ," not by transferring Christ's righteousness into sinners.

Calling wicked sinners righteous does not make them so (no matter what they believed or did); but the acceptance of Christ (with all members of His spiritual body) as righteous is based upon the sinless perfection of the Son of God.

Paul summed it all up in one glorious word: "THAT WE MAY PRESENT EVERY MAN, PERFECT IN CHRIST." (Colossians 1:28) It is precisely that perfection that Paul had in view in the above verse where he spoke of being "holy and without blemish!"

Verse 5

Theologians have tried for ages to make something hard out of predestination; but the meaning is not difficult. God designed the whole creation to accomplish the fulfillment of the plan which existed before creation.

God's purpose in creating man was that He might become a Son of God through Jesus Christ. That is the destiny God intended for every man ever born on earth.

God in designing the creation of men with the express purpose of making men His sons through Christ would most certainly not have created men in such a manner that the highest happiness of them could be achieved in the service of Satan rather than in the service of Himself.

"Adoption . . ." is used here to describe the acceptance of sinners into the family of God. It is only one of many words that describe the relationship Christians receive when they are converted. Thus, they are "the temple of God, the family of God, the bride of Christ, the vineyard of the Lord, the church of the firstborn, and (as here) the adoption." Each of these different terms describes some special and significant feature of the "new creation in Christ."

The word adoption seems to stress the fact of the Christian's privileges in God's family being totally undeserved and unmerited, just as an abandoned and

forsaken child may be taken into a family by adoption, such a legal action bestowing upon the child all of the rights and privileges of that family without any regard whatever to any merit of the child.

Verse 6

“To the praise of the glory . . .” The Father is the source of blessing here, the Son in verse 12 and the Holy Spirit in verse 14. It would appear that Paul built up this type of phrase to extol and praise God as the giver of all blessings.

“He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved . . .” Of the greatest significance is the past tense, indicating that God’s action in making men accepted is not a continuing operation. Sinners are not acted upon continually and individually as they may believe in Christ; the great enabling charter of all human redemption has already been granted, sealed and delivered. Through the gospel, men are called to believe the truth and be baptized into Christ; and the human response to that invitation determines destiny.

“In the Beloved . . .” The great truth here is as F. F. Bruce, op. cit., p. 30, wrote, “That all the blessings which are ours by God’s grace are ours in Christ; there is no way apart from Him in which God either decrees or effects the bestowal of His grace on men.”

Verse 7

“In Him . . .” that is, “in Christ,” carrying the great truth that the blessings enumerated in this epistle belong exclusively to those who have been “baptized into Christ,” there being absolutely no other way mentioned in the New Testament through which any man may dare to fancy that he is “in Christ.” If there is any other way to be in Christ someone should site the New Testament passage which tells sinful men what it is, because it is clear enough that many are spurning the manner of being united with God “in Christ” through faith, repentance, and submission to God’s ordinance of baptism. (1 Corinthians 12:13; Romans 6:3-5; 1 Peter 2:18-20; Galatians 3:27)

“Redemption through His blood . . .” The New Testament presents the blood of Jesus Christ as the purchase price of the church, the grounds of

redemption and the great atonement. (Acts 20:28; I Corinthians 6:20; 1 Peter 1:18-20; Colossians 1:14)

Francis Foulkes, op. cit., p. 52, wrote, "Such redemption is found in Christ, not merely through Him, but by men coming to live in Him."

There are two fundamental teachings in regard to the great sacrifice for human transgression paid by Jesus our Lord upon the cross, which appear in this passage:

- (1) the concept of a ransom paid in order to deliver, and
- (2) the idea of sins forgiven, remitted and taken completely away.

Jesus Christ himself described His earthly mission in respect to both of these, "giving His life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28), and "shedding His blood for the forgiveness of sins." (Matthew 26:28) Willard H. Taylor, Beacon Bible Commentary, Vol. 9, page 154, wrote, "The word Paul used here for "forgiveness" is *aphesis*. It means 'letting go,' and 'exacting payment for.'"

"According to the riches of His grace . . ." The supply of grace is one of surpassing richness, fullness and over-sufficiency. "An abundant entrance" will be granted to the redeemed. (2 Peter 1:11)

Verses 8-9

"Which He lavished upon us . . ." The reference is to the "riches" just mentioned. "Wisdom and insight" being among the great blessings "in Christ." The difference in wisdom and insight is this: J. Armitage Robinson, Saint Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians, p. 30, wrote, "Wisdom: this is knowledge that sees into the heart of things, which knows them as they really are." William Barclay, The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians, p. 96, wrote, "It is the ability to see great ultimate truths of eternity." Willard H. Taylor, op. cit., p. 154, wrote, "It more nearly approximates our word "insight."

"Insight" The three scholars just cited also defined this as "the understanding which leads to right action," "the ability to solve the problems of each moment of time," and "wise conduct."

The only true “wisdom and insight” are revealed from God through the Sacred Scriptures.

“The mystery of His will . . .” The New testament use of the term “mystery” is not very closely related to the modern use of the word, conveying instead the meaning of “a secret once unknown, now revealed.” John Mackay, *God’s Order*, p. 59, called it, “God’s unveiled secret.”

There are many mysteries referred to in the New Testament, but that in view here is the “great mystery” (1 Timothy 3:16) embracing in its fullness the total sphere of God’s dealings with His human creation.

Verse 10

Any failure to get the full meaning of being “in Christ” is to forfeit all hope of understanding that part of the New Testament written by the apostle Paul.

“Suitable to the fullness of the times . . .” Although “suitable” is a word normally connected with a servant’s administration of the affairs of another, Alfred Barry, *op. cit.*, p. 18, wrote, “Here it is applied to the disposal of all things by God Himself, according to the law which He has set Himself to do all things by.”

“Fulness of the times . . .” This is a reference to the fact that God scheduled all of the events of time and history, whether sacred or profane, in advance. All things move according to the cosmic schedule of God Himself. (Colossians 1:16-20 and Philippians 2:9-10)

“Summing up all things in Christ . . .” D. A. Hayes, *op. cit.*, p. 388, said, “The word all occurs in this epistle fifty-one times!” Paul is thinking of the ultimate total and complete victory of God in Christ over all evil.

“Things in heaven and things upon the earth,” as well as things “under the earth” (Philippians 2:10) shall finally recognize the authority and dominion of Christ and confess His name to the glory of God.

Francis Foulkes, *op. cit.*, p. 53, noted that, “This verse has been used as the keystone of the doctrine of ‘Universalism,’ to the effect that all men shall be saved in the end.” Nothing in the passage, however, supports such a view.

Indeed “all things” shall be compelled to acknowledge the authority and glory of the Son of God; but Jesus Himself spoke of certain ones in the final judgment scene who indeed acknowledge Him as “Lord,” but who shall not enter into life. (Matthew 7:21-23)

A practical deduction from this was made by Alfred Martin, op. cit., p. 727, saying, “Since Christ is preeminent in God’s purpose in the whole universe as well as in the church, the individual who does not have Christ preeminent in his life is entirely out of harmony with the purpose of the Father.”

Verse 11

“We have obtained . . .” Even the purpose of God in the calling of Israel in the Old Testament had respect to the fulfillment of God’s purpose in Christ. Evidently Paul intended to bring into view here the fact that even the choice of Israel was not the totality of God’s plan, but only a part of it, which from the very beginning included also the bringing of the Gentiles to receive His mercy and grace and become a part of the same inheritance, or heritage, along with the Jews.

Verse 12

“To the praise of His glory . . .” The great purpose for which God created men is that of glorifying God.

“Who were the first to hope in Christ . . .” This is generally interpreted to mean that the Jewish dispensation looked to the coming of Christ, hoping for the deliverance that He would bring.

The clause might very well be a qualifier of them who “shall be to the praise of His glory,” the same being limited to those, and only to those, who had before that future event, laid hold upon the hope in Christ.

Verse 13

The Revised Version of the Bible reads: “In whom, having also believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit . . .”

The New American Standard Bible reads: “In Him you also, after listening to the message of truth . . . having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise . . .”

This very interesting discrepancy between the RV and the AV and also the NASV reveals the error in the RV. It is not a mere case of choice of words. The two versions teach different things, and there is no way both of them can be correct.

The AV and the NASV shows that the sealing of the Holy Spirit of promise took place in those “in Christ at some point in time after” they had become believers in Christ; but the RV muddles the meaning, leaving the possible interpretation that the “sealing” took place coincidentally and at the same time of believing. If “believing” is understood as the whole complex of actions involved in conversion (faith, repentance, confession, and baptism) no error is implied, however “believing” or “faith” as used in the limited, technical sense of the theological jargon current today, is alleged to be something apart from being baptized into Christ, enabling jugglers of the sacred text to claim the meaning to be “Christians are sealed with the Holy Spirit at the time of believing only, and not after being baptized into Christ.”

That this is a false view is evident since both versions reveal the sealed persons to be those who are “in Christ;” and since no one was ever “in Christ” except by being baptized into Him, the true meaning shines through despite all efforts to hide it.

It is exceedingly significant that in the case of the Holy Savior Himself, the Spirit did not descend and remain upon Him until after He was baptized. Why should it be thought strange that the gift of the Holy Spirit was promised only to believers who would repent and be baptized?

Note: It is amazing how commentators cite a dozen other New Testament passages searching for the “Holy Spirit of promise,” all of them apparently never having heard of Acts 2:38-39! It is a positive certainty that if the “promise of the Holy Spirit” in that passage does not connect with Paul’s reference to the “Spirit of promise” here, then nothing in the New Testament does!

Verse 14

THOUGHTS REGARDING THE EARNEST

The meaning of “earnest” as used here is exactly the same as that intended by the use of the word today to refer to a partial payment tendered as a guarantee that the full amount promised will be paid in the future. The earnest of the Holy Spirit is given to Christians by the Father in heaven, or by Christ (it is true both ways), as a pledge of the ultimate reception of the redeemed soul into eternal fellowship with the Father in heaven.

The earnest is always a token, not any large share of the amount guaranteed. Those receiving the earnest of God’s spirit are not thereby commissioned to throw away their Bibles and start “walking by the Spirit!”

The “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, etc.” which mark the true Spirit of promise in Christian hearts are here considered to be one in kind with the joys of the redeemed in heaven. The Christian life, faithfully lived, is itself the beginning of the heavenly adventure.

Verse 15

“Having heard of the faith . . . among you . . .” Almost the exact parallel of this verse is in Colossians 1:4, addressed to a church Paul had never seen. The same words here addressed to the recipients of this letter must therefore mean that Paul had never seen them! This means, of course, that it is not Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, where he had spent three whole years! Such a deduction, however, cannot be intelligently supported because Paul used almost exactly these same words, and certainly the full thought of them, in Philemon, to one of his own converts.

Thus, it is clear enough that Paul did not mean in this verse that he had heard “for the first time” of the faith and love of the Ephesians, but that he had heard such things of their members following the time when he had worked among them.

Note: Verse 16 through verse 22, is a prayer Paul penned on behalf of the Ephesians.

Verse 16

Several things about prayer are evident in this specimen. First of all, Paul did not cease to give thanks for his converts. Paul never forgot to pray for others. In the second place, thanksgiving was a prominent, invariable element in all of Paul's prayers that have come down to us. Whatever the circumstances, he always found something to be thankful for.

Verse 17

James Macknight, op. cit., p. 269, accurately discerned the meaning of this verse thus, "The apostle did not pray that God would give to all the Ephesians the knowledge of the doctrines of the gospel, by an immediate revelation made to themselves; but that he would enable them to understand the revelation of these doctrines which was made to the apostles, and which they preached to the world."

There is still a need for Christians to pray that God will help them to understand the revelation of the Sacred Scripture, because many of its most marvelous teachings require more than a little application and serious study to be clearly understood.

Verse 18

"The eyes of your heart may be enlightened . . ." This was a prayer by Paul that God would give true spiritual discernment to the Ephesians.

Nothing can bless men any more than sensitivity to spiritual truth. It is a sad fact that people may hear the glorious news of salvation in Christ until it no longer arouses any emotion at all in their hearts.

God grant that our hearts may never be insensitive to such a message. How can this earth, which is so much with all of us, but which like ourselves is designed to perish, and which is unable to supply the deep needs of our souls—how can this earth come to be everything to men, and the hereafter nothing?

God help men to tune their hearts to hear Christ speaking across centuries of time to every evil soul, “Come to Me . . . I will give you rest.”

Verses 19-20

These two verses set forth the power of God, with Paul using a succession of very strong words to describe it.

Dynamis means the ability to accomplish, the cognate verb means: “I am able.”

Energeia means power at work, not mere potential power but active power.

Kratos means the power that rules, has dominion, especially over rational things.

Ischys means inherent strength, or might. It has more to do with potential, intrinsic might, whether active or not.

The very ultimate demonstration of God’s power was cited by Paul here as the resurrection of Christ. That is the act above all others and beyond all others that shows the unlimited power and ability of God to do all that He has promised to do for His children.

Without the resurrection of Christ, the Christian gospel is stripped of all credibility and relevance for men; and that is why Paul never forgot to include it in the very heart of every message and every letter.

Verse 21

In Matthew 28:18, Jesus Christ spoke of “all authority” in heaven and upon earth having been given unto Him; and exactly the same teaching is here. Besides ten passages of the Greek New Testament which flatly refer to Jesus Christ as God, there are at least a hundred others such as this one which conveys exactly the same teaching.

Verses 22-23

It is not merely the fact of Christ’s universal, eternal power which Paul affirmed here; the significant thing is that He is the head of that community of men and women on earth called “the church” who are His body , His spiritual

body, having an intimate and eternal connection with the all-powerful One who is actually the "head" of that spiritual body.

The Pauline doctrine of "salvation in Christ" places the ground of justification totally in Jesus Christ. Nothing that a sinner can either believe or do, "saves him." He is saved, not by Himself, but by Christ.

When Paul says he is justified "by faith," it is not the sinner's faith, but Christ's which is meant. Paul reiterated the thought four times in the first letter that he ever wrote that men are saved by "the faith of Christ."

CHAPTER 2

Paul's theme in this chapter continues to be the glorious blessings of the saved "in Christ," as contrasted with their former state of being without any hope whatever. Those who were once "dead in sins" are now alive in Christ (verses 1-10); and those who were once "aliens and strangers, separated from God" are now members of God's family, (verses 11-22).

Verse 1

John William Russell, Compact Commentary on the New Testament, p. 476, wrote, "To be dead in trespasses and sins does not mean unconsciousness or non-existence." (1Timothy 5:6; Revelation 3:1) In the Scriptural view, sin equals death; and there is no light or causal view of either in the Bible.

Both Jews and Gentiles are shown to have been alike guilty and in need of God's mercy.

Sinners in their pre-Christian state were "dead in sins;" but that deadness was not something they inherited, but came about through the guilt of sins committed.

There is a world of difference in being dead in sins, as here, and being dead to sin in Christ Jesus. Those in Christ are legally dead to sin, in the same sense of being free of the penalty of it, through the death of Christ. They are in Christ, Christ died, and therefore they died.

There is no such thing as “being dead to sin” in the sense of exemption from the temptations to sin. Even Christ was tempted.

Verses 2-3

“Walked according to the course of this world . . .” This refers to the behavior which is characteristic of sinful men.

Such men do what men are normally expected to do, from motives that are common to all, and invariably governed by selfishness. The person walking after this manner regards not the will of God but only passions, appetites, and ambitions of egocentric self.

“The prince of the power of the air . . .” The character in view is here is most assuredly Satan, who is called the “god of this world” in 2 Corinthians 4:4, and who was called the “prince of this world” (John 14:30; 16:11) by none other than the Christ Himself. Christ taught men to pray, “Deliver us from the evil one!”

The greatest deception Satan ever perpetrated upon men is that of persuading them that he does not exist.

It is clearly Satan which Paul referred to in this place; but what is meant by “powers of the air?”

“Powers of the air . . .” This is the same as “power of darkness” (Luke 22:53; Colossians 1:13) and “the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.” (6:12)

Alfred Barry, op. cit., p. 23, wrote, Air here describes a sphere, and therefore a power, below the heaven and yet above the earth. The word and its derivatives carry with them the ideas of cloudiness, mist and even darkness. It is naturally used to suggest the evil power as allowed invisibly to encompass and move about this world, yet overruled by the power of the true heaven, which it vainly strives to over cloud and hide from earth.”

The designation of Satan as prince of the powers of the air (in the sense suggested above) is precisely accurate and instructive. Satan’s awesome power is above that of men, but below that of Christ.

“The Spirit that is now working . . .” A spirit is a living being; and from this it is plain that Paul considered Satan to be at work in the men of his generation; and we are certain that he is no less at work now. William Barclay, *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians*, p. 116, pointed out that these first three verses have a description of the life without Christ, the same being:

- (1) a life lived on the world’s standards and with the world’s values,
- (2) a life under the dictates of the prince of powers of the air,
- (3) a life of disobedience,
- (4) a life at the mercy of desire,
- (5) a life that follows the desires of the flesh, and
- (6) a life which deserves only the wrath of God.

“Lusts of the flesh . . . desires of the flesh . . .” These certainly include the gratification of bodily appetites but David Lipscomb, *New Testament Commentaries*, *Ephesians*, p. 40, said, “The flesh, the world and the devil are not different classes of sin, but aspects of sin; and any one is made at times to represent all.”

With regard to the powerful spiritual hosts over whom Satan is said to be their prince, James Macknight, *Apostolic Epistles with Commentary*, Vol III, p. 278, identified them with the fallen angels of Jude 6 and 1 Peter 5:8, supposing that “they have arranged themselves under the direction of one chief,” the better to carry on their evil work. He also supposed that Satan might have been the leader of the angels who rebelled against God, hence “the devil and his angels.” (Matthew 25:41)

“By nature, children of wrath . . .” Apart from God, there is nothing in nature that leads men into paths of righteousness.

“Even as the rest . . .” How could Paul have included himself here with the godless pre-Christian Gentiles? Of course, in the sense of all men being guilty before God, the Jew and Gentile alike were without merit; but that is not the meaning of this place. Paul had always sought to have a true conscience before God; and he was a practicing Pharisee of the noblest and purest motives; and

one may not escape the certainty that in this place Paul was including himself with the Christian Gentiles in an accommodative sense.

Verses 4-5

“Dead in our transgressions . . . ” F. F. Bruce, *Answers to Questions*, p. 104, said, “This describes the existing state from which we were made alive with Christ.”

“By grace you have been saved . . . ” In this Paul referred to salvation from past sins and induction into the kingdom of Christ.

Paul’s reference to salvation in the past perfect tense as something done and accomplished already has no reference to final destiny but to the primary obedience that makes a true child of God.

Verse 6

“Raised us up with Him . . . ” Paul was speaking obeying the gospel in the preceding verse, of being saved from “old sins,” of becoming a part of Christ, being made alive with Christ,” etc. In that light, this clause is a plain categorical reference to Christian baptism, the same being the means by which God makes the penitent believer to be “in Christ.” How astounding are the comments which would make “raised up with” Christ in this place to mean: “the resurrection of believers at the last day, “a spiritual transformation,” believers are viewed (here) as already seated there (in heaven) with Christ,” “in spirit already,” and ere long our bodies too will be raised”—but the true meaning is given by Paul himself.” (Romans 6:4; Colossians 2:12-13)

The full meaning of this verse is that Christians who been baptized into Christ, therein being “made alive together with Christ” and being “raised up with Him,” are partakers of the full rights and privileges of the heavenly kingdom. Men have removed baptism from their own theology, but they have not removed it from that of Paul.

Verse 7

“Surpassing riches . . . in kindness . . . ” The marvelous tenderness and consideration of God for His erring human children must ever inspire with

admiration, wonder and awe, the soul becomes conscious of the fullness and glory of such wonderful love.

“In Christ . . .” The love, the goodness, the hope, the forgiveness, the joy, the salvation—everything is in Christ.

“In the ages to come . . .” The apostle Paul did not anticipate the end of the world in a few days or a few weeks, or in his lifetime, but on the other hand considered that God’s grace would be available in the salvation of sinful men for “ages to come.”

Verses 8-9

There is no release in this text from obligations God has bound upon sinners who desire to be saved. It cannot mean, nor does it say, that “faith only” saves sinners and that even that faith is supplied by the Lord, not by sinners, being “not of yourselves!”

The error of men in their interpretations of this passage is evident in such comments as, “Our salvation . . . is appropriated by us through faith alone.” (F. F. Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 51)

If salvation is by grace alone, it cannot, at the same time, be of faith; and if it is of faith alone, it cannot, at the same time, be of grace also. James 2:24 says: “A man is justified by works, and not by faith alone.”

NOTICE, what verse 8 says: “For by grace you have been saved though faith . . . it is the gift of God.” Some of the critical scholars declare the past tense perfect tense here to be un-Pauline, but while it is true that Paul often spoke of salvation as a continuing process (as in 1 Corinthians 1:28 and Romans 5:9), he was here speaking of being “saved” in the sense of having obeyed the gospel. Jesus said, “He that believes and is baptized shall be saved.” (Mark 16:16)

The primary salvation accomplished when a sinner believes and obeys the gospel is complete and final and perfect, as regards his old sins.

“For by grace . . .” It is clear then that God’s grace is to all men, for all men alike, and that it is available for every person who was ever born on earth. (Titus 2:11) If, then, salvation is by grace only, all men are already saved; for

God's grace has appeared to all. Christ Himself, however, taught that all men will not be saved.

The Reformation heresy was simply that of removing or negating all conditions of salvation except the sinner's subjective trust/faith, thus proclaiming what was called "salvation through faith alone." Such preconditions of salvation as repentance, confession, baptism and the acceptance by the convert of his Christian baptism and the acceptance by the convert of his Christian obligations—all these are declared to be "works" and therefore unnecessary to be performed as conditions of salvation, and this despite the truth that none of them is a "work" at all, except in the sense that the sinner's faith is also a "work."

"Through faith . . ." The most likely meaning of this phrase is "through the faith," that is, "through the Christian faith," or the Christian religion. One thing is absolutely certain: this cannot mean the subjective trust/faith of sinners.

"And that not of yourselves . . ." The word "that" making it absolutely mandatory to understand "the faith" as being that which is "not of yourselves."

There is only one possible way of understanding "faith" as the subjective response of a person (in this passage) and that is by referring it to the faith of Jesus Christ. If this is done, of course, then the availability of Christ's faith as the basis of human redemption is indeed the gift of God.

In all likelihood, the simple meaning here is "the Christian faith," which came about as a gift of God to mankind, and not as a result of any human contribution whatever.

"Not as a result of works, that no one should boast . . ." This refers to works of the Law of Moses, to nothing else. Paul said, "Work out your own salvation," (Philippians 2:12), and he also praised the Thessalonians for their "work of faith." (1 Thessalonians 1:2)

"That no one should boast . . ." This intention of the Father absolutely removes the primary steps of Christian obedience from any possibility of inclusion in the words "not of works," because there is nothing in any of the

steps of primary obedience which by even the wildest stretch of human imagination can be construed as “glorying,” or providing any basis for human glorying.

“Faith . . .” not in one’s self, but in the crucified Savior—any ground of glorying here?

“Repentance . . .” entails godly sorrow for sins committed, issuing in a reversal of the human will—any ground of glorying here?

“Confession . . .” is not a confession of how saved one is, or what wonders the Lord has done for one, but of faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God—any ground of glorying here?

“Baptism into Christ . . .” In this act, which is the sinner’s only in the sense that he is commanded to “have himself baptized,” he is passive, silent, meek, helpless; with hands folded over a penitent heart, he permits his entire person to be buried in baptism, this action showing that he does not trust himself for salvation any “good works . . .” more than he would trust a dead body, fit only to be buried—any ground of glorying here? NO! NO! NO!

Those who are glorying in this generation are not those who are obeying the gospel in order to be saved, as the Scriptures teach; but, on the other hand, they are those who are screaming to high heaven that they are being saved in a better way, by doing nothing except “believing” or “trusting.” They are glorying in being saved without “obeying the gospel;” and they are glorying against those whom they denounce and decry as “legalists” because they do render obedience to these primary commandments and strive to teach all men to do likewise.

Verse 10

“Good works . . .” One who is a Christian under the same imperative compulsion as that which rested upon the Christ who said, “We must work the works of Him that sent Me.” (John 9:4) Any theory which divorces the works a Christian must do from having any connection with his salvation is a false theory. It is true, to be sure, that even the good works of Christians are in no sense adequate grounds of God’s justification lavished upon them in Christ: but

they are conditions antecedent to eternal life, which man indeed, for cause, be waived by the Father in love, but which may not, under any circumstance, be rejected with impunity by arrogant men who simply decide they will do it “by faith alone.” Most of the commentators who advocate the “faith only” heresy are very broadminded in dealing with this verse.

Francis Foulkes, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, Ephesians, p. 77, wrote, “They say the essential quality of the new life is good works.”

W. G. Blaikie, op. cit., p. 64, wrote, “If we are not living a life of good works, we have no reason to believe that we have been saved by grace.”

Willard H. Taylor, Beacon Bible Commentaries, p. 174, wrote, “Paul reminds us that works have a place in God’s salvation.”

You might ask, “What is that place?” Paul spelled it out, thus, “God will render to every man according to his works: to them that by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and incorruption, eternal life; but unto them that are factious and obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness, shall be wrath and indignation, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that works evil of the Jew first and also of the Greek. (Romans 2:6-9; 2 Corinthians 5:10)

Note: The truth is clear enough for all who wish to know it!

Verses 11-12

There is a progression in these verses describing the pre-Christian state of Gentile Christians. George E. Harpur, A New Testament Commentary, Ephesians, p. 463, wrote, “Physically they lacked the ancient sign of the covenant; politically they had no part in Israel’s national or religious life; and spiritually they had no knowledge of the true God.”

Also in verse 12 (beginning after the words “by human hands”) W. G. Blaikie, op. cit., p. 63, said, “There is a fivefold negative description with a cumulative effect, the situation becoming graver and more terrible; and the last clause is the climax.”

“Therefore remember . . .” It might be good for any Christian to pause now and then and look up to God and remember the way it was with himself before he began to follow Christ.

“Uncircumcision . . . Circumcision . . .” Circumcision was the sign of God’s covenant with the children of Israel; but instead of accepting their responsibility of teaching all nations of the true God, they usurped for themselves alone the privileges of the true knowledge of God and became exclusive, arrogant, proud and conceited, looking down upon Gentiles with the utmost contempt and detestation.

No modern person can fully appreciate the exclusiveness of ancient Israel; but the following paragraph from William Barclay, *op. cit.*, p. 125, provides some suggestion of what it was like, “The Jew said that God created Gentiles as fuel for the fires of hell, that of all the nations God made, He loved Israel alone, that the best of serpents crush and the best of Gentiles kill, that it was not even lawful to aid a Gentile woman in labor because it would only bring into the world another Gentile. The barrier was absolute. If a Jewish boy married a Gentile girl, a funeral for the boy was carried out. Even setting foot in a Gentile’s house defiled a Jew!”

Most of the glorying Paul had in mind in his letters regarded such inordinate conceit as that depicted by Barclay above.

“Separate from Christ . . .” Gentiles, prior to Christianity had no longing for a Messiah, as did the Jews.

“Excluded from the Commonwealth of Israel . . .” The use of this expression shows that Paul was already thinking of the commonwealth of the new Israel, the spiritual Israel, which is the church. All nations, races and divisions of men are invited to membership in the Commonwealth.

The Jewish exclusiveness was actually hardly any worse than that of the educated Greeks who divided the whole world as “Greeks and barbarians,” or that of Romans who classified all men as either “citizens or non-citizens.”

“Strangers to the covenants of the promise . . .” All of their great and precious promises of the Old Testament, looking to the blessing of “all kindred of the earth,” were literally unknown by the Gentiles. The Jews knew, or should have known, that God also had plans for their salvation, but no evangelical message ever went out from Jerusalem under the old covenant.

“Having no hope . . .” The pessimism of the entire pre-Christian Gentile world is one of the saddest and most wretched chapters of human history. In the vanity of his own intellectual conceit, ancient man rejected the knowledge of God, which at one time he most certainly did have; and the story of what then followed is recounted in the first two chapters of Romans. Every man should read it as a prophecy of what will surely happen to “modern man” when he has finished with removing God from his thoughts.

“Without God . . .” translates a single word in the Greek (atheists), the same being the only New Testament occurrence of it. This word was commonly used by Christians to describe the pagans.

Verse 13

Paul showed the salvation of Gentiles to have been in God’s plan always, Gentiles being clearly included in Isaiah’s prophecy of those whom God would heal. Peter also, in the Pentecostal sermon, extended the terms of admission to God’s kingdom to “all who are far off.” (Acts 2:39)

“Far off . . .” It is clear that in both the Old Testament and the New Testament these words are a reference to Gentiles, but the implications and connotations of the expression are far greater than that of both the pagans and the Jews, that which is “far off” was held to be detestable.

The English word “profane” derives from the Latin *procul a fano*, which is literally far from the temple.” (Adam Clarke, Commentary on the Whole Bible, Vol. XI, p. 780)

The utter depravity of the whole pre-Christian Gentile civilization is expressed by the words “far off.”

Brought near by the blood of Jesus Christ . . .” It is the blood of Christ which cleanses from sin, making it possible for the profane to enter the temple of God; it was the ransom paid for the redemption of the souls under bondage to sin; it was the purchase price paid for His church. The blood references in the New Testament are precious, and only the spiritually reprobate are capable of rejecting them as in any manner offensive.

Verse 14

“Our peace . . .” The mind of the great apostle still lingered upon the glorious prophecies of Isaiah; and in such a frame of mind Paul would most certainly have included in his thoughts the prophecy of the Son of God who had assured His apostles that the Jewish temple itself would be utterly devastated and destroyed within the time-span of a single generation after Jesus spoke (Mark 13:30), and that the destruction would be so complete that not one stone would be left on top of another. (Mark 13:2)

Paul would also have had first-hand information about the rending of the temple veil that hung between the Holy of Holies and the Holy Place, a sensational event that took place the moment of Christ’s death (Matthew 27:51), the significance of this being in the fact that the sacred veil was the largest, highest, most important and most symbolical of all the “middle walls of partition” (of which there were several) in the ancient Jewish temple. Thus, when God rent it in twain (two pieces), all of the middle walls of separation were broken down and destroyed.

Paul’s whole apostolic mission had been carried forward in the stern and certain conviction that God had broken it down; and for anyone to imagine that Paul would have needed the actual destruction of the temple itself (which occurred after Paul’s death) to suggest the figure which he employed in this passage it would first have to be supposed that Paul was a spiritual dunce. The whole Christian world knew that the temple was doomed to destruction by Christ’s prophecy; and not even all of the cunning and power of Jews and Gentiles alike who tried to save it could prevent the prophecy’s fulfillment. Not

only by Paul, but by every Christian, the Jewish temple was looked upon as already destroyed!

Verse 15

“By abolishing . . . the enmity . . .” The new and living way is said to have been opened up through the veil, that is to say, his flesh, thus lending the probability to view of John William Russell, op. cit., p. 477, that Paul was referring to the veil of the temple (middle wall in verse 14) which was rent when Christ died. He wrote, “Regarding the “middle wall of partition . . .” This probably is a symbolical reference to the partition in the temple which set apart the court of Gentiles. Its destruction was typified in the ending of the veil of the temple at the time of the crucifixion. (Matthew 27:51)

“By abolishing the enmity . . .” F. F. Bruce, op. cit., p. 54, wrote, “No iron curtain, color bar, class distinction or national frontier of today is more absolute than the cleavage between Jew and Gentile in antiquity.” Christ abrogated, annulled and replaced the entire Jewish system with another institution, that of the New Covenant, in which all former distinctions, were canceled.

“By abolishing . . . the Law of commandments . . .” This refers to the totality of the entire Jewish system of religion, and is not restricted in meaning to “the ceremonial law,” or any lesser part of Judaism. All of that system was nailed to the cross of Christ.

“He might make (or create) the two into one new man . . .” The spiritual creation “in Christ” is of equal rank in the holy Scriptures with the creation of the universe itself, as recorded in Genesis.

“In Himself . . . make the two into one . . .” The two are the Jews and the Gentiles, both of whom are now united as one new man “in Christ.”

“Thus establishing peace . . .” Thus the key words of Isaiah 57:19-21 continue to sparkle in Paul’s writings here: “Them that are far off . . . them that are near . . . peace . . .”

Verse 16

“Reconcile . . .” All of the enmity and hatred of previous class distinctions are dissolved and disappear through the creation of a new man, the Christian, who is then no longer a Jew nor a Gentile but a participant of the newness of life in Christ Jesus.

“In one body . . .” This is the church, the Commonwealth of the New Israel, the spiritual body of Christ, the community of new creatures forming God’s creation through Christ upon earth.

“Through the cross . . .” The centrality of the cross of Christ is an essential Christian concept. No person can be a “new man” till he is willing to forsake the old man, an act referred to by Christ as “to deny” one’s self. The cross was literally the death of Christ; but for all Christians, the cross means the renunciation of self, the denial of self, followed by union with Christ, in Christ and as Christ, in which state the new man has a new life, a new name, a whole set of new value judgments, actually a new mind, the mind of Christ.

“Having put to death the enmity . . .” The instrument of Christ’s triumph over sin was the cross, in which all evil, of every kind, was brought to naught, potentially at the present time, and in the absolute sense eventually.

Verse 17

“He came and preached peace . . .” Christ’s entry into the world to bring the word of the Father to sinful humanity had a far greater purpose than merely making peace between Jews and Gentiles. W. G. Blaikie, op. cit., p. 66, wrote, “The repetition of the word ‘peace’ (in this passage) is expressive; if the subject had merely been peace between two classes of men, we should not have had the repetition. The repetition denotes peace between each of the two classes, and a third party, that is, God.”

Verse 18

This verse is exceptional in that Christ, the Holy Spirit and the Father are all named in it.

Verse 19

Willard H. Taylor, op. cit., p. 181, noted, “There are no less than three metaphors of unity in verses 19-21, expressed as:

- (1) common citizenship,
- (2) membership in a single household, and
- (3) mutual parts of one holy temple.”

Paul was a Roman citizen and had received special blessings from such a relationship. Thus it was natural that he should have compared the privileges of being in Christ to citizenship in a kingdom much higher and holier than any other ever known on earth.

“Are of God’s household . . .” This is a reference to God’s family, extended and expanded to include all who would be saved.

Verse 20

“The foundation of the apostles and prophets . . .” There are five foundations of the Christian faith mentioned in the New Testament:

- (1) The foundational teachings of Christ delivered through the apostles and prophets of the new dispensation. (Matthew 7:24-26)
- (2) The foundational fact is that Jesus Christ is the Son of the living God. (Matthew 16:13-20)
- (3) The foundation person is Jesus Christ our Lord. (1 Corinthians 3:11)
- (4) The foundational personnel was made up of the apostles and prophets of the New Testament, as revealed here.
- (5) The foundational doctrines of Christianity (six of these are enumerated in Hebrews 6:1-2).

Significantly, many different metaphors are needed to set forth the many faces of Christ’s relationship to His people on earth. He is called the bridegroom, the lord of the vineyard, the foundation, the cornerstone, the good

shepherd, the true vine, the door of the sheep, the pioneer, the forerunner, the head of the body, etc.

“The cornerstone . . .” The ancient cornerstone was more than what this usually called a cornerstone now. Several lines of the building were bound together, completed and held together by the cornerstone.

Verse 21

“The whole building . . .” It is the unity of all things in Christ which Paul stressed; and the holy temple of the Lord would therefore seem more logically represented under the figure of a whole building, rather than a conglomeration of many buildings, as in “each several building.”

The words of David Lipscomb, op. cit., p. 54, would appear to be the best understanding of them, he wrote, “The New Testament clearly recognizes each separate congregation as the body of Christ. God through His Spirit dwells in each distinct and separate church (in the sense of congregation). The church is the body of Christ in the community where it exists. It is not a foot in Corinth, and arm in Ephesus, an eye in Philippi, or an ear in Antioch. A child of God in a strange land has only to worship God Himself and multiply the word of God in the hearts of others; and the result is a church of the living God, complete without reference to any other organization in the world.”

Verse 22

“In whom . . .” is the equivalent of “in Christ;” and thus we have another verse in which the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are designated.

CHAPTER 3

This whole chapter is a prayer, but between the first and second words of it, Paul made a characteristic digression in which he gave further teaching on the mystery of redemption (verses 1-13), concluding his part of the letter with what has been called “the boldest prayer ever prayed.” (verses 14-21)

Verse 1

Paul's prayer began back in 1:15; and following several digressions, he was about to resume it here; but he hardly got started before going into another digression on the mystery of Christ.

"For this reason . . ." The thought of this verse will be resumed in verse 14.

"Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus . . ." William Barclay, *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians*, p. 140, said, "A single word or idea can send Paul's thoughts off at a tangent."

When Paul wrote this, he was awaiting trial under Nero and in all probability full aware of the ultimate martyrdom that awaited him; but there is no word of complaint here. In fact, he is not Nero's prisoner at all, but the prisoner of Christ! When Paul suffered from whatever cause, it was all for Christ. William Barclay, *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians*, p. 141, wrote, "The Christian has always a double life and a double address."

Paul as a prisoner of the Roman government, but that is not the way Paul looked at it, at all. He thought of himself as suffering and being imprisoned for the sake of Christ.

"For the sake of you Gentiles . . ." It was Paul's standing up for the truth that Gentiles should be brought into the Lord's church without regard to the Jews and the Law of Moses that precipitated the savage hatred of him on the part of unconverted Israel. It was his friendship for Trophimus, a Gentile, which resulted in the false charges against him in the temple, that first brought him into power of the Roman government. In a very real sense, every Gentile on earth is indebted to Paul for the salvation which we have received in Christ.

Paul's great mission, assigned by Christ who called him to the apostleship, was to "the Gentiles." That is what is in view here.

In addition to Paul's defense having precipitated his first arrest and imprisonment, it was predominantly Paul's religious views on this very question which were the grounds of all of the persecutions that confronted him, both Jewish and Roman.

As George E. Harpur, A New Testament Commentary, Ephesians, p.464, pointed out, "If the Gentile Christians were stated to be non-Jewish, then they came under Roman laws about illegal religions; but so long as they were regarded as a Jewish sect, they were immune from such laws with their death penalty."

Thus it was actually true that all of Paul's persecutions, first to last, were part and parcel of his mission to the Gentiles.

Verse 2

"If indeed, you have heard . . ." Francis W. Beare, op. cit., p. 665, said that it means, "Assuming that you have heard . . ." Many reputable scholars translate the "if" as "since" or "inasmuch."

Verses 3-4

"By revelation . . ." Paul always emphasized that the wonderful truth he brought to men was from God, not of himself, that it was given to him by Christ.

"The mystery . . . the mystery of Christ . . ." Francis Foulkes, the Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians, p. 93, rejected such a simplistic understanding of the mystery, asking, "Can they not be different aspects of the central revelation?"

David Lipscomb, New Testament Commentaries, p. 57, said, "The mystery of Christ includes far more than the fact that Gentiles were fellow partakers with Jews of the promise in Christ Jesus."

"As I wrote before in brief . . ." "When you read . . ." F. J. A. Hort believed that it meant "in a semi-technical sense, the reading of the Holy Scriptures." (Francis W. Beare, op. cit., p. 666, wrote, "The more radical critics have screamed themselves hoarse about such an interpretation; but it is logical, in keeping with the significant passages of the New Testament, and probably correct.

Jesus, it will be remembered, asked the lawyer, "How do you read it?" It was, therefore, a proverb from the first with Christians that they should constantly read the Scriptures. In the light of these facts which cannot be denied, how naturally Paul should have included the clause, "When you read."

Verse 5

The Scriptural definition of “mystery” is apparent here, the mystery being God’s plan of redeeming men, once concealed, now revealed. “As it has now been revealed . . .” What Paul said here is not that the present revelation of the mystery is final and complete, but that the previous generations did not possess a revelation of it “as it has now been revealed.” Revelation 10:7 states the mystery of God will be finished, or “is finished” in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound; and it will hardly be denied by any that this means it is not finished now!

Note: There is no ground for men assuming conceitedly that they “know all about it.”

“Holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit . . .” Far from claiming to be the unique source of God’s revelation of the great mystery, Paul here declared that the “holy apostles and prophets” of the first Christian generation (all of them) were likewise participants in having received from God this glorious revelation.

F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Ephesians*, p. 61, has a perceptive comment thus, “The reference to the “holy apostles and prophets” has been felt to have an impersonal ring about it, making it difficult to imagine Paul himself as writing it; but the difficulty lies rather in our twentieth-century English ears than in first-century English ears than in first-century New Testament Greek. There is nothing formal or liturgical about Paul’s use of the adjective “holy,” and nothing unnatural about the way in which he associates the other apostles and prophets with himself.”

Verse 6

“To be specific . . .” This has the meaning of “this is to say,” or “namely.” It is often used in legal documents for the purpose of introducing a detailed statement, or formal list.

“Fellow heirs . . . fellow members . . . fellow partakers . . .” It would have been difficult indeed to have piled together three expressions more eloquent of

the absolute quality of privilege and blessing to be shared and shared alike by Jews and Gentiles in Christ.

Alfred Martin, Wycliffe Bible Commentary, the New Testament p.736, wrote, "The mystery was not that the Gentiles should be saved—there is much in the Old Testament concerning that, particularly in Isaiah—but that they should be joined with Jews in one body."

Verse 7

In verses 2, 7, and 8, Paul stressed the grace that is the Divine favor, bestowed upon him by the Father through Christ.

Verse 8

"To me the very least of all saints . . ." George E. Harpur, op. cit., p. 464, said, "It is a mistake to render this 'the very least of all saints.'" "Less than the least" is similar to "more than the most" or "higher than the highest."

F. F. Bruce, op. cit., p. 63, wrote, "No disciple of Paul's would have dreamed of giving the apostle so low a place!" That is, none except the holy apostle himself who wrote this epistle.

"The fathomable riches of Christ . . ." The blessings of salvation in Christ are extravagantly above all human ability to evaluate them. Francis W. Beare, op. cit., p. 669, said the literal meaning of "unfathomable" is: "trackless, inexplorable, not in the sense that any part is inaccessible, but that the whole is too vast to be mapped out and measured."

Paul's thought in this connection was that such unsearchable riches were to be provided for all mankind through his preaching.

Verse 9

"And to bring to light . . ." The message of salvation, is to be preached to human beings, not to angels, spirits or other non-terrestrial beings. It is important to keep this in mind in the study of the next verse.

"The administration of the mystery . . ." Paul's many references in the New Testament to the mystery of God, the mystery of the faith, the mystery of

Christ, the great mystery, the mystery of godliness, etc., are among the most interesting passages in the New Testament. Essentially, Christ Himself is the mystery, a thumbnail biography of Christ actually being called the mystery in 1 Timothy 3:16.

“For ages has been hidden in God . . .” God’s plan for human redemption existed always in the purpose of God, the fact of its being hidden indicating that there were beings who might indeed have understood it if God had chosen to reveal it. William Hendriksen, *op. cit.*, p. 158, wrote, “God does not owe it to anyone to explain why for a long time the mystery was concealed.” It was concealed not only from the Gentiles, but also from the Jews; according to 1 Peter 1:12 and it was also concealed from the angels in heaven.

“Hidden in God, who created all things . . .” The reason for injecting this word about creation would appear to be according to W. G. Blaikie, *op. cit.*, p. 106, “To indicate the relation of the matter in hand to the mightiest works of God. This is a trifling matter; it connects with God’s grandest operations.”

Verse 10

Some of the teaching men have allegedly found in this verse:

John Locke: The governments and powers in the heavenly places are the Jewish religious leaders.

James Macknight, *op. cit.*, p. 303, “They are the different orders of the angels in heaven.”

William Hendriksen, *op. cit.*, p. 303, wrote that Calvin, Hodge, Grosheide and Lenski thought this refers to, “The good angels in heaven.”

A. T. Robertson, *Ibid.*, understood the reference to be: “Evil powers or fallen angels, exclusively.”

Such a variety of opinions suggest that the true interpretation might lie in a different direction altogether. In verse 9, as already noted, Paul gave the purpose of gospel preaching to be that of making “all men see.” Verse 10 could be nothing more than a dramatic, rhetorical burst of eloquent hyperbole, having much the same meaning as if he had written: “We shall shout the gospel

message to the highest heavens and extol the glory of the church as the demonstration of God's manifold wisdom to the highest beings in the universe!"

This view has one thing in common with those already cited—it may be wrong; but at least it makes as much sense as anything else at hand on the subject.

"The manifold wisdom of God . . ." William Hendriksen, p. 159, wrote, "The word here rendered "manifold" actually means "multi-colored, or much variegated," translating the phrase, "the iridescent wisdom of God."

This calls attention to the infinite diversity and sparkling beauty of the wisdom of God. F. F. Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 64, favored, "The many-colored wisdom of God." Since wisdom has no literal color, it is clear that Paul was speaking figuratively in this passage.

Verse 11

The preeminence of the Lord Jesus Christ and His having been, from all eternity, the focal center of God's redemptive purpose are affirmed in this verse. There are also overtones of the pre-existence and Godhead of the Lord Jesus Christ in this declaration.

Verse 12

"Through faith in Him . . ." that is, through the faith of Christ, meaning the faith Christ Himself possessed and demonstrated.

"In Whom we have boldness . . ." Christian boldness is revealed as being at least partially the responsibility of the Christian himself to maintain it, encourage it in others, and to manifest it openly in all places and circumstances.

"Confident access . . ." This is Paul's word for the privilege of approaching God in prayer, of coming boldly to the throne of grace possessing the right to petition the Father in one's own person through identity with the Lord Jesus Christ and needing no go-between, mediator, priest or any other person whomsoever as any kind of dispenser of spiritual privileges, or even as an aid in such things.

Christians are priests unto God, in Christ Jesus, who is the “one mediator;” and no other mediators are needed. Not the name of any saint, nor the use of any religious device, nor the requirement of any human creed can circumvent or countermand this fundamental right of the redeemed in Christ, who without any qualification whatever have “access with boldness” unto God “in Christ Jesus,” through their own faith in Christ; NO, but by reason of the perfect faith and obedience of Christ with whom the Christian is identified as being in Christ, and in the meaningful sense, actually Christ, as being a part of His spiritual body.

Verse 13

What a beautiful and selfless thought is this! The rigors of a Roman prison, though somewhat tempered in Paul’s case, were nevertheless extremely galling, the very fact of being chained twenty-four hours a day to a Roman sentry was itself a terrible punishment. Paul at this time seems to have been kept, either within the compound that housed the royal bodyguard of the Caesars. In the final imprisonment which came some years later, Paul is thought to have been kept in a dungeon.

Verses 14-15

“I bow my knees . . .” Paul had begun to finish this prayer back in verse 1, but he interrupted it to the magnificent digression regarding the great mystery in Christ; now he repeated the words, “For this cause,” and completed the marvelous prayer.

The Jews often stood to pray (Matthew 6:5; Luke 18:11-13); but kneeling for prayer is often indicated in the New Testament, although it was not unknown at all in the Old Testament. However, other acceptable attitudes or postures are also indicated, such as “lifting up the hands” (1 Timothy 2:8), “falling on the face.” (Luke 5:12)

“Before the Father . . .” Paul here prayed to God, not as the Father of mankind, generally, but in the spiritual sense of being the spiritual Father of His children in Christ. William Hendriksen, op. cit., p. 167, wrote, “In the Spiritual, or redemptive sense, God is definitely not the Father of all men.” This is an

important distinction. It is not the brotherhood of all men (in the sense of having the same Creator) that blesses human relationships. It is the brotherhood of men “in Christ” that brings peace and amity.

“From whom every family in heaven and on earth . . .” W. G. Blaikie, *op. cit.*, p. 107, in *Pulpit Commentary*, dogmatically declared that there are no constraining reasons for the change, “The context requires the sense of “whole family.”

John Wesley, *One Volume New Testament Commentary*, *in loco*, had a unique thought that is quite interesting. He came up with a number of different families, all one, in the sense of being God’s children. He wrote, “The whole family of angels in heaven, saints in Paradise, and believers of earth is named (of the Father), being “the children of God,” a more honorable title than children of Abraham, and depending on Him as the Father of the family.”

Verse 16

“The inner man . . .” Adam Clarke, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Vol. VI, p. 44, is as good as any. He wrote, “Every man is a compound being, having a body and a soul. The outward man is that alone which is seen and considered by men. The inward man is that which stands particularly with reference to God and eternity.”

All of the Ephesians whom Paul had converted had been made partakers of the Gift Ordinary of the Holy Spirit, granted to them as an earnest of their redemption at the time they were baptized into Christ.

The prayer in this verse is to the effect that the Spirit of God within them would be a source of power, more firmly establishing them in the faith.

Verse 17

Christ dwelling in Christian hearts is one and the same thing as the Spirit’s dwelling in them. The first fruit of the Spirit is love (Galatians 5:23); and here the great result of the “indwelling Christ” is that of the Christian’s being, “rooted and grounded in love.”

Verse 18

“What is the breadth, length, height, and depth . . .” Francis W. Beare, *op. cit.*, p. 679, though it was “truth.” David Lipscomb, *op. cit.*, p. 66, believed it was the love of Christ, Adam Clarke, *op. cit.*, p. 447, considered it to be the “church of God;” James Macknight, *op. cit.*, p. 307, saw in this a comparison of the church with the dimensions of the temple of Diana; Alfred Barry, *Ellicott’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Vol. VII, p.35, said the early “church fathers referred these words to the cross.”

Perhaps if we were to cite all of these possible meanings and were privileged to ask the apostle which one is correct, he might very well answer, “Why all of them, of course.” Christ in our hearts can help us to understand how infinitely above men are the things of God.

Verse 19

“The love of Christ . . .” Being made here the object of the verb “know” indicates quite clearly the “the love of Christ” is not primarily the thing under consideration in the previous verse, despite the fact of the vast majority of scholars taking exactly that position.

“That you may be filled up to all the fullness of God . . .” This is the grand climax of a prayer which reaches the most exalted heights. Paul here prayed for the Christians to whom he wrote that they might be filled with “all the fullness of God.” No wonder this has been called the boldest prayer ever prayed.

THE DOXOLOGY

Verses 20-21

“Exceeding abundantly . . .” F. F. Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 70, wrote, “This is another one of Paul’s super-superlatives, coined to express God’s capacity to transcend all that we ask or think.”

“The power that works within us . . .” Paul did not undervalue the Divine nature of the power of God in human life, the same being the most remarkably powerful influence that men can know. In this marvelous doxology, Paul did not leave the church out. Great as the power of God in human life assuredly is,

it works in those who are “in Christ” being particularly their endowment. Being “in Christ” is the same as being “in the church”—this is another truth that is emphasized in this doxology. It is precisely in this great truth that Protestantism has failed. All of the systems which set aside the church, or propose salvation apart from it, are disconnected, and shall always be disconnected from the mainstream of Christianity.

It is God’s will that glory to Himself shall be in the church and in Christ Jesus; and men who do not consent to this are not in harmony with God’s will.

There are not two places in which to glorify God. “In the church” and “in Christ Jesus” designate the same theater of operations. Those “in Christ” are also in the church; and those not “in the church” are not “in Christ.”

CHAPTER 4

The first three chapters dealt with Christian doctrine, and the last three deal with Christian morality and behavior. Of course, there is some mingling of the two.

It should be noted that Paul placed doctrine first. All human morality derives from the authority of God; and, apart from mortal responsibility to the Creator, there is, strictly speaking, no such thing as right or wrong conduct, immorality or morality.

The ultimate authority for evaluating the deeds of men as either praiseworthy or blameworthy cannot lie within men, but must be grounded externally in the will of the Father in heaven. It was therefore by design that Paul first wrote of Christian doctrine, then of Christian morals. John Wesley, *One Volume Commentary on the New Testament*, in loco, wrote, “This is the true order.”

Verse 1

“Walk in a manner worthy . . .” “Walking” is frequently used in the New Testament as a designation of the Christian’s total behavior pattern. To walk “worthily” is therefore to exhibit the kind of life that would do honor to the holy

religion of Christ which they had accepted. All of the high hopes, aspirations and ideals for God's holy church upon this earth, however, must finally succeed or fail in a degree determined, at least in part, by the kind of people who make up the church.

William Barclay, the Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians, p. 157, said Paul, "next turned to the character of the Christian which is necessary if the church is to fulfill her great task."

Verse 2

These qualities of Christian character are the opposite of those sought and glorified by the non-Christian.

"Humility . . ." William Barclay, The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians p. 157, tells us that, "In the Greek there is no word for humility which has not some suggestion of meanness attached to it."

Humility is a becoming virtue in Christians because it reflects their evaluation of themselves in respect to the infinitely righteous and holy God. It is the fountain from which are derived all of the Christian virtues.

There is also a very proper and necessary self-esteem which enters into Christian character. (Romans 12:3)

"Gentleness . . ." Francis Foulkes, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, Ephesians, p. 109, wrote, "It is closely connected with the spirit of submissiveness."

Moses was described as "meek," (Numbers 12:3) and perhaps in the character of the mighty lawgiver can be seen the true qualities which are indicated by this word. Certainly, "weakness" is not one of them. It does not mean docile, easy to handle or merely "cooperative." It refers to moral authority and power issuing in restraint as far as human temptations are concerned.

"Patience . . ." Francis Foulkes, Ibid, wrote, "This word is used of God's patience with men." (Romans 2: 4; 9:22; 1 Timothy 1:16; 1 Peter 3:20; 2 Peter 3:15) William Barclay, op. cit., p. 164, wrote, "If God had been a man, He would long since have wiped out the world for all its disobedience!"

Paul's use of the word here in the sense of a Christian virtue suggests that Christians should be tolerant, forgiving and understanding of one another's mistakes and sins. A Christian who is always "up tight" about mistakes of others can create a disaster in any congregation. He, in fact, is a disaster!

"Forbearance to one another in love . . ." In a word, this means that a Christian should accept his place with other Christians, having an attitude that grants to them the same "right to belong" which he claims for himself.

Verse 3

Why is there so much disunity in the world? In a word, we do not know. It appears in this verse that unity is not produced by Christians, but by the Spirit of God, and Christians are merely admonished to keep it.

Henry H. Halley, Halley's Bible Handbook, p. 564, wrote, "Whether there will ever be in this world any outward unity of the visible church, we do not know. The selfishness and pride of men are against it."

"Being diligent . . ." carries the idea of "trying" or "endeavoring," leaving out any requirement that "unity" must be achieved.

Verses 4-5

"One body . . ." This is the spiritual body of Christ, the church, made up of Jews, and Gentiles, all men, and even includes the saved who no longer live on earth.

"And one spirit . . ." The reference to the third person of the Godhead seems to anticipate "Lord" (verse 5) and "God" (verse 6). In any case, the Spirit here is that being called "the Holy Spirit" in the New Testament, who like Christ and like the Father, dwells in Christian hearts.

"One hope of your calling . . ." This is the hope of eternal life in Christ.

"One faith . . ." is thought to refer to the Christian religion and not to the subjective trust/faith of individual Christians. John Wesley, *op. cit.*, in *loco*, said, "It refers to 'the universal church.'"

William Hendriksen, New Testament Commentary, Ephesians, p. 187, has a convincing analysis indicating that it is trust/faith Paul had in mind. He wrote, "The fact that "faith" is mentioned immediately after "Lord," and is immediately followed by "baptism," all in a very short sentence, would seem to indicate that all three are a very closely knit unit."

This therefore carries the full impact of Mark 16:16, where Christ said, "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved." The Lord and faith and baptism are all in a very short sentence there, faith and baptism appearing as coordinates in both passages.

The fact that there is no reference to the "Lord's Supper," is very puzzling to many commentators:

William Hendriksen, New Testament Commentary, Ephesians wrote, "Why does he not also include the Lords' Supper?"

Willard H. Taylor, Beacon Bible Commentary, Vol. 9, p. 205, wrote, "Baptism," means, "Spirit baptism," based on the fact that Paul does not refer to the Lord's Supper here in this list of unities."

Francis Foulkes, op. cit., p. 113, wrote, "It is often asked why no reference was made here to the other great sacrament of the gospel (the Lord's Supper).

Francis Foulkes, Ibid, p.113, said, "The apostle is speaking of the initial conditions of the Christian life, whereas the Holy Communion belongs to the support and development of the Christian life."

Many have failed properly to discern that baptism is one of the Divinely imposed preconditions of salvation.

"One baptism . . ." The obvious meaning of the passage is Christian baptism; that is, the baptism the church is commanded to administer, the baptism which is the initiatory rite of admittance into the Christian religion.

F. F. Bruce, the Epistle to the Ephesians, p. 80, said, "If 'one baptism' here had meant Spirit-baptism to the exclusion of water baptism, it would have been associated with 'one Spirit,' and not with 'one Lord.'"

THE ONE BAPTISM

No less than seven baptisms are mentioned in the New Testament. The statement here that there is “one” means that only one pertains to the Christian life in the present dispensation. There cannot be any escape from the conclusion, that this is the baptism of the Great Commission, as given by both Mark and Matthew.

The one baptism is therefore the one that the church itself is commanded to administer; and that destroys any notion to the effect that baptism in the Spirit or by the Spirit is meant; because there has never been a church since the times of the apostles that could baptize anyone in the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 3:11) The “one baptism” is the one Christ commanded His followers to administer to “all nations.” (Matthew 28:18-20)

Verse 6

The seventh of these great unities is God Himself. The teaching of Paul is that all men “live and move and have their being in God” is implicit in a verse like this.

“One God . . .” The unity of God, as reiterated in the first commandment of the Ten Commandments, was thus emphasized at a time when the world was steeped in polytheism. “The LORD is our God, the LORD is one.” (Deuteronomy 6:4) Note: The word for God’s oneness in the Old Testament is *echad*, the same being a compound unity (as in “The people is one”—Genesis 11:6)

Verse 7

It is incorrect to construe this as a reference to supernatural gifts. The age of miraculous gifts was rapidly passing. Some of these no doubt still existed, but they are not in focus here. W. G. Blaike, Pulpit Commentary, Vol. 20, p. 148, said, “Grace does not refer merely to supernatural gifts, but also to the ordinary spiritual gifts of men . . . what each gets, he gets for the good of all.”

The fact that the supernatural gifts are not any longer needed does not detract from the glory of these gifts which are called ordinary, but which have blessed the church in all ages.

Verse 8

John Wesley, *op. cit.*, in loco, said, This quotation is from Psalm 68:18; but Paul altered it from, “Thou didst take gifts to He who gave gifts.” Wesley’s explanation is the usual one; but it is perhaps better to understand this as a Scripture that Paul was here writing, not one that he was merely quoting.

F. F. Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 82, pointed out, the first three words of this verse may be translated in either of two ways, thus, “Therefore (that is, God) said, or therefore it (that is, Scripture) says.” Since it is clear that the Scriptures do not say what Paul wrote here, the conclusion is reasonable that the first of these renditions is the correct one.

“Led captive a host of captives . . .” Christ is represented as the mighty conqueror, leading in his train of captives “captivity” itself, a personification of all of the bondage which oppresses human life, such as “captivity to death,” the imprisonment of our mortality, “the captivity to sin.” (2 Timothy 2:24)

“And He gave gifts to men . . .” This is the part of the so-called quotation that is in no sense whatever “a quotation.” Referring this passage to the Old Testament (Psalm 68:18), F. F. Bruce, *Ibid*, p. 82, wrote, “It reveals the picture of a victorious king ascending the mountain of the Lord in triumphal procession, attended by a long train of captives, receiving tribute from His new subjects.”

The conquering Christ, however, is represented as distributing gifts to men. The New Testament is the record of the rich man and the glorious nature of the gift of Christ to those who love Him. His “unsearchable riches” are freely lavished upon His own.

Verse 9

Now this expression, “He ascended.” Paul in this verse made an argument to the effect that the ascension of Christ proved that Christ had also descended

to the earth. His argument was not that any ascension proves a descent. If he had meant such a thing as that it would not have been true. The ascension of Christians to be with the Lord in eternity does not prove that they also descended.

Misunderstanding of Paul's argument lies behind a remark like this: "That an ascent implies a descent . . . strange and unconvincing as the argument appears to the modern reader, it is pure *midrash*!" (Francis W. Beare, Interpreter's Bible, Vol. X, p. 688). Such a view is only blindness to the glory of one of the real New Testament texts.

What then was Paul's argument? Paul? Paul, along with the whole New Testament church, believed in the pre-existence of Christ with God, before the world was, worshiping Him as Lord, Savior, King, Creator of the universe, Sustainer of the universe, and as Paul himself titled Him, King of kings and Lord of lords. (1 Timothy 6:15)

Now when it is declared of Jesus Christ the Lord that He ascended, the inescapable and necessary deduction is imperative: that He also descended! How otherwise could a member of the Godhead ascend? How could the Holy One, with God in the beginning, "the same was God;" how could He have ascended without first descending? This verse is one of the most eloquent passages in the New Testament touching upon the glorious Christian doctrines of the Ascension of Jesus Christ and of His pre-existence from all eternity with the Father.

Verse 10

William Barclay, op. cit., p. 171, wrote, "The ascension of Christ meant not a Christ-deserted, but a Christ-filled world." The manner of Christ, "filling" all things, of course, is not in a physical sense. It is His all-pervading power and sovereign authority; it is His omniscience and universal presence in all places simultaneously—these are the qualities of our Lord in view here. (See Matthew 18:20)

Verse 11

This is a characteristic Pauline insertion, prompted by his mention a moment earlier of Christ “filling all things.” Which of necessity meant the He filled the church. How did Christ do such a thing? In the thought here it is through the faithful preaching of men in all generations who would declare the saving message.

F. F. Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 691, observed that there are two pairs of offices in view here:

- (1) the apostles and prophets, and
- (2) the evangelists and pastor-teachers.

The first pair was effective in the founding of the church, and the second pair are required in all generations.

The organization of the Lord’s church did not develop but was given from the very first. Paul ordained elders among the churches established on his first missionary tour. (Acts 14:23)

The verse before us says: “He gave,” that is, the Lord gave the offices mentioned, including that of elder or bishop, called here pastors-teachers.

Verses 12-13

In these verses is set forth the purpose of the Lord in the sending forth of apostles, prophets, evangelists and elders, mentioned in the preceding verse, the purpose being the building up of the body of Christ, which is the church. But the passage dramatically goes beyond that. It is not apostles, etc., alone who are to do the ministering in the Lord’s church.

William Hendriksen, *op. cit.*, p. 198, said, “The perfecting of the saints unto the work of ministering” means that, “Not only those called apostles, prophets, evangelists and; pastor-teachers, but the entire church should be engaged in spiritual labor. The universal priesthood of believers is stressed here: “The measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ . . .” can be nothing if not absolute perfection. William Barclay, *op. cit.*, p. 177, said, “The aim of the church for its members is nothing less than perfection.”

Verses 14-15

There are two things which contribute to the seduction of Christians away from the holy faith. There are:

- (1) the natural instability of any persons who are captivated by novelty, easily misled, swayed by popular fashion, etc.

William Barclay, op. cit., p. 178, said of such people, "They are always under the influence of the last person with whom they talked."

- (2) Then there are the deceivers themselves, ruthless, cunning, unprincipled sons of the devil who, while often appearing in sheep's clothing, are nevertheless "ravaging wolves."

The language Paul used here makes any apology for the deceivers a gratuitous endorsement of evil. Note: Willard H. Taylor, op. cit., p. 91, wrote "Our translation is inadequate. The meaning is: "They make use of every shifting device to mislead" (Weymouth). There are not only those around you who lead you astray but mean to do it (Moule). They lay deliberate traps on purpose to guide you away from Christ whom they do not love."

Note: "Be aware" that the greatest mistake that any Christian can make is to assume that teachers of error are sincere.

"Speaking the truth in love . . ." The wholesome life of absolute integrity, truthfulness before all men, love toward all men—what priceless gems of character are these; and where in all the wide, wide world may one look for a life like that except in the humble and faithful service of the Son of God?

Verse 16

In this wonderful expression of the glory and beauty of the body of Christ, J. R. Dummelow, Commentary on the Holy Bible, p. 964, wrote, "Language cannot express the full truth." A moment before Paul spoke of Christ as "the head." He is also the whole body. He is all in all.

"Every joint" and "each several part" make it clear that Paul expected every member of the body of Christ to make its own contribution to the building up of the whole.

Verse 17

F. F. Bruce, op. cit., p. 91, has accurately observed, “Christians constitute a third race on earth, no longer Jews, no longer Gentiles.” The meaning here is simple enough. “No longer live the old pagan life.”

Verses 18-19

Here is a reference to the pre-Christian Gentiles who at first knew God, rebelled against Him, turned away from Him, eventually being hardened, first through their own wickedness, and later receiving a judicial hardening of God Himself who thus punished their disobedience.

These two verses are a thumbnail reference to a matter Paul discussed at length in Romans chapter 1. “Hardening of their heart . . . gave themselves over to sensuality. . . things that satisfy the flesh.”

Verses 20-24

“You did not learn Christ in this way . . .” The “you” here is emphatic. “Certainly, you, among whom I myself labored, did not learn Christ in such a manner as to allow living like Gentiles!”

W. G. Blaikie, op. cit., p. 151, wrote, “To learn Christ: means “to learn all about Christ through complete acceptance and obedience of His teachings.”

“If indeed you have heard Him . . .” is an idiomatic saying with the impact of, “As surely as you have heard Him.”

“Lay aside the old self . . .” This was the old man that lived like the Gentiles, as Paul had just described.

“Put on the new self . . .” Note, that the “new man” is not man’s doing at all, but God’s. This simply means to “put on Christ.” How is this done?

- (1) Christians put on Christ in baptism. (Galatians 3:26-27)
- (2) They put on the name of Christ. (Matthew 28:18-20)
- (3) They put on (or receive inwardly) the mind of Christ. (Philippians 2:5)

- (4) They put on “the body of Christ” in the sense of belonging to His spiritual body, the church.
- (5) They put on the manner of daily living that Christ exhibited.
- (6) They put on Christ in the sense of being “in Christ.”

Verse 25

George E. Harpur, A New Testament Commentary on Ephesians, p. 466, pointed out that Paul made the application in practical living concerning what he meant by putting off the old man and putting on the new man.

From this verse through chapter 5:20, the contrast between the old man and the new man are dramatically presented:

- (1) Falsehood versus truth. (4:25)
- (2) Resentment versus self –control. (4:26-27)
- (3) Stealing versus generosity. (4:28)
- (4) Evil speech versus edification. (4:29-30)
- (5) Malice versus love. (4:31-5:2)
- (6) Impurity versus chastity. (5:3-14)
- (7) Imprudence versus wisdom. (5:15-17)
- (8) Debauchery versus joy. (5:18-20)

“SPEAK TRUTH EACH ONE OF YOU . . . “ always speaking the truth relieves one of the task of remembering what he has already said! The violator of this holy law will discover that the principle of truth within him perishes, leaving him helpless to discriminate between reality and fantasy. Satan is a liar and the father of lies.

“WITH HIS NEIGHBOR . . .” This does not restrict truth-telling to conversation with neighbors only, leaving one free to lie to those whom he does not recognize as neighbors. The injunction means always speak the truth

Verse 26

This verse cannot be misread, as if it said, “Be sure to be angry now and then, but do not sin!” It appears that the meaning is, “When you are angry, be sure that you commit no sin!” Anger is a time when sin strongly presents itself as a temptation to violence or other retaliatory action directed against the object of one’s anger.

Anger is even attributed to God Himself; therefore the teaching cannot mean that it is a sin to be angry. There are things which certainly should arouse the emotion of anger in Christian hearts. About the most ineffective person on earth would be one incapable of being angry.

“Do not let the sun go down on your anger . . .” Even when anger comes, it must be terminated quickly. Sundown is the time for removing anger from the heart. When anger remains, it can corrupt and destroy every virtue of the soul.

Verse 27

Paul recognized the devil as a personal enemy of Christians; and in this he followed the Savior who taught men to pray, “Deliver us from the evil one.” (Matthew 6:13)

Satan in this verse appears as a being operating against Christians; and the admonition is that they should not allow any room for the devil’s operations, as would be done if anger should be retained in the heart.

Verse 28

The ignorant person called upon to read this chapter publicly almost broke up the meeting when he read: “Let him that stole, steal; no more let him labor with his hands!”

It is very obvious from this entire section that the persons who were addressed in this epistle were quite possibly doing some of the very things Paul condemned here. Francis W. Beare, op. cit., p. 700, said, “The church was welcoming into her fellowship members of the criminal classes.” Words like

these have the impact of “cease and desist from all sin.” While those who “had been” criminals were welcome, their sins were not welcome.

The word of God reveals some acceptable methods of acquiring property, these being:

- (1) by inheritance,
- (2) by work,
- (3) by reception of it as a gift,
- (3) through merchandising,
- (4) through investment, etc.; two of the acceptable methods and one of the unacceptable methods appear in his verse, the latter being, of course stealing.

Verse 29

The Christian is an ambassador at all times of the faith which he has professed. All conversation provides an opportunity of imparting grace to people who might stand desperately in need of it; and for the child of God to waste the vast majority of all such conversations through idle, frivolous, empty, meaningless conversations is a standing tragedy on earth. And what is even worse is the indulgence of conversation which is vulgar, profane, or obscene.

“That it may give grace . . .” The Christian should never lose sight of the sad fact of a world lost in sin, without the Lord, needing some word, some ray of light, some word of grace that will point to the Lamb of God that takes away sin.

Verse 30

“Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God . . . You were sealed for the day of redemption . . .” Any of the sins Paul was forbidding in these verses would, of course, grieve the Holy Spirit in the heart of any Christian committing them; but the thought here seems especially directed against filthy conversation.

In addition to “grieving” the Holy Spirit, mentioned here, the New Testament reveals a number of other ways in which men may sin against the Holy Spirit:

- (1) They may lust against Him. (Galatians 5:16)
- (2) They may resist Him. (Acts 7:51)
- (3) They may lie to Him. (Acts 5:3)
- (4) They may try Him. (Acts 5:9)
- (5) They may insult Him. (Do despite unto Him) (Hebrews 10:24)
- (6) They may blaspheme against Him. (Mark 3:29)
- (7) They may “quench” Him. (1 Thessalonians 5:19)

“The day of redemption . . .” John Wesley, *op. cit.*, in loco, said, “This means the day of judgment, in which our redemption will be completed.”

Verse 31

What incredible waste and loss of all that is precious flow out of the undisciplined lives of unregenerated men; and, tragic as that is, it must be held even more deplorable that many Christians have never learned to live above the behavior Paul proscribed in this powerful verse. William Hendriksen, *op. cit.*, p. 223, gave us the excellent definitions of the sins listed here:

- (1) “Bitterness” means the settled disposition of one who is resentful.
- (2) “Wrath” is like that of a roaring furnace, settled indignation.
- (3) “Anger” is a strong, sudden antagonism, explosive, potential of murder.”
- (4) “Clamor” is yelling at others.
- (5) “Slander” is blasphemy in the Greek, meaning “speaking against either God or man”
- (6) “Malice” takes delight in inflicting hurt or injury.

Verse 32

These are the opposites of the things forbidden in verse 31.

“Be kind to one another . . .” Nothing blesses mankind any more than ordinary kindness, which is not in any sense ordinary, but the most extraordinary endowment that any Christian possesses.

“Tender-hearted . . .” How much at variance with the pagan cultures of antiquity was this Christian virtue is pointed out by James Macknight, Apostolical Epistles and Commentary, p. 329, when he wrote, “This precept is very different from that of Epictetus who speaks to this purpose, “If one is in affliction, thou may say to him that thou hast pity on him, but take care not to feel any pity.”

“Forgiving . . . just as Christ has also forgiven you . . .” The watchword for Christians, and for all men, is “forgive or forfeit all forgiveness!”

“Christ also has forgiven you . . .” The great invitation for all virtue is in Christ, especially that for forgiveness. All thought of malice toward others should perish in the flood of joy that sweeps over the soul which has been cleansed and forgiven of all sins.

CHAPTER 5

“Walk” is a metaphor of general behavior is used in this chapter to admonish Christians to:

- (1) walk in love (verses 1-2),
- (2) walk in the light (verses 3-14) and
- (3) walk in wisdom (verses 15-21).

In verse 22 Paul began instructions relative to three classes of reciprocal obligations:

- (1) those between husbands and wives, (verses 22-33)
- (2) those between children and parents, (chapter 6:1-4) and
- (3) those between servants and masters, (verses 5-9).

Verses 1-3

“Imitators of God . . .” “Imitating God” is a commandment to be fulfilled by “walking in love,” just as Christ loved us and gave Himself for us. Certainly, the teaching here is not to the effect that weak and fallible mortals should in any sense “play God” by usurping to themselves judgments that pertain to God alone.

John Mackay. *God’s Order*, p. 170, said, “To copy God is to be like a person, to reflect His image.” Christians should strive to be like God in forbearance, goodness, and love.

The reference to Jewish sacrifices in verse 2 has puzzled commentators who have variously understood the nature of Christ’s sacrifices (as mentioned here) to be “a sacrifice of consecration (Exodus 29), a peace-offering (Leviticus 3) or a sin-offering (Leviticus 4).

Christ was not merely one kind of sacrifice, or offering, but every kind.

Verses 3-4

This is another of Paul’s catalogues of vice, none of them, or even all of them together being any complete list of sins, but merely typical. Other lists are in Romans 1:29ff, 1 Corinthians 5:11ff, 6:9ff, Galatians 5:19ff and Colossians 3:5 ff.

Fornication is prominently mentioned in practically all of these, due to its prominence in the pagan culture from which Gentile converts to Christianity had been recruited.

F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Ephesians*, p. 102, wrote, “We may think it strange to see covetousness so closely associated with these vices, but Paul is simply moving from outward manifestations of sin to their inner springs in the cravings of heart.”

It will be recalled that Christ also did this, tracing murder to the angry thought behind it, and adultery to the lustful heart. (Matthew 5:21-27ff)

“Even be named among you . . .” This indicates that such vices as are enumerated here are forbidden to Christians and that it is not fitting that their

minds should dwell upon such things or that their tongues should talk about them.

“Filthiness . . . foolish talking . . . jesting . . .” Filthiness of moral character leads inevitably to filthiness of conversation; and Paul condemned that. The smutty story, the foolish jesting, the empty nonsense that passes in some quarters of conversation—all of these are proscribed and forbidden.

The Puritans went too far in their overly strict interpretation of Paul’s words here, it may not be denied that our own generation has erred in the other direction. This passage condemns much of the conversation of many Christians.

Verse 5

Willard H. Taylor, *Beacon Bible Commentary*, p. 230, wrote, “The phrase kingdom of Christ and God occurs only here in the New Testament.” It does not indicate two kingdoms, but rather that the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of God are one and the same.

Verse 6

“Empty words . . .” refers to the arguments of those opposing the truth by defending the immorality of the pagan culture surrounding the church of those days.

“Because of these things . . .” because of the gross sins, just enumerated by the apostle.

“The wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience . . .” implies more than the ultimate overthrow of evil at the final judgment.

Repeatedly, throughout history, when the measure of a people’s wickedness had overflowed, God wiped them out in some grand historical upheaval. Paul would mention this a little later.

Verses 7-9

Up to this point, Paul was describing the “unfruitful works of darkness” (verse 11); and the argument of this passage is, “do not take up the old ways again; you once practiced all that; you know how useless and unfruitful such

works are; and you now belong to a new order of things; “You are light in the Lord.” The glorious results (fruit) of the new way of living in Christ are all “goodness, righteousness, and truth!”

Verse 10

As “children of light.” by continuing to walk in the Christian way, the very achievements of such living would “prove” what was pleasing to God, first to themselves, and secondarily, to all who became aware of what they were doing.

Verse 11

“Expose them . . .” There can be no neutrality between the sons of light and the sons of darkness. William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Ephesians*, p. 233, noted, “Sin must be exposed. One is not being nice to a wicked man by endeavoring to make him feel what a fine fellow he is. The cancerous tumor of sin must be removed. It is not really an act of love to smooth things over, as if the terrible evil of the sons of disobedience is really not so bad.”

Verse 12

Although this verse is surely true of all wicked men, James Macknight, *op. cit.*, p. 337, and others, have detected a close connection here with the various mystery cults of paganism. His paraphrase of verses 11-12 brings this out: “And have no fellowship with those who celebrate the heathen mysteries, which being transacted in the darkness of night are really the unfruitful works of darkness, as they bring no fruit to the initiated, except eternal death; but rather reprove them. For the impure and wicked actions which are secretly done in the mysteries by the initiated, are so abominable, that it is base to even mention them.”

Verse 13

“Everything that becomes visible is light . . .” This means: “Everything that the light reveals becomes itself light!” Of course this is literally true. Nothing can be seen, except through its reflection of light; and that which reflects light (as the moon) is in itself light.

J. R. Dummelow, op. cit., p. 965, noted, this very thing happened to Christians who received this letter. "Light turns darkness into light; this is what had happened to Paul's readers."

Verse 14

"For this reason it says . . ." The translators and commentators have done a number of strange things with this verse. Francis O. Beare, op. cit., p. 711, wrote:

- (1) "They have accused Paul of misquoting Scripture;"
- (2) "They have suggested that the words here are an early Christian song; and to accommodate that view, they have translated the words of the above clause as "Wherefore it says;"
- (3) They have said, "Through error or forgetfulness, the writer has mistaken this fragment of a Christian hymn to be a quotation from the Old Testament!"

We categorically reject such interpretations, there being utterly no reason whatever that such views should be trusted.

Verses 15-16

Christ Himself divided the whole human family along this fundamental line of cleavage, "the wise and the foolish," the wise being those who "hear the sayings of Jesus and do them," the foolish being those who hear and do not. (Matthew 7:24ff)

"Make the most of your time . . . because the days are evil . . ." How true this was of the time when Paul penned these words. Within a very few years, Rome would be burned, and Nero would drown the Christians in blood to divert suspicion from himself that he personally had set it on fire. Jerusalem would fall to the armies of Vespasian and Titus; and the accumulated wrath of God for centuries of rebellion would finally overflow against Israel.

The days were indeed evil; and only a little while remained before the storm would overwhelm the world, only a little while to walk in the light and joy of the loving service of Christ the Lord.

Verses 17-18

“Do not be foolish . . .” Cited here as persons falling into the classification of “foolish” are the drunken. Who are they? Our current society recognizes no drunkards, only “alcoholics.”

It is not even the drunkard who is condemned in this place, but the person who “gets drunk,” or becomes intoxicated. The person who becomes intoxicated (even once) had violated the admonition here.

“For that is dissipation . . .” (Drinking too much alcohol) Alcohol is the greatest single killer in the United States today. It produces more sorrow than may be attributed to any other single source on earth.

It corrupts government, aggravates poverty, destroys spirituality and eventually destroys any society stupid enough to indulge the unrestrained use of it.

“But be filled with the Spirit . . .” The Holy Spirit is the true watchword. William Hendriksen, op. cit., p. 239, wrote, “Satan is ever substituting the bad for the Good. Getting drunk is associated with unrestrained living . . . it marks the person who, if he so continues, cannot be saved.”

It has been asked, “If the Holy Spirit indwells us, why does Paul command us to be filled with the Spirit?” F. F. Bruce, *Answers to Questions*, p. 107, says, “Being filled with the Spirit implies more than being indwelt by Him. In some believers’ lives he has little more than a foothold, being almost crowded out by a number of concerns. Paul is eager that his converts should be under the undisputed control of the Spirit.”

Verse 19

“Speaking to one another . . .” The custom was actually that of singing by turns.

“Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs . . .” The teaching declares that not all songs are acceptable in the worship of God, but only those with spiritual value.

David Lipscomb, New Testament Commentaries, Ephesians, p. 106, wrote, "It is viewed here as instruction regarding the public worship of the Christians."

"Singing . . ." The meaning of this term is to produce music vocally. God's command for Christians is that they should sing, and if playing instruments of music is an acceptable part of divine worship, it is difficult to understand why it would not have been so stated in this place.

WHY INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC IN THE WORSHIP OF GOD IS REJECTED

- (1) There is nothing strange or unusual about some Christians rejecting mechanical music as in any manner appropriate or permissible in Christian worship.

No one has ever denied that the use of mechanical instruments in worship was unknown to the New Testament age.

The first historical appearance of instrumental music in Christian worship, came during the eighth century.

- (2) It is accepted by many that the use of musical instruments in the Old Testament was an innovative change by David and that the change was not approved by the Lord.

The Orthodox Hebrew Communion through the centuries has clung to the non-use of mechanical instruments, maintaining that God did not approve of them; and they know the teaching of the Old Testament on that point better than any modern scholars.

- (3) Mechanical music as worship of God is antithetical, (exactly opposite) by nature, to spiritual religion.

From times immemorial, many centuries before Christ, instruments of music were conspicuously associated with pagan worship. (Daniel 3:7) For the first six and one-half centuries of the Christian faith on earth they were just as conspicuously omitted from Christian worship. Although Paul did not have such things in mind when he declared that "God is not worshiped with men's hands," the text truly applies to this question. (Acts 17:25)

The introduction of mechanical instruments into the worship of Christ involves the service and skills of technical and professional craftsmen who tend to emphasize “art” more and more, and “worship” less and less, resulting usually in the professionalizing of the “singers” as well as the players.

Verses 20-21

“Giving thanks for all things . . .” This cannot mean that a Christian should give thanks because illness, suffering, loss and adversity of many kinds may have fallen upon him, but that he should give thanks for “all things” in every situation that may afford a proper ground of gratitude to God.

Thus: When one is young, let him thank God for youth; when he is old, let him thank God that he has been permitted so long to live; in health, for strength and joy; in sickness, for the ministry of physician, nurse, loved ones and friends; in poverty, for the privilege of living “like Jesus;” in wealth, for God’s endowments; in death itself, for the hope of eternal life, etc.

“Be subject to one another in the fear of Christ . . .” This clause is the topical heading for the next three paragraphs of the epistle, as pointed out in the chapter introduction. The first of the three reciprocal relationships discussed is that of husbands and wives, beginning in the next verse.

Verses 22-23

Wives, be subject to your own husbands . . .” This is to be understood in the light of the obligation, given a moment later, for the husband to love his wife as Christ loved the church. There never was any kind of effective organization that functioned without a head.

By the appointment of God Himself, the husband was named head of the family. Societies which have reversed this are known as matriarchal; but by definition they are inferior.

“As to the Lord . . .” F. F. Bruce, op. cit., p. 114, wrote, “This does not mean that they should yield to their husbands the same deference as they would yield to Christ Himself, but that deference is a duty which they owe to the Lord.”

“Christ also is the head of the church . . .” Marriage from the very beginning was prophetic of the spiritual relationship between Christ and His church (the great “mystery” of verse 32.) Here, F. F. Bruce, *ibid*, said, “The implication seems to be that the husband is the protector and defender of his wife.”

Verse 24

The true life of the church is in her head, which is Christ; and the true achievement and fulfillment of the wife is in her husband. This is the Christian view of the family.

Like the poor prodigal who resented the restrictions of his incumbency in the father’s house, but found those of the “far country” to be far more cruel and oppressive, woman may choose to forsake the gains of centuries in the Father’s house for the fancied delights of the far country.” But, if so, she will find, as did the prodigal that Satan is still in the swine business!

Verses 25-26

The measure of love that husbands are commanded to give their wives is that of Christ’s love of the church. A love that would die for the beloved! Any submission or subjection that a devoted wife might give to her husband would be more than rewarded and justified by such a love as that. William Hendriksen, *op. cit.*, p. 250, was right when he declared, “More excellent love than this is inconceivable.”

“That he might sanctify her . . .” The sanctification in view here is the original consecration of the alien sinner to God’s service at the time of his conversion.

“Having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word . . .” This is a reference to Christian baptism.

“With the word . . .” is understood in two different ways, some holding that it means baptism in response to “The preaching of the gospel, and others supposing that it refers to the confession “with the mouth” by converts prior to and at the time of their being baptized. This prompted Edgar J. Goodspeed, the

New Testament, An American Translation, in loco, to write, “Just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her, to consecrate her, after cleansing her with the bath in water through her confession of Him.”

F. F. Bruce op. cit., p. 110, wrote, “Baptismal regeneration theorists believe that the external application of water, accompanied by the appropriate words, is sufficient to bring about regeneration.”

Regeneration, a work of God takes place in the sinner at the time of, and when he is baptized. Water baptism is most certainly a precondition of receiving regeneration and forgiveness from God. It is not water which regenerates, it is God who does so when the sinner is baptized.

A great Baptist scholar, Beasley-Murray, Baptism in the New Testament, p. 278, is willing to admit such a distinction is valid and he wrote, “Baptism is the occasion when the Spirit brings to new life him that believes in the Son of man.”

If through man’s failure to obey the Lord by being baptized that occasion never comes then neither will newness of life arrive!

William Hendriksen, op. cit., p. 251, also , after the usual disclaimers regarding “baptismal regeneration,” rendered the meaning of this verse thus, “Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her in order that He might by means of the rite of baptism with water sanctify and cleanse her.”

Amen! There cannot be any doubts that such is the true meaning here. David Lipscomb, op. cit., p. 113, said, “Nothing more is attributed to baptism in this passage, than in many other New Testament passages such as in Mark 16:15-16, Acts 2:38, and Acts 22:16”

Verse 27

The absolute perfection of the church is prophesied here but the manner of achieving this is left out of sight. It is revealed by Paul in Colossians 1:28.

Verses 28-29

The analogy which had been in Paul’s mind as far back as verse 23 is about to be stated here and in the following four verses.

First, there is the practical consideration that: just as Christ provides for every need of the church, nourishing and blessing her in all times and places by all means, so also the husband is obligated to make the care of his wife the principal concern and most urgent business of his whole life. In loving her, he is, after all, only loving himself.

Verses 30-31

We are members of His body . . .” Paul here says of the bride of Christ, what Adam said of his bride, “bone of my bones . . . flesh of my flesh.” (Genesis 2:23) Without the inspiration of one like Paul, men would probably never have known the magnificent analogy concealed in the creation story itself as a prophecy and prefiguration of the church. Paul had long understood the “mystery” mentioned here, having brought it to light by various earlier references to it. In 2 Corinthians 11:3, he pointed out that Satan’s seduction of the bride of the first Adam suggested the seduction by Satan of the bride of the second Adam (the church).

ADAM AND EVE . . . CHRIST AND THE BRIDE

Adam naturally provides the great type of Christ. Just as Adam was the progenitor of all living, so Christ is the author of life Himself. As in Adam all die so in Christ shall all be made alive. When Eve was formed, a deep sleep fell upon Adam, and Eve was taken from his side.

In the redemptive act on the cross, the deep sleep of death came upon Christ; His side was pierced; blood and water came forth, these emblems of the two great Christian ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, making it possible to see (in a figurative sense) that the church came forth from the side of Christ.

Satan beguiled Eve and likewise the church, luring her into the great apostasy. The oneness of Adam with his bride formed a prophecy of the oneness of Christ with His bride the church.

Verses 32-33

William Hendriksen, op. cit., p. 256, pointed out that the Vulgate mistranslation of the passage “The mystery is great” reads thus: “*sacramentum hoc magnum.*”

James Macknight, op. cit., p. 346, wrote, “It is upon this sole basis that the Roman church set up the claim that marriage is a sacrament.”

The exalted view, of marriage and the church of Jesus Christ, shines forth in this text. The sacredness of marriage is seen in God’s design of it, from the very beginning, to be a figure of the union of Christ and His church; and the glorious importance of the church appears in the fact of its having been in the design of God from the very beginning.

Despite all of these wonderful thoughts, however, Paul will still conclude with a practical thought, “Nevertheless let each individual among you also love his own wife.”

Let the husband think of himself as the protection, defender and provider for his wife, even as Christ is of the church.

“Let the wife see to it that she respect her husband . . .” “Respect” also carries the thought of “reverence”. Foy E. Wallace, Jr., A Review of the New Versions, p. 445, said, “It is this kind of fear that the Bible so frequently calls on individuals to show before God.”

CHAPTER 6

Of this whole chapter, J. R. Dummelow, Commentary on the Holy Bible, p. 966, said, “It is a worthy conclusion of this immortal Epistle!” Paul here continued his discussion of reciprocal relationships:

- (1) between children and parents, (verses 1-4)
- (2) between slaves and masters. (verses 5-9)

His final great admonition to strength in the Lord through putting on the whole armor of God (verses 10-20) was followed by practical words regarding the bearer of the letter (verses 21-22) , and the benediction (verses 23-24).

Verse 1

Paul began with the duties of that group who were supposed to submit and obey. Alfred Martin, Wycliffe Bible Commentary New Testament, p. 749, wrote, "Obedience is a stronger word than submission which was given as the duty of the wife."

James M. Gillis, The Ten Commandments, p. 49, wrote, "The salvation of society is in the family and the reconstruction of family virtues, parental authority, and filial obedience. The family is the nucleus of all society. You can have no prosperous state unless the family is healthy. You can have no effective church unless the family is sound. The family is the organic cell from which all human societies are constructed."

"For this is right . . . " There will never be a time when it is right for children to disregard, dishonor, and disobey their parents.

Thomas Aquinas, The Commandments of God, p.50, wrote, "Parents give their children three things, they brought them into being, provide them nourishment, and afford them instruction."

There are three concentric rings describing the situations in which all men should learn discipline and obedience, these being the home, the school and society. If one does not learn obedience at home, he becomes a troublemaker in school; and from there he soon graduates to the police court. A great deal of the world's sorrows could be prevented if all children were taught to obey their parents.

"In the Lord . . ." Paul did not have in view here anything except Christian homes. He did not teach that children should obey instructions which contradict basic Christian principles.

Verse 2

“Which is the first commandment . . .” meaning, “This is the first commandment for children.” This would make Paul’s meaning to be, “Children, obey our parents in the Lord, for that is the first commandment for children; also, there is a promise connected with it.”

Verse 3

Multiplied thousands of untimely and tragic deaths of young people would be avoided, or could have been avoided, by their simple obedience to the sacred instructions here. Disobedient, arrogant and heedless children, refusing to be restrained by parental wishes of any kind, are almost certain to violate basic rules of survival on the earth.

Verse 4

In 5:25, Paul laid it upon husbands that they must love their wives, even as Christ loved the church enough to die for it! Here he confronted parents, fathers particularly, with their obligations to their children. They must instruct and discipline them “in the Lord.” A moment later, he would thunder the obligations of masters toward their slaves (6:9). In the society of Paul’s day, wives, children and slaves had no rights.

STATUS OF WIVES, CHILDREN AND SLAVES

All women, wives in particular, were in practical fact the chattels of their husbands, without economic or civil rights of any kind whatever, subject to divorce or abuse upon any pretext and without recourse or protection of any kind.

The rights of children were also non-existent in ancient society. William Barclay, *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians*, p. 208, wrote, “A Roman father had absolute power over his family. He could sell them as slaves, or work them in the fields, even in chains. He could take the law into his own hands (he was the law), punish as he liked, and even inflict the death penalty on a child!”

The notion that a father had any obligation toward a child simply did not exist in non-Jewish elements of ancient pagan society. As a result of the

prevailing attitude, many unwanted or despised children were exposed at birth to the elements, wild beasts, or other forms of horrible death.

It was exactly the same way with slaves. William Barclay, *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians*, p. 214, wrote, "A slave is no better than a beast; the old and sick must be thrown out to starve; when a slave is sick, it is a waste to give him rations; masters had power of life and death over slaves . . . Slaves used as maids often had their cheeks torn, their hair torn out, or even branded with hot irons at the caprice of their heartless and cruel masters."

Now, it was to a world which from the remotest antiquity had operated upon such principles as these, regarding wives, children, and slaves, that the great apostle of Christianity thundered the mighty oracle of these magnificent chapters. In the name of Christ, he asserted the obligation of husbands, fathers, and masters, thereby announcing the charter of the basic rights of wives, children and slaves.

Verse 5

Frances W. Beare, *Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. X, p. 732 wrote this injunction addressed to slaves and masters, "Does not imply either approval or disapproval of the institution of slavery itself."

Those who understand Christianity as any kind of attack upon the established institutions of ancient culture were in no case frontally assaulted by Christianity.

"With fear and trembling . . ." Francis W. Beare, *Ibid.*, p. 733, said, "This is not advice for the slave to cringe before his master, but is to be taken in close relationship with the words, as unto Christ."

"The sincerity of your heart . . ." Adam Clark, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, in loco, wrote, "This means "Not merely through fear of punishment, but from a principle of uprightness."

"As to Christ . . ." All work must be done, by all men, slaves included, as being performed under the eye of God. Every piece of work a Christian does must be good enough for God to see.

The problem which the world faces is a religious problem. William Barclay, op. cit., p. 215, observed that, "We will never make men good workmen by increasing pay, bettering conditions or heightened rewards. It is a Christian duty to see to these things, of course; but in themselves they will never produce good work. The only secret of good workmanship is that it is done for God."

Verse 6

"Eye service . . ." refers to the slave (or other workman) who is diligent to appear busy only when the boss is looking. It is the opposite of work done out of good will with love and integrity.

"As men-pleasers . . ." A motive far higher than winning approval of inspectors or superiors marks the work of Christians, that of considering every task as "the will of God," and striving to please Him in the execution of it.

Verse 7

All work done by the Christian is to be done, "as to the Lord," that is, "as service of the Lord."

This is one of the noblest principles of Christianity, making all employment to be the service of God. Not merely those who perform public service to the church, or those who stand in some formal relationship to religious activity, not merely these, but all men who engage in honest work, doing it well and cheerfully, are servants of God, no less than they.

Verse 8

Although there is a sense in which good, honest cheerful work of a slave might bring some limited reward during earthly life, F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* p. 124, wrote, "It is ultimately the judgment seat of Christ that the apostle has in view here." Whatever men may do, Christ will reward all of His workmen at last. F. F. Bruce, *Ibid.*, wrote, "It is this consciousness which would enable the workmen, even though he was a slave, to work zestfully and cheerfully even for a master who was unreasonable in his demands and impossible to please."

Verse 9

This is the oracle of God that turned the world upside down. All obligations involving human beings are a two-way street. Slaves have duties, but so also do their masters! What an earth-shaking concept that was and IS! Toward their slaves, masters were commanded, “Give them the same good will, love, and loyalty that you hope to receive from them.” (Francis W. Beare, op. cit., p. 735)

It should be noted that it was not the truth alone which could change the world; it was the truth in Christ the Lord! The duty of masters to their slaves, fathers to their children, and husbands to their wives, were not just splendid theories. The living Christ at the right hand of God would require of every man an accounting of his deeds at the judgment of the Great Day. No man would escape it!

The resurgence of humanism in these times should be noted. Turning away from God, men are obsessed with the notion that, in themselves, they can make everything all right, with their laws, social gains and planned programs of all kinds; but it is no more possible to accomplish worthwhile human societies away from God than it is to produce a crop of apples from uprooted trees.

Love of God is still the first and great commandment, love of neighbors second. Worshiping and serving the creature more than the Creator, however, drowned the pre-Christian world in debaucheries; and, if indulged, it will do it again!

Verse 10

The admonition Paul was about to give here had been in mind throughout the epistle. He mentioned the strength of God (1:1; 3:16) and the putting on of “the new man” (4:24) earlier; but now He would give final instructions for arming the Christian for the warfare against those forces which opposed Him.

Verse 11

“The full armor of God . . .” The Christian does not oppose evil in his own strength, but in the strength of the Lord. Only the armor of God is sufficient to the warfare involved.

“The schemes of the devil . . .” This refers to the stratagems employed by the evil one with the design of destroying the faith of Christians. Paul was familiar with many of the devices by which Satan had sought to hinder and thwart his apostolic labors.

So-called “moderns” who are so far above the word of God that they reject all possibility of an unseen kingdom of evil presided over by a malignant personal foe (Satan), are not “wise” in any sense, but are blinded and deceived by, “the god of this world.”

Verse 12

Paul described the spiritual enemy. It is a fact beyond denial that the ancient pagan world was organized along patterns of evil, and the whole pagan complex of antiquity was fitted together, dovetailed and interwoven in such a manner as to forbid the notion that such a sprawling, powerful, effective and arrogant pagan society was merely accidental. Satan had organized it. Furthermore, evil is still organized; and organization presupposes an organizer.

“World forces of this darkness . . .” The power of Satan is limited to them who yield themselves to do evil; and in no sense does Satan share ultimate authority with God. This whole passage, including the discussion of the armor, is figurative, setting forth the Christian’s struggle against evil as warfare; and this passage is a description of the foe.

“In the heavenly places . . .” This expression, as Paul used it, sometimes means “in the presence of God,” but in others it is limited to what might be called, loosely, the Christian religion; and it is so limited here. Satan is not conducting any war in heaven against God! However, religion, in the broad sense, provides a very extensive and convenient field of satanic operations, the great apostasy itself having been produced in the church herself.

Verse 13

The Christian warfare is not so much an attack against evil, as it is a warding off and foiling of evil's attack against Christianity which is indicated by the emphasis upon "stand." The forces of evil on earth have been mightily offended and wounded by the gospel of Christ; bitterness and hatred against the truth are to be expected everywhere.

"In the evil day . . ." What is meant, is the day of crisis or decision; and, as William Hendriksen, New Testament Commentary, Ephesians, p. 286, pointed out, "In order to stand one's ground in the day of evil or crisis, let him stand his ground today!" Over and beyond this, there also looms the certainty of the final judgment on the last day.

Verses 14-17

"Which is the word of God . . ." These last six words are descriptive not merely of the sword of the Spirit but of the whole armor of God. Note the following:

TRUTH	What is this, if it is not the sacred word?
RIGHTEOUSNESS	The biblical definition of righteousness is "all the commandments of God." (Psalm 119:172)
THE GOSPEL OF PEACE	This is the word of God.
FAITH	"Faith comes by hearing God's word." (Romans 10:17)
SALVATION	Paul wrote to Timothy that "From childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give the wisdom that leads to salvation." (2 Timothy 3:15)

Thus salvation comes only of the sacred writings which are the word of God.

THE WORD OF GOD	This is also the sword of the Spirit.
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No passage in the Bible any more dramatically teaches the absolute necessity of the Christian's thorough knowledge of the word of God. Not having it, he is naked, barefooted, bareheaded and helpless before the enemy. Christians are not protected if they flee from the foe; they are expected to stand against every attack.

"The sword of the Spirit . . ." It should be noted, especially, that the word of God is the means by which God's Spirit enables Christians to stand against the enemy and overcome. Note: Our generation needs to return to the word of God.

Verse 18

William Hendriksen, New Testament Commentary, Ephesians p. 280, noted, "The word "ALL" is used four times in this verse.

ALL kinds of prayers and supplications are to be used: public prayers, private prayers, intercessory prayers, prayers of thanksgiving, every kind.

ALL seasons are the seasons of prayer: all times of the day, all conditions and circumstances, all occasions, all states of mind, etc.

ALL perseverance: through times of discouragement or defeat when it seems that all is lost, when victory has smiled or when it has failed . . . let nothing hinder the prayer life.

ALL the saints are to be remembered in prayer.

Paul's letters abound with the word that he is praying for those whom he remembers and for those who will receive his letters.

Even though the Christian has put on the whole armor of God, he cannot win the victory except through constant reliance upon prayer.

Verse 19

As Paul constantly prayed for others, he earnestly desired that others should constantly pray for him. He was an ambassador of the Highest, yet he was chained to a Roman soldier; but Paul was not intimidated by the disparity between his true status and that which might have seemed to be his status.

Paul, in those letters he was dispatching from his Roman cell, was destroying the great pagan empire; and there can be little doubt that Paul; fully understood this.

“The mystery of the gospel . . .” This is another reference to the mystery of Christ, the mystery of God, etc., as Paul variously identified it.

Verse 20

This was during Paul’s first imprisonment in Rome, “During which Colossians, Philemon, Ephesians and Philippians were written; and, although not as severe as his second imprisonment, he was nevertheless a prisoner.” (William Hendriksen, New Testament Commentary, Ephesians, p. 282) From Acts 28:20, it is inferred that Paul was continually chained to a guard.

Paul did not pray for the easement of his burden, but for the grace to proclaim the word of God boldly in spite of it.

Verses 21-22

Tychicus was a native of Asia (Acts 20:4) is named among the delegates to the Gentile churches, who went with Paul to Jerusalem, and was mentioned as a messenger of Paul in 2 Timothy 4:12 and Titus 3:12.

F. F. Bruce, op. cit., p. 135, observed that, “On the present occasion, he was probably Paul’s special envoy to churches in the province of Asia which were planted in the course of Paul’s Ephesian ministry.”

Verses 23-24

William Hendriksen, op. cit., p. 286, made a noble comment on these verses saying, “The peace that passes all understanding, the love that is the greatest of the three greatest, and the faith that overcomes the world, these three precious treasures are given away to anyone who sincerely requests them of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

“Love incorruptible . . .” What an amazing word is this! William Hendriksen, op. cit., p. 286, wrote, “It is those who love with an imperishable love that are meant; there must be neither decrease nor decay; and “those who

were chosen in Him before the foundation of the world” (1:4) retain their love for Him diminished after the world itself has passed away!”