

## **Study One**

### **By The Will of God**

### **Ephesians 1:1-2**

The letter to the Ephesians is fairly short. It consists of six chapters which contain 155 verses from the pen of the apostle Paul. It takes about thirty minutes to read this letter. Read the book of Ephesians. As you read make some preliminary observations. Jot down your thoughts on your first reading of Paul's words. Share your thoughts with your homegroup. Make a list of some of your favorite verses in this book. Be prepared to share these verses with your homegroup.

Many students of Paul consider Ephesians to be the Apostle's greatest letter.

- Samuel Taylor Coleridge called Ephesians *the divinest composition of man*.
- John Mackay, once president of Princeton Theological Seminary, called the letter the *climax* of Paul's literature. *Never, he said, was the reality of Revelation more obvious and the reflective powers of the Apostle's mind more transfigured than in the great book of Ephesians.*
- E. J. Goodspeed sees the letter as a *rhapsody on the worth of salvation*.

- New testament scholar Ralph Martin says Ephesians is the *most relevant* portion of the New Testament. (Martin, p. 1)
- Pastor Kent Hughes avers, *Ephesians -- carefully, reverently, prayerfully considered -- will change our lives. It is not so much a question of what we will do with the epistle, but what it will do with us.* (Hughes, p. 16)

### **How did Paul come to write Ephesians?**

Ephesians takes a unique place among the thirteen New Testament letters attributed to the apostle Paul. Ephesians doesn't *sound* like Paul. It is certainly the least personal of his letters. Absent are the usual references to friends and co-workers in the church who are singled out for special greetings (cf. for example Romans 16). Paul seems more detached from his readers in this letter than in, say, Colossians where he struggles for the church in prayer (Col. 2:1ff.), or in his Corinthian correspondence where we find Paul intimately and, at times, angrily involved with his readers (1 Corinthians 1:10ff.).

Paul's detachment is all the more surprising when one considers the Apostle's very intimate relationship with the church in Ephesus:

- The seeds for the church in Ephesus were planted by Paul, Priscilla and Aquila at the tail end of Paul's second missionary journey. Because Paul was in a hurry to return to Jerusalem, he left Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus to continue, we assume, the work he began in the synagogue (Acts 18:18-21).
- On Paul's third missionary journey he spent three months preaching in the synagogue trying to convince the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah (Acts 19:8).
- Following a rebellion against his teaching, Paul rented a lecture hall and for two years taught daily to both Jews and Greeks (Acts 19:9-10).
- We read of Paul's farewell to the elders of the Ephesian church in Acts 20:13-38. The story is one of the most touching in all the New Testament. Here we find Paul fully engaged with the leadership of the church. *They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him.* (Acts 20:37).

After Paul leaves Ephesus, he journeys to Jerusalem, is arrested and imprisoned in Caesarea for at least two years (Acts 24:27). Then he goes to Rome and is a prisoner there under house arrest for two years (Acts 28:30).

It is from Rome that Paul wrote his prison letters: Colossians, Philippians, Philemon and Ephesians.<sup>1</sup> In Ephesians we catch Paul in a contemplative mood. He writes a rhapsody about God and his church.

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<sup>1</sup>This is open to interpretation. Paul nowhere claims to have written these letters from Rome. Some commentators think Paul wrote Ephesians from his prison cell in Caesarea. Still others posit an Ephesian

### What is the letter about?

We could call Ephesians Paul's eulogy to God! In 1:3 he says, *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*. . . <sup>1</sup> The word *praise* in Greek is *eulogetos* (εὐλογητος). It means *to bless, or to praise*. From this word we get the English word *eulogy* which, according to the dictionary, refers to *a laudatory speech or written tribute*. . . . Ephesians is Paul's exuberant adulation of God. He doesn't have a specific agenda for the church in Ephesus.<sup>2</sup> Paul has no theological ax to grind, as in Colossians.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, he is not preparing for a visit (as in Romans), trying to settle a dispute (as in Corinthians), or giving thanks for financial support (Philippians).

In Ephesians Paul is thinking about God. He ponders what God has done in Christ. His enthusiasm is evident to anyone who reads the epistle: five times he refers to the *riches* of God, 12 times to the *grace* of God. The *glory* of God is mentioned eight times. The words *in Christ* are used 15 times. As we read the book several themes emerge:

1. The sovereignty of God. God is the highest authority and power in the universe. He is the object of all praise and adoration (cf. 1:3,9,11-12; 2:4-7).
2. The ministry of the Holy Spirit (2:18, 22; 3:5, 16; 4:1-4, 30; 5:18; 6:18).
3. The doctrine of the church. Ephesians is unique in its insistence that the church is the incarnate representative of Christ on earth during the present era. Ralph Martin writes:

In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul had insisted on the indivisibility of the body, which is made up of many members (cf. Rom. 12:4-5), but in Ephesians (notably in 1:22-23; 4:15-16; 5:29-30) the head and the body are inextricably united and interdependent. (Martin, p. 7)

John MacArthur goes so far as to say, *Christ's church is His present reincarnated Body on earth!*

4. The doctrine of reconciliation. The great theme of Ephesians is the reconciliation Christ provided on the Cross. First, sinful men and women were

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imprisonment and place the letter there (based on 1 Corinthians 15:32).

<sup>1</sup>These words introduce one of several extremely long sentences in the Greek text (1:3-14, 15-23; 2:1-9; 3:1-7)

<sup>2</sup> There is some debate as to whom the letter was addressed. The oldest Greek manuscripts omit the words *in Ephesus* in 1:1. Ephesians may have been a *circular* letter intended for both the Ephesian church and the various churches in the region. Ephesus was surrounded by over 200 independent communities in the Roman province of Asia. If this is the case, we have an explanation for the lack of personal greetings in the letter. Paul has a wider audience in mind.

<sup>3</sup> The similarities between Colossians and Ephesians are quite clear. In 1823, Wilhelm Martin Le-Brecht de Wette, one of the most influential 19th century biblical scholars, claimed that Ephesians was but a *verbose* expansion of Colossians. He was having a bad day. However, the letters do share over 50 phrases verbatim (cf. Hendrickson, pp. 6-26, for a parallel of the two books).

reconciled to God (Eph. 2:1-10). The implication of this vertical reconciliation is a horizontal reconciliation between ethnic and racial divisions (2:11-22). Paul is stunned by what he calls the *mystery* of the gospel. And what is that mystery?

This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 3:6

The salvation which was once thought to be the private possession of Israel, is now available to Jews and Gentiles alike. As a Jew who had been trained to see Gentiles as outsiders, Paul is shocked when he considers what God has done in Christ. This melding together of Jews and Gentiles into one *body* was planned by God from eternity past (1:11-13; 3:9-11). The proclamation of this mystery is what landed Paul in prison. It is no surprise, therefore, to find Paul asking for boldness in his future proclamation of this mystery.

Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

Eph. 6:19-20

Ralph Martin writes,

[Paul] is gripped by what is virtually a single theme that runs like a thread through his treatise. He marvels. . .at the grace of God which has brought into being a united church. In this Christian society, Jews and Gentiles find their true place (2:1-11). The unity of this universal society which is nothing less than Christ's body (1:23; 3:6; 4:4; 5:30) is his great concern. . .The coming into existence of this one family where all barriers of race, culture, and social status are broken down is the wonder that fills his vision. (Martin, p. 6)

Along these lines William Barclay writes,

The key thought of Ephesians is the gathering together of all things in Jesus Christ. Christ is the centre in whom all things unite, and the bond who unites all things. In nature as it is without Christ there is nothing but disunity and disharmony. . . The world, as we see it without Christ, is a divided, disunited, fragmented world. . . this disunity can only become a unity, and this disharmony can only become a harmony, when all things and all men and all powers in heaven and earth are united in Christ. (Barclay, p. 77)

As we read, study, ponder and argue over this wonderful letter during the coming weeks, let us catch a vision of what Jesus did for us on the Cross. In a world broken by racism, emphasizing at times a new tribalism, let us celebrate the reconciliation Christ provided on the Cross. Let us live out this marvelous mystery in the church. When we live in this way, members of the body of Christ will bask in the loving concern of the God whom we worship, the ministry of the church will be enhanced, and Christ will be glorified.

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*Sermon Notes. . .*

## Study Two

### Blessing God!

### Ephesians 1:3-6

After a brief and somewhat typical greeting (1:1-2), Paul begins one of the loftiest sentences of the New Testament. In the Greek text, verses 3 through 14 are a single, glorious, run-on sentence. One commentator says Paul is writing in a *state of controlled ecstasy*.<sup>1</sup> Even a casual reading of a re-punctuated English Bible gives the reader the unmistakable sense that Paul is grasping for words to express his sheer delight in what God has done for the believer in Christ.<sup>2</sup>

These verses contain much to ponder. They are loaded with significance and will shape our understanding of both God and the salvation he provided in Christ. Before going on in this study guide take a few minutes to read Ephesians 1:3-14 and pray over this short section of Ephesians. Catch a glimpse of the whole. Marvel at what God has done for you!

Make a list of the things God has done for you from these verses.

List the references Paul makes to our being *in Christ, in him*, etc.

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<sup>1</sup> Marcus Barth calls this section of Ephesians, *one infinitely long, heavy, and clumsy sentence, replete with dependent clauses, excurses, specifications, repetitions, and the like*. He goes on to point out *the distinctiveness, the beauty and the sense of the several limbs of the 'monster.'* (From Morris, p. 13) F. W. Danker adds, *As a syntactical salmagundi, the marvelous spiral of Eph. 1:3-14 is probably without rival in Greek literature.* (From Lincoln, p. 11)

<sup>2</sup> A. Armitage Robinson writes of these verses, *At first we marvel at the wealth of his language: but soon we discover by the very repetition of the phrases which have arrested us, the poverty of all language when it comes to dealing with such topics as he has chosen. He seems to be swept along by his theme, hardly knowing whither it is taking him.* (From Hughes, p. 270)

Try to outline these verses. Attempt a sentence diagram of verses 3-14.

**Notes and Questions:**

**1:3** begins Paul's lofty eulogy to God (see p. 2 of this study). Verse 3 contains three uses of the word blessing and is translated quite literally in the NASB.

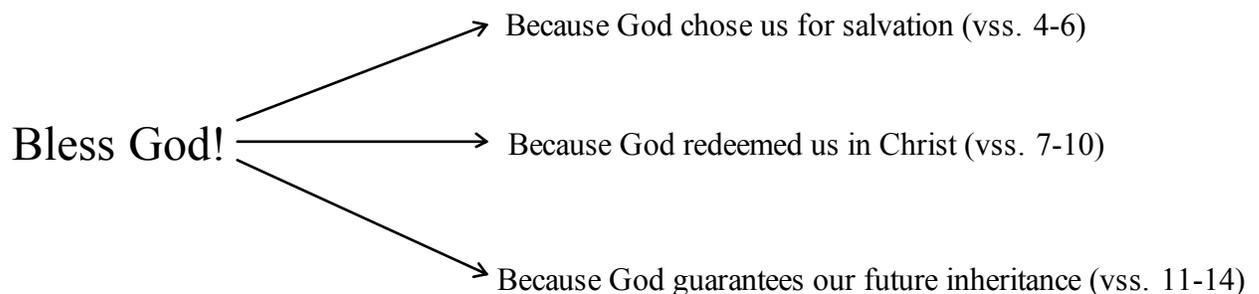
*Blessed* be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has *blessed* us with every spiritual *blessing*. . .

**Blessed be God** was a typical introduction to Jewish praise in the synagogue. But notice what Paul does with this familiar introduction to worship. The Apostle ties the blessing of God with the lordship of Jesus the Messiah and then goes on to point out the blessings we have received from him.

John MacArthur writes of these verses,

Paul takes us to the very throne room of the Godhead to show the greatness and the vastness of the blessings and treasures that belong to those who are in Jesus Christ. (MacArthur, pp. 5-6)

As we go into the throne room of God, keep the following outline in mind:



Sometime during your homegroup discussion, celebrate these blessings in prayer. Pray specifically through these three sections of Paul's sentence.

**1:4-5** Contain two words saturated with significance and controversy. The words are *chose* and *predestined*. Theologians have written volumes on these words and developed

theologies to match their findings.<sup>1</sup> Before we look more closely at each of these important words, notice the point of Paul's train of thought. We are to bless God (vs. 3) **because** he *chose* us and *predestined* us to salvation. Regardless of where our study and discussion takes us, let us return to this central idea of our passage. Worship is Paul's intention.

What do you think Paul means when he says God *chose us* in Christ?

The Greek word Paul uses is *eklego* which means, simply, to pick or to choose. Paul is speaking here of what is called the doctrine of *election*. God, in his infinite, sovereign wisdom and grace decided to choose for himself<sup>2</sup> some to be *holy and blameless*. . .

What do you make of this doctrine of election? How does it feel to know that God chose you *to be holy and blameless in his sight* before the creation of the world?<sup>3</sup>

Compare the following Scriptures:

- John 6:44
- John 15:16
- 1 Thessalonians 1:4-7
- 2 Thessalonians 2:13
- 1 Peter 1:2

Ours is an era which stresses the freedom of the individual. Accordingly, we are often offended at the doctrine of election. Many of us grimace at the thought that we are saved because of God's sovereign choice. What does this doctrine teach us about God? What does it teach us about ourselves?

### **About God**

### **About Ourselves**

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<sup>1</sup> Rest assured, all the controversies of the past two thousand years will be settled in the next two pages of the study guide.

<sup>2</sup> Paul uses the middle voice with his verb, which could be translated, *He chose for himself* (Simpson p. 25).

<sup>3</sup> Charles Spurgeon writes, *There is no doubt in my mind God chose me before I was born. He didn't have any reason to choose me after I was born.* . .

Respond to the following quotation by John Murray.

If we say or suppose that . . . predestination . . . is determined by some sovereign decision on the part of men themselves, then we contradict what the apostle by eloquent reiteration was jealous to affirm. If he meant to say anything in these expressions in Ephesians 1:5, 9, and 11, it is that God's predestination, and his will to salvation, proceeds from the pure sovereignty and absolute determination of his counsel. It is the unconditioned and unconditional election of God's grace.<sup>1</sup>

We need to be careful in our thinking here. While the New Testament writers affirm the necessity of God's sovereign choice in our salvation, they also affirm the reality of each man and woman's free will. Each time an appeal is made to come to Jesus in faith in the sermons recorded in the book of Acts, for example, the speaker assumes the listener has a will which is free to respond. Consider the following Scriptures:

- Matthew 23:37
- John 7:17
- Romans 7:18
- Revelation 22:17

What are we to make of these two sets of Scriptures? Consider and evaluate the following attempt at reconciling the doctrines of election and free will:

Apart from God, man's will is captive to sin. But he is nevertheless able to choose God because God has made that choice possible. Jesus said that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16) and that "everyone who believes in Me shall never die (11:26)." The frequent commands to the unsaved to respond to the Lord . . . clearly indicate the responsibility of man to exercise his own will.

Yet the Bible is just as clear that no person receives Jesus Christ as Savior who has not been chosen by God (cf. Rom. 8:29; 9:11; I Thess. 1:3-4; I Pet. 1:2). Jesus gives both truths in one verse in the gospel of John: *All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.* (John 6:37). We should let the antinomy remain, believing both truths completely and leaving the harmonizing of them to God. (MacArthur, p. 11)<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The Collected Writings of John Murray, vol. II, p. 127. Emphasis added.

<sup>2</sup>Hughes adds, *We must never allow our subjective experience of choosing Christ to water down the fact that we would not have chosen him if he had not first chosen us. . .* (Hughes, p. 24) J. I. Packer grapples

In verse 5 we read that

He predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will . . .

The Greek word Paul uses here is *proorizo* (προορίζω). It means *to decide beforehand, to preordain, to determine, or to predestine*. The KJV translates this word *predestinated*, while the NEB uses the English word *destined*. Some translators use the word *foreordained* to translate *proorizo*. In Romans 8:29 Paul couples this word with the Greek word for *foreknowledge* to make the same point he makes here: God chose us!

But again, we need to ask, *What are we to do with this teaching?* What does Paul's exultation do to us?

Go back and review Ephesians 1:4-6. What are the stated purposes of the doctrine of election? List these purposes.

What does the notion of *adoption* (vs. 6) bring to mind? How does this teaching shape your understanding of your *relationship* to God? Do you know anyone who has adopted a son or a daughter? How do these parents *feel* about their adopted children? Are these children loved as if they were their own flesh and blood?

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with the reconciliation of these two biblical teachings. What do you think of the following? *All Christians believe in divine sovereignty, but some are not aware that they do, and mistakenly imagine and insist that they reject it. What causes this odd state of affairs? The root cause is the same as in most cases of error in the Church -- the intruding of rationalistic speculations, the passion for systematic consistency, a reluctance to recognize the existence of mystery and to let God be wiser than men, and a consequent subjecting of Scripture to the supposed demands of human logic. People see the Bible teaches man's responsibility for his actions; they do not see (man, indeed, cannot see) how this is consistent with the sovereign Lordship of God over those actions. They are not content to let the two truths live side by side, as they do in the Scriptures, but jump to the conclusion that, in order to uphold the biblical truth of human responsibility, they are bound to reject the equally biblical and equally true doctrine of divine sovereignty, and to explain away the great number of texts that teach it. The desire to oversimplify the Bible by cutting out the mysteries is natural to our perverse minds, and it is not surprising that even godly men should fall victim to it.* (J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, 1961, pp. 16-17)

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Again, observe where Paul is going with this! All of this is *to the praise of the glory of his grace!*<sup>1</sup> Worship is the outcome of these powerful doctrines.

In his book, Knowing God, J. I. Packer sees the connection between our doctrine and our spiritual vitality.

If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God's child, and having God as his father. If this is not the thought that prompts and controls his worship and prayers and his whole outlook on life, it means that he does not understand Christianity very well at all. For everything that Christ taught, everything that makes the New Testament new, and better than the Old, everything that is distinctively Christian, as opposed to merely Jewish, is summed up in the knowledge of the Fatherhood of God. "Father" is the Christian name for God. (J. I. Packer, Knowing God, 1973, p. 182)

Spend time as a group doing what Paul does. Bless God for who he is and what he has done.

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<sup>1</sup> *Glory* in the New Testament denotes 'divine and heavenly radiance,' the 'loftiness and majesty' of God, and even the 'being of God' and His World. (Kittel, II, p. 237)

## Study Three

### Redemption Accomplished

### Ephesians 1:7-10

William Shakespeare's tragedy of Macbeth, written early in the seventeenth century, contains the bitter proclamation: *Life is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.* . .

Paul's letter to the Ephesian church is the Apostle's grand statement against Macbeth's lamentation. Life, for Paul, is full of wonder and mystery because of what God has done for his people through Christ.

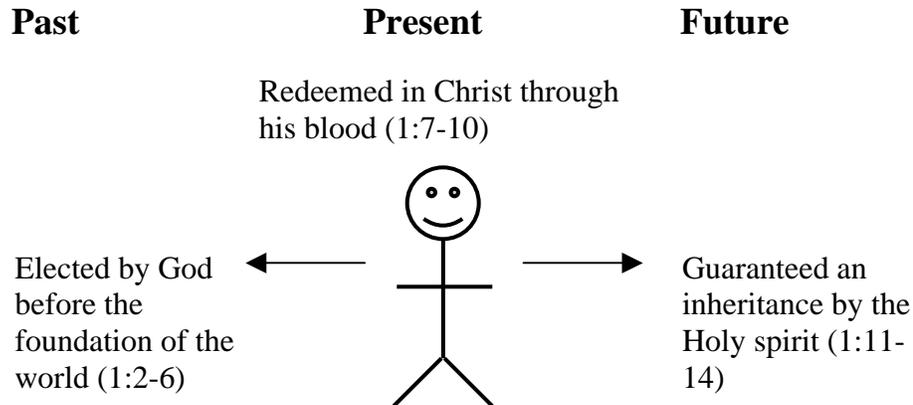
Once again, read and meditate upon 1:1-14. Allow these verses to take you into God's throne room. Notice how these verses point to a view of life which is full of meaning. Ponder with Paul for a few minutes. What has God done for you? How do these verses give significance to your life?

Paul is gushing in these verses. He cannot find enough descriptives to express his awe over what God has done for us in Christ. Make a list of the key words in verses 7-10. Try to find a synonym for each word.

**Key Words**

**Synonym**

The outline of these verses (see p. 5) could be understood in a temporal sense:



When Paul says we were *redeemed* in Christ he employs a word picture. In the ancient world the victor in battle would take the conquered soldiers from the opposing army and make them into slaves. Sometimes these slaves would be sold back to their original king. The payment price was called a *ransom*. When the transaction was completed the slaves were *redeemed*. Morris writes,

...the thought in “redemption” is always that the person has been in a captivity from which he or she cannot break free, yet is set free on the payment of a price.<sup>1</sup> (Morris, p. 20)

Compare the following verses with Ephesians 1:7. How do they fill in the picture of the payment Christ made for our sin?

Gal. 3:13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.”

1 Peter 1:18-19 For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

1 Timothy 2:5 For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus who gave himself as a ransom for all men --the testimony given in its proper time.

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<sup>1</sup> Sometimes an individual slave was able to collect enough money to purchase his/her own freedom. The same term was applied. The slave purchased *redemption*.

Hebrews 9:15 For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance --now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.

Mark 10:45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Think of these verses in light of biblical history. For roughly 1000 years Jews had been offering sacrifices in the temple and, before that, in the tabernacle. While these sacrifices symbolized redemption from sin they didn't really work. *It is impossible*, we learn in Hebrews, *for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins*. (Heb. 10:4) The sacrifices were merely *shadows* (Col. 2:17) which looked forward to reality of the cross.<sup>1</sup>

How does Paul describe our redemption in 1:7? Diagram this part of his sentence:

Each of us has sins in our background which haunt and trouble us. We have proverbial *skeletons in the closet* we hope no one finds. The word in 1:7 for *forgiveness* should set us free from our regrets. The word means, *to send away*. In the death of Christ our sins are *sent away*. All of them!

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<sup>1</sup> Christ *bought us back* while on the cross. But how? What was it about the cross that justified us? How did the death of Christ procure our salvation? Romans 3:25 gives the best explanation. *God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood*. Here Paul uses the Greek word *hilasterion* (ἱλαστήριον). The word is usually translated *propitiation*, which means to appease someone's wrath. In the Greek Old Testament the word occurs twenty times to denote the golden cover of the Ark of the Covenant, the mercy seat. This is the place where the high priest met with God annually. Here the high priest would sprinkle blood on the mercy seat to assuage the wrath of God. Through the shedding of blood this was the place where Israel was reconciled to her God.

In Romans 3:25 Paul uses this familiar imagery and gives it new significance. When Christ was on the cross God provided *propitiation* to himself. *The death of Christ, then, is the means by which God does away with His people's sin - not symbolically, as in the ritual of Leviticus 16 in which the material mercy-seat figured, but really. And really in a twofold sense; the sin has been removed not only from the believer's conscience, on which it lay as an intolerable burden, but from the presence of God.* (F. F. Bruce, Romans p. 106)

Examine the following verses with this in mind. Personalize these verses as you read them. When you read the word *sin*, or, *sins*, think about those things in your past which haunt you.

- Psalm 103:12
- Isaiah 44:22
- Jeremiah 31:34b
- Micah 7:18-19
- Matthew 26:28
- 1 John 1:9

If these verses are true, why do believers often retain guilt feelings concerning past sins?

What does your reading of these verses do to your feelings of guilt?

What can we do to encourage one another past these haunting sins?

Notice that the forgiveness we receive is *in accordance with the riches of God's grace*. . . *Riches* is one of Paul's favored words. Fifteen of the twenty-two times the word occurs in the New Testament are from the pen of Paul (five times in Ephesians alone). *Riches* refers to literal wealth, but it is used figuratively to refer to the abundance of blessings in Christ.

Ephesians 1:18 I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints . . .

Ephesians 2:7 in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 3:8 Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ .

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Ephesians 3:16 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being . . .

Paul follows this word saying God *lavished* his grace upon us. *Strictly speaking the word refers to things that are over and above the required number . . .* (Morris, p. 21)

What is Paul saying about our forgiveness?

. . . in the unspeakable Gift high heaven comes to our aid and allocates to our bankrupt funds its own illimitable wealth, "infinite riches in a little room". And the Lord's forgiveness is as complete as its procurement was costly. His is no grudging, but a cordial, an *abundant*, an exhaustive pardon. (Simpson, p. 31)

When Paul says God made *known to us the mystery of his will . . .* he does not have in mind something cryptic or spooky. In the New Testament the word *mystery* generally refers to the revelation of something which was previously hidden. God's grace is manifest in his revelation of the *mystery of his will*.

Read 1:9 in context. What is the *mystery of his will*?

Verse 10 is intriguing. Paul's inspired thoughts about redemption take on cosmic dimensions. What is the purpose of everything? Where is history directed? What gives meaning to the fragmented parts of our lives?

The French philosopher Andre Maurois mourned the absence of meaning in life:

The universe is indifferent. Who created it? Why are we here on this puny mud-heap spinning in infinite space? I have not the slightest idea, and I am quite convinced that no one has the least idea. (from Barclay, p. 98)

G. N. Clark became president of Cambridge University. In his inaugural lecture he said,

There is no secret and no plan in history to be discovered. I do not believe that any future consummation could make sense of all the irrationalities of preceding

ages. If it could not explain them, still less could it justify them. (from Hughes, p. 35)

Even those in the so called *hard sciences* have difficulty making sense of the whole of life. In theoretical physics, scientists look for a *unified theory of everything*.<sup>1</sup> The problem is that no such all-encompassing theory yet exists.

But look at Ephesians 1:10! Here Paul proclaims the meaning of the universe. The Greek text is difficult to translate. Paul uses a Greek word (*anakephalaiosasthai*) which means *to sum up*. Literally it means *to gather under a single head*. It refers to the conclusion of an argument.

Here it probably means that in Christ the entire universe will one day find its full explanation and rationale, its “principle of cohesion.” If so, this bold claim marks the completion of New Testament thought which has Christ as the source (Col. 1:16; John 1:3-4; Heb. 1:2-3) and the sustainer (Col. 1:17) of creation. He is now hailed as the destined Lord of all life as the goal toward which the whole creation is moving. . . (Martin, p. 17)

What should our response be to such knowledge? How should these verses shape our worship? Our lifestyle? Our friendships?

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<sup>1</sup> One encyclopedia states that such a theory *may be defined most broadly as a theory that with one set of equations would unify all four of the fundamental interactions of nature: gravitation, electromagnetism, and the strong and weak nuclear forces.*

## Study Four

### Chosen In Christ

### Ephesians 1:11-14

Our text in this study concludes Paul's marvelous run-on sentence which began in 1:3. Paul's words are pregnant with meaning. The Apostle's inspired words strain to express his exuberance in what God has done for us in Christ! Before going on in this study re-read 1:3-14 a few times. Try reading from an unfamiliar translation. Ponder and meditate upon this grand sentence.

Let us turn our focus on the last four verses of this sentence (11-14). Here Paul reiterates the great themes of vss. 3-10 but adds a hint of what is to come in Ephesians chapter 2. Notice *we/you* language in these verses. Paul is introducing the major theme of his letter, the reconciliation of Jew and Gentile in Christ.<sup>1</sup>

In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession --to the praise of his glory.

One of the problems besetting the early church was that of Jewish exclusivism. Spiritual pride on the part of the Jews caused divisions between Jewish and non-Jewish believers almost from the inception of the church.<sup>2</sup> Ephesians, at one level, is Paul's statement of Christian unity. As one commentary title states, Ephesians is about *God's New Society*.<sup>3</sup>

In these verses Paul begins to show that in Christ, Jew and Gentile come together as one new people. The *we* (Jews) and the *you* (Gentiles) are both marked by the Holy Spirit and have become together the people of God! Paul will develop this theme in chapters two and three.

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<sup>1</sup> See study 1, pages 3-5.

<sup>2</sup> Remember Acts 6? Here the division was between *pure* Jews who spoke Hebrew (Aramaic) and the Hellenized Jews who had been *corrupted* by Greek ways.

<sup>3</sup> This was the original title of John Stott's commentary published in 1979.

In verse 11, Paul returns to the theme of the believer's election. He states that the believer has been *chosen in Christ*. If we compare translations we find the NASB is very different from the NIV.

NIV	NASB
In him we were <u>also chosen</u> , having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will . . .	In Him also we have <u>obtained an inheritance</u> , having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will . . .

The Greek verb Paul uses is found only here in the New Testament (eklerothemen) Eklerothemen comes from kleroô which means, literally, “to cast lots,” “to choose by lot,” or “to receive by lot.” The noun kleros means “the lot,” “portion,” or “inheritance.” Paul probably has in mind the OT concept of Israel as God’s “lot” or “chosen people” (Deut. 4:20; 9:29; 32:9; I Kings 8:51 . . .). Now, however, believers are chosen “in Christ.” Our future is so certain in Christ that Paul writes in the past tense “we have already obtained our inheritance in Him. . .” (Patzia, pp. 156-157)

Imagine you are the recipient of a large inheritance. Imagine further that the legal documents surrounding this inheritance declared that you will receive the estate (with interest, tax free) ten years from today. What changes would this make in your lifestyle? What changes would take place in your attitude toward money?

Now apply this delightful (?) fantasy to the big picture of your life! Paul declares you have received an incredibly rich inheritance which will last for eternity! God is in control. You are his possession, chosen, elected, loved and saved by Him. Think about your future inheritance from the vantage point of the following verses:

1 Corinthians 2:9 However, as it is written: “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.”

Romans 8:18 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

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

I Peter 1:3-5 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade --kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

How does this wonderful news affect the day-to-day struggles of life?

Paul links our being *chosen* in Christ with our *predestination* in Christ. Remember study two? The Greek word Paul uses is *proorizo* (προορίζω). It means to *decide beforehand, to preordain, to determine, or to predestine* (see pages 9-11). Our salvation is according to God's wonderful plan.

Hendrickson summarizes this teaching from the entire section:

Neither fate nor human merit determines our destiny. The benevolent purpose — that we should be holy and faultless (verse 4), sons of God (verse 5), destined to glorify him forever (verse 6, cf. Verses 12 and 14)—is fixed, being part of a larger, universe-embracing plan. Not only did God *make* this plan that includes absolutely all things that ever take place in heaven, on earth, and in hell; past, present, *and even the future*, pertaining to both believers and unbelievers, to angels and devils, to physical as well as spiritual energies and units of existence both large and small; he also *wholly carries it out*. His providence in time is as comprehensive as his decree from eternity. (Hendrickson, p. 88, emphasis is Hendrickson's)

To some extent the entire thrust of vss. 3-14 involve the doctrine of election. Consider J. I. Packer's comments on this teaching:

The fact is that the doctrine of election, dealing as it does with the inmost secrets of God's will, is strong meat: very nourishing to those who can take it, but acutely indigestible to those whose spiritual system is out of order. And the symptoms of indigestion (let it be said) appear not only when the doctrine is rejected, but also when it is misapplied. Biblical teaching on election is meant to make Christians humble, confident, joyful and active, but the doctrine can be held and propagated in a way that makes them instead proud, presumptuous, complacent and lazy; so that this teaching may become a stumbling block to those who receive it no less than to those who object to it. (God's Words: Studies of Key Bible Themes, 1981, p. 157)<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John Calvin warned in his Institutes of being overly curious regarding this doctrine. *The discussion of predestination - a subject of itself rather intricate - is made very perplexing, and therefore dangerous, by human curiosity, which no barriers can restrain from wandering into forbidden labyrinths, and soaring*

In one way or another we have looked at this doctrine for the past three weeks. Has this look produced any *indigestion* in your soul? Has it produced *humility, confidence, joy* and godly *activity*? Give at least one example to your group.

**1:13** Paul tells his readers they were marked with a *seal, the promised Holy Spirit*.

In the partially literate society of Paul's time, a seal was used to bear the imprint of its owner. A wax seal marked an object, a letter or a legal document and said to all who saw it, *I belong to my owner*.

Paul is saying that the Holy Spirit within the believer is God's seal on that person. . . . It is the sign that God has accepted him or her. It is the guarantee that all God's promises will be fulfilled in the believer. (Morris, p. 26)

The Holy Spirit, living within us, is God's mark on us. The Spirit is given to everyone who trusts in Christ (Rom. 8:9). Each believer's body is called the *temple* of the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 6:19).

The Holy Spirit guarantees we are God's children. The NASB translates this verse quite literally. We have received *the Holy Spirit of promise*.

What does this seal of the Holy Spirit promise? See verse 14. What does this mean to you?

The word Paul uses for *deposit* is loaded with significance. The Holy Spirit is, in Greek, the *arrabon* (ἀρραβών) who assures our future salvation. The word means, *the first installment, deposit, down payment, pledge that pays part of the purchase price in*

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*beyond its sphere, as if determined to leave none of the Divine secrets unscrutinized or unexplored. . . . Let us, then, in the first place, bear in mind, that to desire any other knowledge of predestination than what is unfolded in the word of God, indicates as great folly, as a wish to walk through unpassable roads, or to see in the dark. Nor let us be ashamed to be ignorant of some things relative to a subject in which there is a kind of learned ignorance. (From A Compend of the Institutes of the Christian Religion, ed. By Hugh T. Kerr, pp. 127-128)*

*advance, and so secures a legal claim to the article in question, or makes a contract valid.* (Bauer, p. 109)

The word is used, outside of the New Testament, of a woman who received 1,000 drachmas as *arobona* for a cow she was selling. (Moulton and Milligan, p. 79) In modern Greek the word is used to refer to an engagement ring.

The Holy Spirit, then, is God's deposit in us, who guarantees our future redemption as his possession. Notice that the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer is real, but that presence is merely a taste of what is to come.

Share with your group how you experience the Holy Spirit in your Christian life. Is it a good idea to understand this experience as a guarantee of your future inheritance in Christ? Do you think Paul has a believer's experience in mind in these verses? Is there a danger in this notion? Could we become *experience junkies* who always crave the latest manifestation of the Spirit?

Paul calls believers the *possession* of God (vs. 14). Notice how this fulfills the yearnings of the writers of the Old Testament:

Exodus 19:5 Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. 'These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.'

Deuteronomy 7:6 For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession.

Malachi 3:17 "They will be mine," says the LORD Almighty, "in the day when I make up my treasured possession."

Where does all of this lead (verse 14)?

What does the phrase *to the praise of his glory* mean to you? How do you appropriate this phrase in your day-to-day life?

Leon Morris points out that the Greek word for praise is found three times in the book of Ephesians, the most in any one book of the New Testament. Each of these occurs in Paul's lengthy sentence (1:3-14). What can we deduce from this?

Spend time as a homegroup responding to Paul's declaration of God's grace. Give God the praise which is his due.

*Sermon Notes. . .*

## **Study Five**

### **The Greatness of His Power**

### **Ephesians 1:15-23**

*A chief object of all prayer is to bring us to God.*  
P. T. Forsyth, The Soul of Prayer<sup>1</sup>

When we begin verse 15, Paul's 205-word sentence has come to a close. He now moves on to inform his readers that he is praying for them, and to tell them something of the content of his prayer.<sup>2</sup> Ephesians 1:15-23 contains many difficulties, problems of interpretation, grammar, etc. But the overall thrust of the text is fairly clear. Paul desires that the Ephesian church may know and experience the greatness of God's power.

Read these nine verses a few times. Compare translations. Notice how different the NIV is from the more literal NASB.

What are the key words in the text?

What are Paul's main concerns?

What questions arise in your thinking as you read these verses?

How would you summarize Paul's prayer for the Ephesians?

#### **Notes and Questions:**

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<sup>1</sup> The Soul of Prayer, (Regent College Publishing, 1997) p. 16,

<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, Paul mentions his prayer for each church he writes to except for the Corinthian church (which seemed to have more problems than all the other churches combined).

**1:15** *For this reason. . .* How does Paul's prayer flow from his praise contained in 1:3-14? What is the reason for his prayer?

**1:17** Paul's reference to the *Spirit* is ambiguous. He may have the Holy Spirit in mind (NIV) or he may be referring to a general gift of spiritual wisdom (NASB). In the Greek New Testament the Holy Spirit is usually (but not always) preceded by a definite article, *the Holy Spirit*. In 1:17 there is no definite article:

. . . we should probably not see too great a difference between the two translations, for in either case the gift comes only through the indwelling Spirit of God; and where the Spirit is given, wisdom and revelation follow. (Morris, p. 31)

In either case, *wisdom* refers to seeing and living life from God's vantage point (consider wisdom in the book of Proverbs). This is a gift from God.

Think about wisdom and the Christian life. How does a wise person behave? What person do you know who is wise? Why do you consider this person to be wise? How is this wisdom a result of the Holy Spirit's work in that person's life? (Who is the wisest person in your home group???)

**1:17** Leon Morris clarifies the meaning of the word *revelation*.

With [the spirit of wisdom] goes "a spirit of . . . revelation." Just as it is true that the believer should aim for the highest mental excellence that the Spirit of God can give, so it is true that the believer is never in the position of being able to work out the Christian way by means of the best wisdom he or she can acquire. Christianity is a religion of revelation. It is only because God has revealed the Christian teachings that we can know them. Specifically, there is nothing about a Galilean carpenter nailed to a Roman cross that can obviously bring salvation to sinners in the modern world. But God has revealed something of the significance of that death on the cross, and it is in light of the revelation that we come to put our trust in the crucified one. And we live out our lives in light of the revelation, for it includes not only an understanding of the way sinners come to be saved, but also of the way saved sinners are to live out the implications of their faith. (Morris, p. 31)

**1:17** At the end of this verse we are told (NIV) the spirit of wisdom and revelation is given *so that* the Ephesians *may know him* (Christ) *better*. Literally, the text reads “in a full knowledge of him.” The word Paul uses for knowledge is a compound word. We find not the simple word for knowledge (gnosis), but the richer word for deep knowledge (*epignosis*).

Epignosis is the fullness of knowledge acquired through personal acquaintance.  
(Wood, p. 30)

What then is Paul saying? His prayer for the Ephesians centers on their gaining intimacy in their knowledge of Christ.

How is your relationship with Christ? Do you *know him better* than you did a year ago? Do you work toward intimacy with Christ?

What role does prayer play in your spiritual progress? Recall the quotation by P. T. Forsyth at the beginning of this study, *A chief object of all prayer is to bring us to God*.

So often we saturate our prayers with *requests* for temporal needs (health, jobs, relationships, etc.). While these requests are certainly to be a part of our prayers, we often neglect the more important needs of our lives.

Notice how Paul prays for believers in the churches to which he writes. How should this shape our prayers for others?

Philippians 1:9-11 And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ --to the glory and praise of God.

Philemon 6 I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ.

Colossians 1:10-12 And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good

work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.

How can we, as a church, develop the habit of praying for one another after the manner of Paul's prayers? More specifically, what can your homegroup do to make a priority of these kinds of prayers for one another?

**1:18** continues Paul's prayer. Our translations usually *read so that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened*, as if Paul were praying for an enlightenment which is not already present. Actually Paul uses what is called a perfect passive participle which denotes a completed action with continuing results. A more literal, yet awkward, translation would read,

*[I pray] so that, the eyes of your heart having been enlightened, you may know what is the hope of his calling. . .*

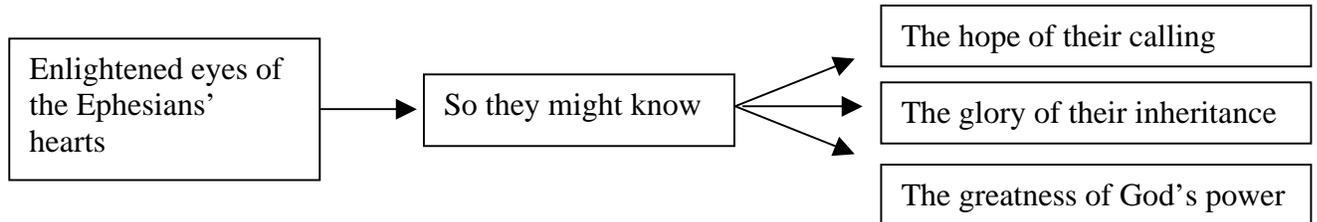
The Ephesians are *in Christ*. Their hearts have already been enlightened. This is what it means to be a believer. *Illumination. . . comes through the reception of the gospel.* (Patzia, p. 166)

1 Peter 2:9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of **darkness into his wonderful light**.

In other words, the believer need not pray for enlightenment (as in Buddhism). He or she already has it in Christ.

What does Christian *enlightenment* look like? Give examples out of your own life or examples you have firsthand in the lives of other Christians.

What does Paul want these enlightened believers to know and experience? Notice the threefold prayer of Paul in 1:18-19.



How are believers to understand the notion of *calling*? Paul will use this word later in his letter (Ephesians 4:1 & 4). Compare two other passages which speak of the believer's calling.

- Romans 1:6-7
- 1 Corinthians 1:2
- 1 Corinthians 1:9

When Paul speaks of the *riches of his glorious inheritance* he may have one of two ideas in mind. He could be speaking of the church as God's inheritance. In the Old Testament, Israel was often spoken of as God's inheritance, that is, as his treasured possession.<sup>1</sup> But more than likely Paul has in mind the inheritance which the church receives. A similar verse in Colossians makes this clear. There we learn that because of the work of Christ we have been *qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light* (Col. 1:12).

What do you think of when you consider your inheritance in Christ? Compare Revelation 22:1-4.

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<sup>1</sup> Consider, for example, Isaiah 19:25; Jeremiah 12:7-9; Joel 3:2.

**1:19** Here Paul prays that the Ephesians will know the *incomparably great power* of God. Again, the NASB renders a more literal translation. There we read the Ephesians were to know *the surpassing greatness of his power*.

The adjective *hyperballon, incomparably great*, is used only by Paul in the New Testament. Paul is again grasping for words. His desire is that the Ephesians grasp the power of God.

Once again he expresses this in the strongest terms that language can find, both by speaking of its surpassing magnitude, and by using all the synonyms possible. (Foulkes, p. 62)

The four words Paul uses are:

- |                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| <i>Power</i>    | From this Greek word we get our word dynamite.   |
| <i>Working</i>  | From this word we get our word energy.   |
| <i>Strength</i> | The word refers to an attribute of God. It is sometimes translated <i>dominion</i> , or <i>power</i> . (See, I Timothy 6:16; Hebrews 2:14) |
| <i>Might</i>    | This word refers to endowed power or ability.  |

Carefully re-read this prayer. What do we find? God's power is here! It is at work within us (consider Ephesians 3:20). If we find we are not experiencing the power of God in our lives the problem is ours. Paul's prayer for the Ephesians reveals a storehouse of power.

## Study Six

### From Death to Life

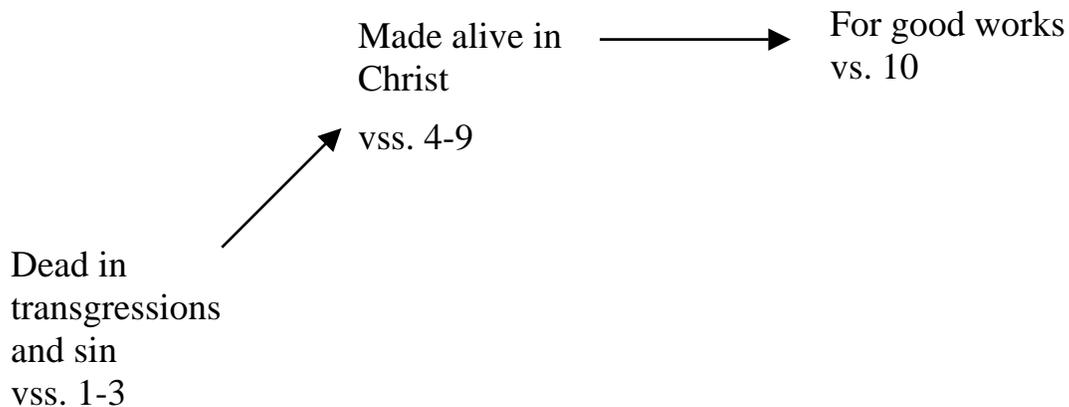
#### Ephesians 2:1-5

When we think of the human condition there is much to be depressed about. Global warming, we are told, threatens life itself while *wars and rumors of wars*<sup>1</sup> are the order of the day. Underemployment, poverty, violence, sexual perversity, psychological turmoil, and racism characterize our era.

Our text for this week stands as a beacon of hope in a hopeless situation. Paul points out the sinfulness of sin in the hearts of all people, but then goes on to describe the wonder of God's reconciliation through Christ.

Max Zerwick called Ephesians 2:1-10 *the shorter epistle to the Romans* because it succinctly states the gospel of grace. In just ten verses the reader is taken from sin to salvation, from bondage under Satan to dwelling with Christ in the heavenly realms, from spiritual death to life with Christ forever.

How do these verses fit with the flow of Ephesians? Consider what Paul has done thus far in his letter. Chapter 1 moves from praise (vss. 3-14) to prayer (vss. 15-23). In these verses Paul summarizes the doctrine of redemption. Read Ephesians 2:1-10 in as many translations as you have available. Memorize this wonderful passage and shout it out your window. Keep the following outline in mind as you read:



<sup>1</sup> Matthew 24:6.

Have some fun with the outline above? Go ahead, be brave, add your own arrows to the sentence diagram. From the text, what does it mean to be dead in transgressions and sins? What are the consequences of this *deadness* in sin?

Why did God make us alive in Christ? What is the stated purpose of this gracious act of God?

This is a fertile section of Scripture. What thoughts stand out as you read? What is Paul's main point? What remains unclear? What surprises did you find in these verses?

**Notes and questions:**

**2:1-3** One of Paul's main concerns in Ephesians is that Jews and Gentiles understand their unity in Christ (see pages 3-4). Here the Apostle levels the playing field before God. We are equal failures with regard to salvation.

Notice the familiar Jew/Gentile language in verses 1-3. *As for you* refers to Gentile believers. But Gentiles are not alone. *All of us also lived among them*. . . Jewish believers come to God from the same impoverished background. Jews and Gentiles are on equal ground.

**2:1** When Paul says we were dead in our *transgressions and sins*, what does he have in mind? The difference between the two words should not be pressed. The root meaning of transgressions is *to fall beside*, or to *to fall away*. The meaning of sin is *to miss the mark*. Paul wants to show the reader that he or she is thoroughly sinful.

What kind of death is Paul talking about? Is this a figure of speech?

If we were dead in our sin (dead people don't respond to external stimulus), how is it that we were able to *receive Christ*? See vs. 5 and think through all that we have learned in Ephesians chapter 1.

**2:3** is, perhaps, a bit surprising. Here Paul, the devout Jew claims that he, along with his fellow Jews were living lives devoted to their own lusts and desires. Andrew Lincoln translates this phrase,

. . . in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the wishes of the flesh and the thoughts. (Lincoln, p. 97)

The Greek words Paul uses are *epithumia* (lusts) and *thelema* (desires). The first word refers to strong or inordinate desires, sexual and otherwise. The second word refers to the strong will of a person who is unredeemed by God.

In what sense can Paul, the devout rabbi, claim to have been living in his lusts before he surrendered to the lordship of Jesus? See, Philippians 3:2-5.

Some Christians have a *sensational* testimony. God rescued them from alcoholism, sexual promiscuity, a life of crime, and drug addiction or wanton materialism. Others have a less spectacular story of conversion. What do Paul's words in vs. 3 mean for those without a sordid past to look back on? In what sense were they *gratifying the cravings* of the sinful nature and *following its desires and thoughts*?

What was your conversion like? Share with your group a one minute story of your coming to the faith. Take a moment and write this out. Come prepared to read your *testimony* to your group.

**2:3** Notice the difference in the NIV and the NASB when translating verse 3. The NIV reads *we were by nature objects of wrath*. Compare this translation with the NASB and you will find we were *by nature children of wrath*. Why the difference? The Greek text indeed reads, *children of wrath*. The NIV translation is probably an attempt to avoid the embarrassment of having little children pictured as creatures who are under the wrath of God! Commentators point out the phrase *children of wrath* is a Hebrew idiom which refers to people of all ages much like *sons of disobedience* in 2:2. The NEB reads, *we lay under the dreadful judgment of God*.

What is this wrath? William Hendrickson writes,

... it is *settled indignation*, the attitude of God toward men viewed as fallen in Adam (Rom. 5:12, 17-19) and refusing to accept the gospel of grace and salvation in Christ. (Hendrickson, p. 115)

John Stott adds,

It is God's personal, righteous, constant hostility to evil, his settled refusal to compromise with it, and his resolve instead to condemn it. (Stott, p. 76)

To go a bit further, the Greek text reads, we were *children by nature objects of wrath*. . . What does Paul mean? Is he saying we are guilty before God by virtue of our being born?

Probably the best commentary is his own as it is found in Romans 1-3, so the expression 'by nature children of wrath' is a summary of Romans 5:12-14.<sup>1</sup> His argument there is that 'death spread to all men because all men sinned' is not that

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<sup>1</sup> Rom. 5:12-14 Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned—for before the law was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account when there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who was a pattern of the one to come.

all inherited a sinful nature which led them to sin and so to die, but that ‘all men sinned’ in and with Adam. The Old Testament has a strong sense of the solidarity of the human race. It speaks of the next generation as being already ‘in the loins’ of the present generation, a truth which modern genetics may be said to underline. Paul is saying, then, that we were ourselves in Adam. It may truly be said that we sinned in Adam, and that in and with him we incurred guilt and died. (Stott, p. 78)

Verses 1 through 7 are one long sentence in the Greek New Testament. Paul again is caught up in his own writing. Grammar and syntax take a back seat to the wonder of what God has done for us in Christ. The subject of the sentence doesn’t come until verse 4 (God) and the verb waits until verse 5 to be revealed (made us alive).

With all of the above in mind (verses 1-3) how do you react to the adversative (*but*) in verse 4? How would your life have turned out differently if God had not stepped in and changed the course of events through his grace?

**2:5-6** Notice the corporate description of our salvation. We are saved with Christ in the context of the Christian community. *God made us alive.* . . . When Jesus was raised from the dead, so were we.<sup>1</sup>

In these verses, Paul uses three verbs which begin with the prefix *syn* (*with* in Greek). We were *made alive with*, *raised with*, and *seated with* Christ.

It is not easy to bring out the force of this feature of the epistle, for we do not go in for such compounds in English. But we must not miss the emphasis Paul is placing on the truths that Christians belong together and that they belong with Christ. (Morris, p. 49)

In what ways do you understand your salvation as a corporate event? How does this inform your view of the church and your place in the church?

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Lincoln writes, *Both Christ and believers have been raised from the dead (1:19; 2:5,6), both Christ and believers have been seated in the heavenly realms (1:20, 2:6).* . . . *The death from which Christ was raised was according to 1:20 a physical death, while that from which believers have been raised is the death of an existence characterized by their sinful action.* (Lincoln, pp. 85-86)

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*Sermon Notes. . .*

## Study Seven

### Grace on Display

### Ephesians 2:6-10

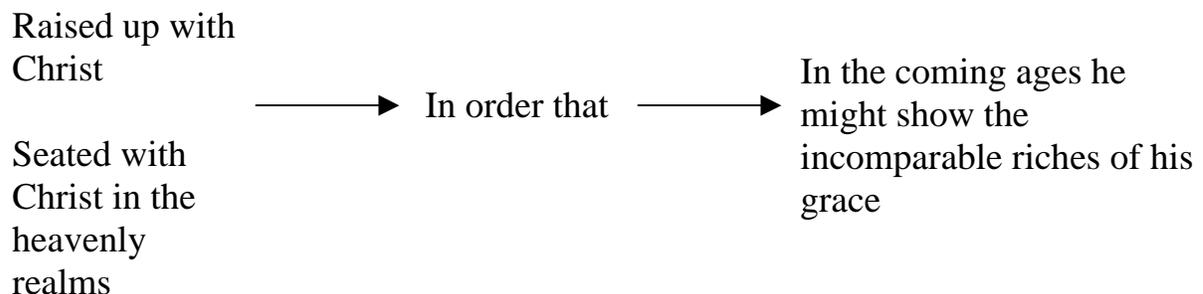
Think about a favorite piece of art in the Western world. Michelangelo Buonarotti's David stands proudly in Florence Italy. The Renaissance marble carving stands over 12 feet tall and has been admired since it was completed in 1504. David is Michelangelo's workmanship. Admirers travel from all over the world to see this magnificent statue. What do they say when they see this beautiful sculpture? David draws attention to the artist who made him. David is a grand testimony to the artist's ability to work wonders with stone. The visitor says, in one way or another, *What a grand artist Michelangelo was!*

As we continue in our study of *the shorter epistle to the Romans*, that is, Ephesians 2:1-10, we catch a glimpse of the grand purpose of our salvation.

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1759), the renowned scholar and preacher of the Great Awakening, wrote a book called, The End For Which God Created the World. There he states,

The ultimate end of the work of redemption is the glory of God.<sup>1</sup>

Edwards then amasses dozens of Scriptures to show this is the case. God sent Jesus to the cross out of his kindness to us. We are the recipients and beneficiaries of his grace. But God himself is the one who gets the glory. Our salvation somehow enhances and magnifies the splendor of God! At the outset, notice this staggering truth in verses 6-7.



<sup>1</sup> Part seven, section three.

Before going on in this study, re-read these 10 verses. Again, compare translations. What new thoughts come to mind?

**2:7** Ponder this verse. What is God's purpose for your salvation? What motivation did God have in providing for our salvation? Does this seem selfish? Does it surprise you?

Wood writes, *This was God's publicity program for the whole of history—and beyond.* (Wood, p. 35)

Notice the teaching of this great truth in other portions of Scripture. Read and explain these passages to one another in your homegroup.

- Ephesians 3:10
- John 12:27-27
- Philippians 2:6-11
- 1 Samuel 12:22
- 2 Samuel 7:23
- Isaiah 63:12
- Psalm 23:3

Notice 2:7 in light of the whole paragraph (2:1-10). God has done everything! We were dead. We were made alive.

Salvation is God's gift, *lest any man should boast*. Christians are always uncomfortable with pride, for they sense its incongruity. We shall not be able to strut round heaven like peacocks. Heaven will be filled with the exploits of Christ and the praises of God. There will indeed be display in heaven. Not self-display, but rather a display of the incomparable wealth of God's grace, mercy and kindness through Jesus Christ. (Stott, pp. 83-84)

Respond to the following statement. Does it accurately summarize Paul's teaching in these verses? If so, what should this mean for the way the church conducts her business, sets her goals, makes her plans?

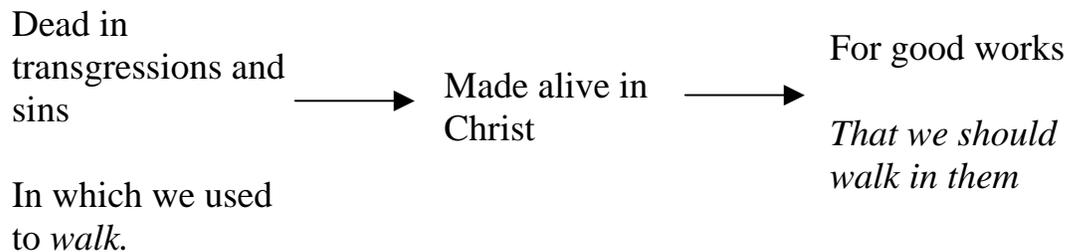
The purpose of God for His Church, as Paul came to understand it, reaches beyond itself, beyond the salvation, the enlightenment and the re-creation of individuals, beyond its unity and fellowship, beyond even its witness to the world. The Church is to be the exhibition to the whole creation of the wisdom and love and grace of God in Christ. (Foulkes, p. 74)

How should this section of Ephesians affect our evangelism?

**2:10** points out our role in responding to God's work. He has brought us from spiritual death to life with Christ *in the heavenly realms*. Consequently *we are God's workmanship*. The Greek word is *poiema* from which we derive the English word poem. The Jerusalem Bible translates this verse *we are God's work of art*.

We have been meeting in our groups for six weeks. Take a few moments and affirm those in your group. In what ways do you see those in your homegroup as God's *works of art*.

Here in Ephesians we learn we are God's *workmanship*, God's carving. What is our function? Why did God make us? Notice the change God has produced in us.



In Ephesians Paul loves to use the verb *to walk*. The verb characterizes the pattern of life for both the believer and the unbeliever.<sup>1</sup>

Share with your homegroup how your *walk* has changed since coming to know Christ. What *good works* are you pursuing in your life at this time?

In these past two studies we have focused on the grand purposes of God. How can SBCC fit into this grand plan of the God of the universe? What changes can we make (corporately and individually) to exhibit the wisdom and grace of God more clearly? What is your role in these changes?

How does it feel to know you are God's workmanship? How does this affect your view of yourself?

Do you live your life to the glory of the creator? In what ways?

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<sup>1</sup> The Greek word is *paripatein* (παριπατειν). The NIV will often translate this verb *to live*. The NASB consistently renders the verb literally, *to walk*. Paul uses this verb with increasing regularity as the letter progresses (see 4:1; 4:17; 5:2; 5:8; 5:15).

## Study Eight

### Fellow Citizens

### Ephesians 2:11-22

One of the *buzz words* of our time is *multiculturalism*. The term is somewhat elastic and usually means what the speaker wants it to mean. There is a multicultural movement in our leading academic institutions, in our government, in the music we listen to, the food we eat and the clothes we wear. But what is it? What is multiculturalism?

On the positive side, multiculturalism is the attempt to respect and embrace the good in all cultures and people groups. Multiculturalists rightly insist that, in the past, we have been insensitive to ethnic and religious minorities and we should rectify our hurtful attitudes and actions. Certainly the American church has much to learn in this area.

But there is a darker side to multiculturalism. Because of the hardness of the human heart we are witnessing a new *tribalism* both locally and internationally. Consider, for example, former Yugoslavia. After the end of the *cold war* the reasons for the unity of this country ceased to exist.<sup>1</sup> In the summer of 1991 Serbian forces seceded from Yugoslavia and attacked people with whom they had been living peacefully for decades. Yugoslavia was one country in the Spring of 1990. It became six countries within a few weeks. As the fighting (ethnic cleansing) continued, the United Nations proposed a peace plan which would divide Bosnia, a disputed territory, into 12 separate parts. So one sixth of a country was to become, evidently, 12 more countries. The plan was rejected and the fighting continued.

We need not look too much further to find similar instances of bitter tribalism. Rwanda, Burundi, Somalia, Israel, Ireland, Korea, Nigeria, Liberia are all names of places where war, fueled by racial and religious hatred, has left its devastating effects on the land and the people. The list could go on and on.

The first century was characterized by a bitter racial/religious animosity between Jews and Gentiles. William Barclay writes,

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<sup>1</sup> Yugoslavia was *created* in 1918 after W.W.I at the Treaty of Versailles. The country was held together by Marshal Tito due to his opposition to Soviet aggression.

The Gentiles were called the uncircumcision by those who laid claim to that circumcision which is a physical and man-made thing. . . The Jew had an immense contempt for the Gentile. The Gentiles, said the Jews, were created by God to be fuel for the fires of Hell. God, they said, loves only Israel of all the nations that He had made. The best of the serpents crush, they said, the best of the Gentiles kill. It was not even lawful to render help to a Gentile mother in her hour of sorest need, for that would simply be to bring another Gentile into the world. . . . The barrier between them was absolute. If a Jewish boy married a Gentile girl, or if a Jewish girl married a Gentile boy, the funeral of that Jewish boy or girl was carried out. Such contact with a Gentile was the equivalent of death. (Barclay, p. 125)

Even the architecture of the temple reflected the racial hatred the Jews harbored for the Gentiles. In 2:14 Paul speaks of *the dividing wall of hostility*. Certainly he refers to the floor plan of the temple in Jerusalem, which was still in operation when Ephesians was written. The temple was elevated and looked up to by all the inhabitants of Jerusalem. It was surrounded by courts of worship. First was the court of the priests. On the east side was the court of Israel and before that the court of women. These courts were at the same elevation as the temple and were for priests, Jewish men and, finally Jewish women. *From this level one descended five steps to a walled platform, and then on to the other side of the wall fourteen more steps to another wall, beyond which was the outer court or Court of Gentiles.* (Stott, p. 91) This was a spacious court running around the temple where Jews and Gentiles were free to mingle. Along the *dividing wall*,— a four foot high stone wall —stood signs which read in both Greek and Latin, *Trespassers will be executed.*<sup>1</sup>

With these things in mind read Ephesians 2:11-22. Read this in context with our text from last week. In 2:1-10 Paul concentrated on the believer's unity (reconciliation) with God. Here he plays out the drama. Not only are we at peace with God, we have become a new people in Christ. We are at peace with one another! Keep the following outline in mind as you read:

**I. The Problem: Racism (2:11-12)**

**II. The Provision: Christ (2:13-18)**

**III. The Product: One People (2:19-22)**

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<sup>1</sup> Josephus writes that the temple was *encompassed by a stone wall for a partition, with an inscription which forbade any foreigner to go in 'under pain of death'*. *Antiquities*, XV. 11.5 An 1871 archaeological dig produced a stone with the inscription, *NO MAN OF ANOTHER NATION TO ENTER WITHIN THE FENCE AND ENCLOSURE ROUND THE TEMPLE. AND WHOEVER IS CAUGHT WILL HAVE HIMSELF TO BLAME THAT HIS DEATH ENSUES.* See Acts 21:27ff. for a New Testament example of the seriousness of this matter in the mind of the Jews.

What thoughts do you have as you read?

What images does Paul use to describe the work of Christ in creating unity? How many can you find? Does he mix his metaphors?

What does this text mean to you personally?

Have you ever experienced hostility or animosity directed toward you because of your race? Describe this. How did this make you feel?

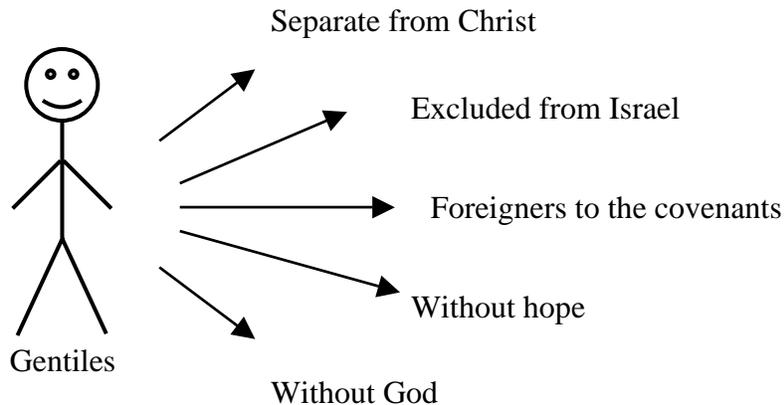
When you think of your own attitudes, what sorts of racial prejudice do you find? Where were these attitudes formed?

**Notes and Questions:**

**2:11** *Therefore, remember* is emphatic in the Greek text. Paul wants the Gentile believers in Ephesus to be aware of where they came from before meeting Christ. He does this again in verse 13: *Remember that once you were alienated . . . but now in Christ Jesus you . . . have been brought near.*

Why would Paul go to such lengths to remind the Gentiles of their former separation from God? Doesn't it seem he should be chastising the Jews for their feelings of superiority?

Notice the depth of the predicament of Gentiles without Christ in 2:12:



Is it any wonder that Hendrickson claims the Gentiles were 'Christless, stateless, friendless, hopeless and Godless'? (Hendrickson, pp. 129-130)

**2:12-13** To be *separate from Christ* is the opposite of Paul's common phrase *in Christ* (2:13). It is not too much to say that Paul sees the Christian life as a life lived *in Christ*. The believer is

- chosen *in Christ* (Eph. 1:4)
- foreordained *in Christ* (Eph. 1:7)
- redeemed and sanctified *in Christ* (Rom. 3:24, I Cor. 1:2)
- reconciled to God *in Christ* (II Cor. 5:19)
- justified *in Christ* (Gal. 2:17)
- given access to God *in Christ* (Eph. 2:12)
- saved *in Christ* (II Tim. 2:10)
- buried *in Christ* (Roman. 6:4)
- even dead *in Christ* (I Thes. 4:17)<sup>1</sup>

Define what it means to be *in Christ*.

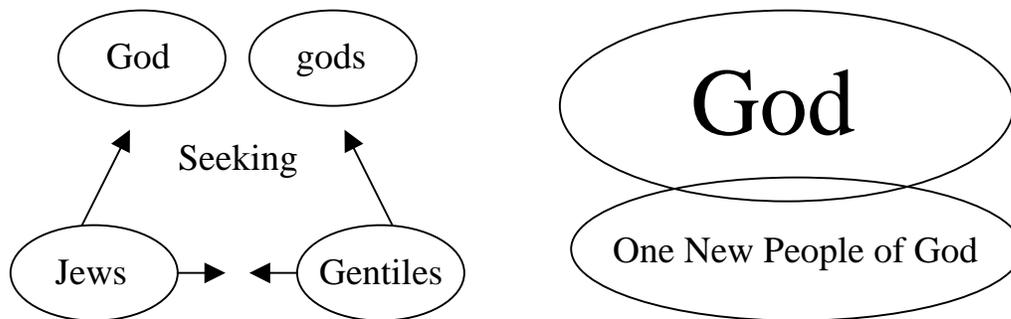
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<sup>1</sup> The list could go on. Of the 89 references to being *in Christ* in the New Testament all but five are from the pen of Paul. Eugene Peterson writes, '*In*' is the preposition of intimacy and one of the most important words in the gospel. (Eugene Peterson, Praying With Jesus, November 12, John 14:20-21)

What does it mean to be *separate from Christ*? How did your life change when you went from being *separate* to *in Christ*?

**2:12** The words *without God* translate the Greek word *atheoi* from which we get our word atheist. The Gentiles were, however, anything but atheists. They worshipped a pantheon of gods who had grown tired in the minds of first century Greeks.<sup>1</sup> In Paul's mind, to worship a false god was to worship no god at all. See Acts 19:26 and I Corinthians 8:5.

**2:13-18** The real concern of this text is to show the unity produced in Christ. Jesus *himself is our peace*. . .



Note verses 15 and 16. How did Jesus make peace between Jew and Gentile?

**2:19-22** These verses are stunning! Notice the three images Paul uses to describe the church:

<sup>1</sup> J. A. Robinson notes, *The Jew had a hope: the Gentile had none. The golden age of the Gentile was in the past: his poets told him of it, and how it was gone. The Jew's golden age was in the future; his prophets told him to look forward to its coming* (J. A. Robinson, St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians, 1909, p. 57, cited in Patzia, p. 191)

We are **fellow-citizens**: This brings to mind the kingdom of God teaching in the New Testament . The *Kingdom of God* refers to the rule and reign of God in the hearts and lives of his people. Accordingly, we are now *citizens* of his kingdom. See Philippians 3:20; Colossians 1:13; 1 Thessalonians. 2:12 etc.<sup>1</sup>

We are **God's household**: This takes the association to the personal realm. To be citizens unites us politically and nationally. To be family members unites us in a far more intimate manner. We share a common father and therefore we are *brothers and sisters* in Christ.

We are **God's temple**: In Old Testament times the temple was the place where God *lived*. This was never understood to be literally true. When Solomon dedicated the temple he said, *But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!* (1 Kings 8:27) But the temple was the place where the glory of God would be manifest.

The new temple, however, is neither a material building, nor a national shrine, nor has it a localized site. It is a spiritual building (God's household) and an international community (embracing Gentiles as well as Jews), and it has a worldwide spread (wherever God's people are to be found). This is where God dwells. He is not tied to holy buildings but to holy people, to his own new society. To them he has pledged himself by a solemn covenant. He lives in them, individually and as a community. (Stott, p. 109)

The American church probably does not have a Jew/Gentile problem. Jewish followers of Christ do not seem to *look down* on Gentile disciples. But could this need for unity be necessary in other areas? Does the predominantly *white middle-class* church feel a bit superior to the inner-city store-front church? Does the educated church *look down* on those believers who are less educated? If so, what can such a church do to repent of this spiritual pride?

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<sup>1</sup> The New Testament also promises a future, earthly kingdom. What the believer experiences in his heart he will one day experience externally, that is, the rule and reign of Christ! See 2 Peter 1:11; 2 Tim. 4:1; 1 Corinthians 6:9 etc.

The style of a church's ministry and life will vary greatly due to the composition of its membership. Maasi believers in Kenya will have a different church life than, say, *white collar* workers in the suburbs of Chicago. Is this bad? When Paul says that Christ created a new society of people who are *fellow citizens* does this mean that each church in a given town should look and act the same? To bring this question closer to home, in Santa Barbara we have many *ethnic* churches. We have a Chinese church, a Japanese church, several African-American churches, and many Hispanic churches. Obviously we have many churches which are predominantly *white*. What are we striving for? Can the body of Christ be *one* and still have room for different ethnic expressions of the church? Or, should the goal be to meld all ethnic (and linguistic?) groups into one church?

Respond to the following quotation from John Stott:

The church must . . . exhibit its multiracial, multinational, and multicultural nature. . . . Only a true theology, the biblical revelation of God, can deliver us from racial pride and prejudice. Because he is God of creation, we affirm the unity of the human race. Because he is the God of history, we affirm the diversity of ethnic cultures. Because he is the God of revelation, we affirm the finality of Jesus Christ. And because he is the God of redemption, we affirm the glory of the Christian church. Whatever (national) policies for racial integration may be developed, we should try to ensure that they will reflect these doctrines. Because of the unity of mankind we demand equal rights and equal respect for racial minorities. Because of the diversity of ethnic groups we renounce cultural imperialism and seek to preserve all those riches of interracial culture which are compatible with Christ's lordship. Because of the finality of Christ, we affirm that religious freedom includes the right to propagate the gospel. Because of the glory of the church, we must seek to rid ourselves of any lingering racism and strive to make it a model of harmony between races, in which the multiracial dream comes true. (John Stott, *Involvement*, vol. II, 1984, pp. 94-95)

Evaluate SBCC in these areas. What can SBCC do to make Ephesians 2:11-22 a reality in our church body?

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*Sermon Notes. . .*

## Study Nine

### Probing the Mystery

### Ephesians 3:1-6

It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.

Isaiah 49:6

The context of the above quotation is found in one of the *Servant songs* of the book of Isaiah. The speaker is none other than Yahweh, speaking to the Messiah. God says, *I am not sending you to bless a tiny nation called Israel. You are going to take my grace to every nation on earth!*

We could call this the *hidden truth* of the Old Testament. God called Abraham (Genesis 12) and told him, essentially, *I will bless you and make you a blessing to every nation on earth*. The Jews never really grasped the second half of God's promise. They reveled in being God's chosen people, but were quite content to leave it at that.<sup>1</sup> The shock of the new covenant in Christ is the full inclusion of

the Gentiles (the nations) into the people of God.

Peter points out that the biblical writers themselves, speaking and writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, didn't fully understand the salvation of which they wrote:

Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things. (1 Peter 1:10-12)

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<sup>1</sup> See the book of Jonah. The whole story is an indictment of Jewish exclusivism. At the end of the story Jonah is upset that God has spared the Ninevites his wrath. He is more concerned about his comfort in the shade than he is about the salvation of 120,000 inhabitants in Nineveh.

In Ephesians 2 Paul introduced the *mystery* of the gospel, that is, that God made one new society, one new people through his death on the cross.<sup>1</sup> In chapter 3 he tries to move on to a prayer (3:1), but, in his characteristic style, he digresses back to ponder again the mystery of the gospel.<sup>2</sup>

As Paul begins this chapter he re-introduces himself to the reader as a *prisoner of Christ*.

By the time Ephesians was written Paul had been in prison for up to five years under Roman governors Felix, Festus and King Agrippa (see Acts 23-26). The original charge brought against Paul was unfounded, but interesting in light of the *mystery* of the gospel. Paul's accusers claimed that he brought a Gentile named Trophimus into the temple area reserved for the Jews. Now he is a prisoner in Rome under the authority of Nero. He is, however, a *prisoner of Christ*. Such was Paul's understanding of the sovereignty of God and of his own discipleship.

This section of Ephesians is ponderous, lofty and will stretch our feeble minds. Before going on this study guide, read Ephesians 3:1-13. How would you outline verses 2-13? What are Paul's main points?

Now read the text again with the following outline in mind (does the text fit this outline?):

I. Probing the Mystery (3:2-6)

II. Proclaiming the Mystery (3:7-13)

### **Probing the Mystery (3:2-6)**

**3:5** Paul says this *mystery* was *not made known* to people in *other generations*. Paul's claim is puzzling insofar as the Old Testament does teach the inclusion of Gentiles in God's plan of salvation. Examine the following verses:

Genesis 12:3; 22:18; 26:4;

Teach that the *nations* or the

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<sup>1</sup> See pages 4-5 on the New Testament concept of *mystery*.

<sup>2</sup> Paul ends the whole letter on the subject of the *mystery* of the gospel. See 6:20.

28:14 Isaiah 42:6		<i>Gentiles</i> will be blessed by God.
Psalm 72	—————▶	Teaches that the <i>Gentiles</i> will bless God.
Isaiah 11:10; 49:6; 54:1-3; 60:1-3	—————▶	Teach that Messiah will come for the <i>Gentiles</i> .
Hosea 1:10 Amos 9:11-15 Psalm 2:8	—————▶	Teach that the <i>Gentiles</i> will be saved by the Messiah.
Joel 2:28-29	—————▶	Teach that the <i>Gentiles</i> will receive the Holy Spirit.

With all of this promised in the Old Testament, how can Paul say that the *mystery* was *not revealed*? John Stott explains:

[W]hat neither the Old Testament nor Jesus revealed was the radical nature of God's plan, which was that the theocracy (the Jewish nation under God's rule) would be terminated, and replaced by a new international community, the church; that church would be 'the body of Christ', organically united to him; and that Jews and Gentiles would be incorporated into Christ and his church on equal terms without any distinction. It was this complete union of Jews, Gentiles and Christ which was radically new, and which God revealed to Paul, overcoming his entrenched Jewish prejudice. (Stott, p. 118)

Paul lays claim to a special revelation from God concerning these hidden truths.

Read Galatians 1:11-20. Here we read of Paul's own spiritual autobiography. Where did Paul get his gospel? It was revealed to Paul by God himself. What questions does this section of Galatians bring to mind? Share and discuss these with your homegroup.

**3:6** Specifically, what is the mystery revealed to Paul? What three things do Jews and Gentiles enjoy *together* in Christ (vs. 6)? What do each of these mean to you?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Paul, writing as a rabbinic Jew, steeped in Jewish schooling, teaching and culture, was astounded at this mystery. The church, not Israel, had become God's instrument in the world for carrying out his work and his will!

MacArthur clarifies how shocking this truth must have seemed:

[I]t is difficult for us to realize how incredibly revolutionary [this] truth was to Jews of Paul's day. . . [T]he idea of including Gentiles in one body with Jews was the spiritual equivalent of saying that lepers were no longer to be isolated, that they were now perfectly free to intermingle and associate with everyone else as normal members of society. In the minds of most Jews, their spiritual separation from Gentiles was so absolute and so right that the thought of total equality before God was inconceivable and little short of blasphemy. (MacArthur, pp. 91-92)

William Hendrickson exults in God's plan to create a new people in Christ:

Paul makes it very clear that God's unveiled secret ("mystery") has to do not merely with an *alliance* of Jew and Gentile, or perhaps a friendly *agreement* to live together in peace, or even an outward *combination* or *partnership*, but, on the contrary, complete and permanent *fusion*, a perfect spiritual union of formerly clashing elements into *one* new organism, even a new humanity" (2:15). In God's house there are no boarders; all are children. (Hendrickson, p. 155)

Let us praise God for the revelation of this beautiful mystery. And let us pray in our homegroups for our church to put into practice the reality created by the death and resurrection of Christ.

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.

Ephesians 2:14-16

## Study Ten

### Proclaiming the Mystery

### Ephesians 3:7-13

The first half of Paul's letter to the Ephesian church reaches its crescendo in 3:7-13. From the opening of the letter the Apostle has probed, pondered and proclaimed the grace of God which was planned before the creation of the world. God chose us and called us to himself before we were born (chapter 1). He made us alive *in Him*, even when we were dead in our sins (chapter 2). He then reconciled us into a *new humanity* through Christ (chapter 2). The dividing wall of hostility has been broken down in Christ. Reconciled relationships testify to the completed work of Christ.

In chapter 3, Paul delights in the fact that God has chosen him to preach this *mystery of Christ*.

Take a moment and review last week's study. Survey the main points.

Read Ephesians 3:1-13. Circle important words and phrases. Try comparing translations. What questions or observations do you have of vs. 7-13? What is unclear? What lessons stand out?



The Greek word translated *unsearchable* (NIV) is pregnant with significance. John Stott notes ten different English translations which try to capture the nuance of this word.

unsearchable	inexplorable	untraceable	unfathomable	inexhaustible
illimitable	inscrutable	infinite	incalculable	not to be traced out

Stott concludes,

. . . what is certain about the wealth Christ has and gives is that we shall never come to an end of it. (Stott, p.120)

Linclon says the word,

. . . suggests the picture of a reservoir so deep that soundings cannot reach the bottom of it. No limit can, therefore, be put to its resources. (Lincoln, p. 183)

It is this message of the riches of Christ which is central to Paul's preaching. How should this *message* transform our understanding of what Christ has done for us? Do you see the *riches of Christ* as an infinitely deep reservoir? Or are his riches more like a shallow pond? What could help change your perception?

**3:9** details a second stage in Paul's preaching.

In verse 8 he *preaches* (euangelizô, εὐαγγελίζω) *to the Gentiles*.

In verse 9 he *make[s] plain to everyone the administration of this mystery*.

The verb in verse 9 is *phôtizo* (φωτίζω) which means *to enlighten*. Those without Christ are *darkened in their understanding* (4:18). Paul's commission, from the beginning, was a call to enlighten the Gentiles. Jesus said to Paul,

I am sending you to [the Gentiles] to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me. (Acts 26:17-18)

Stott comments,

We ourselves must always remember in our evangelism that 'the prince of darkness' holds men and women in darkness, and that only by a divine enlightenment will their eyes be open to see. Our responsibility is to be faithful in

spreading the gospel, since this is the means which God has ordained by which to bring light to those in darkness. (Stott, pp. 121-122)

What are your habits of evangelism? Are you *preaching* to your friends (the word simply means *to proclaim*)? Are you *making plain* the administration of this mystery? How can your homegroup encourage you and challenge you? Share with your group the name of one person with whom you would like to share the gospel in the next two weeks.

Again, notice the differences between verse 8 and 9. In verse 8 the emphasis is on Christ and his *unsearchable riches*. What is the emphasis in verse 9? More specifically, what is *the administration of this mystery* (see the next few verses)?

What is the purpose of Paul's responsibility? Look closely at verses 10-11.

The word *manifold* means *many colored*, or *very varied*. (Wood, p. 48)

The church as a multi-racial, multi-cultural community is like a beautiful tapestry. Its members come from a wide range of colourful backgrounds. No other human community resembles it. Its diversity and harmony are unique. It is God's new society. (Stott, p. 123)

Again, examine verse 10. The church is being watched. As one 19<sup>th</sup> century commentator put it,

The Church becomes a mirror through which the bright ones of heaven see the glory of God. And in order to show them this glory, God committed the gospel to Paul.<sup>1</sup> (A. J. Beet, *Ephesians*, 1890, p. 319)

Respond to the following statement:

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<sup>1</sup> John A. Mackay writes, [T]he history of the Christian church becomes a graduate school for angels. . .

The church does not exist simply for the purpose of saving souls, though that is a marvelous and important work. The supreme purpose of the church, as Paul makes explicit here, is to glorify God by manifesting His **wisdom** before the angels, who can then offer greater praise to God. The purpose of the universe is to give glory to God, and that will be its ultimate reality after all evil is conquered and destroyed. Even now, “The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands” (Ps. 19:1). The church is not an end in itself but a means to an end, the end of glorifying God. (MacArthur, p. 96)

What does this tell us about choosing a church?

What does it tell us about the priorities of a local church?

What privileges and responsibilities does 3:1-13 give to the church of Jesus Christ?

Think about 3:10 in light of what we studied last week. How important is *unity* in the body of Christ?

What *should* this text say to the un-churched Christian?

Michael Griffiths writes,

There is no future for the Christian individual in isolation from the church. The general and proper pattern of the normal Christian life is to be lived in warm and joyous fellowship with other believers in God’s family. (God’s Forgetful Pilgrims)

When we do this, the angels will notice and God will be glorified.

*Sermon Notes. . .*

## Study Eleven

### Grasping God

### Ephesians 3:14-21

If you want to know someone look at his or her checkbook. Then take a peek at that person's calendar. The way we spend our time and money tells a great deal about those things we deem important. A third area to investigate would be the content of a person's prayers. We pray about those things which concern us.

In these verses we catch another glimpse of the concerns of Paul for the Ephesians. The glimpse should boggle our minds. As Bishop Handley Moule asked, *Who has not read and re-read the closing verses of the third chapter of*

*the Ephesians with the feeling of one permitted to look through parted curtains into the Holiest Place of the Christian life?*

Paul has taken us to the *heavenly realms* in these first three chapters of Ephesians. Soon (4:1) he will turn his attention to the practical implications of this lofty exposition on God and his grace. But first he must complete the prayer he began in 3:1 and broke off in 3:2.

*For this reason* (3:14) surely has all that has preceded in mind. The theology of Ephesians builds as the letter progresses.

Paul's posture in prayer, kneeling, is unusual.<sup>1</sup> It is only in this letter that Paul refers to himself kneeling in prayer. Jews generally prayed in a standing position. Markus Barth holds that kneeling was a Gentile posture of prayer. How interesting, therefore, to find Paul kneeling in prayer at the point in his literature of the New Testament where he is propounding the unity of Jew and Gentile. He has adapted his prayer posture to their position (Gal. 4:12).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Barth calls this *an extraordinary attitude of prayer*. (Barth, I, 367)

<sup>2</sup> Many postures for prayer are referred to in Scripture. *Posture in prayer is never a matter of indifference. The slouching position of the body while one is supposed to be praying is an abomination to the Lord.* (Hendrickson, p. 166)

Read Paul's prayer with the following outline in mind:

- I. Introduction: 3:14-15
- II. Paul's three desires for the Ephesians: 3:16-19
- III. Conclusion: 3:20-21

Does this prayer take you into the *Holiest Place of the Christian life* (see above)?

What does this prayer teach about God? Find the doctrine of the trinity in this prayer.

In study five we looked at Paul's prayers and encouraged one another to begin praying prayers like this for each other (see pages 27-28). Have you been in the habit of doing this as you pray together in your homegroup?

In what ways has Paul's prayer for the Ephesians been answered in your life?

Before discussing this text as a group spend some time praying this prayer for one another. Use Ephesians 3:14-21 as a prayer book. Paraphrase this prayer on behalf of the members of your group.

## I. Introduction: 3:14-15

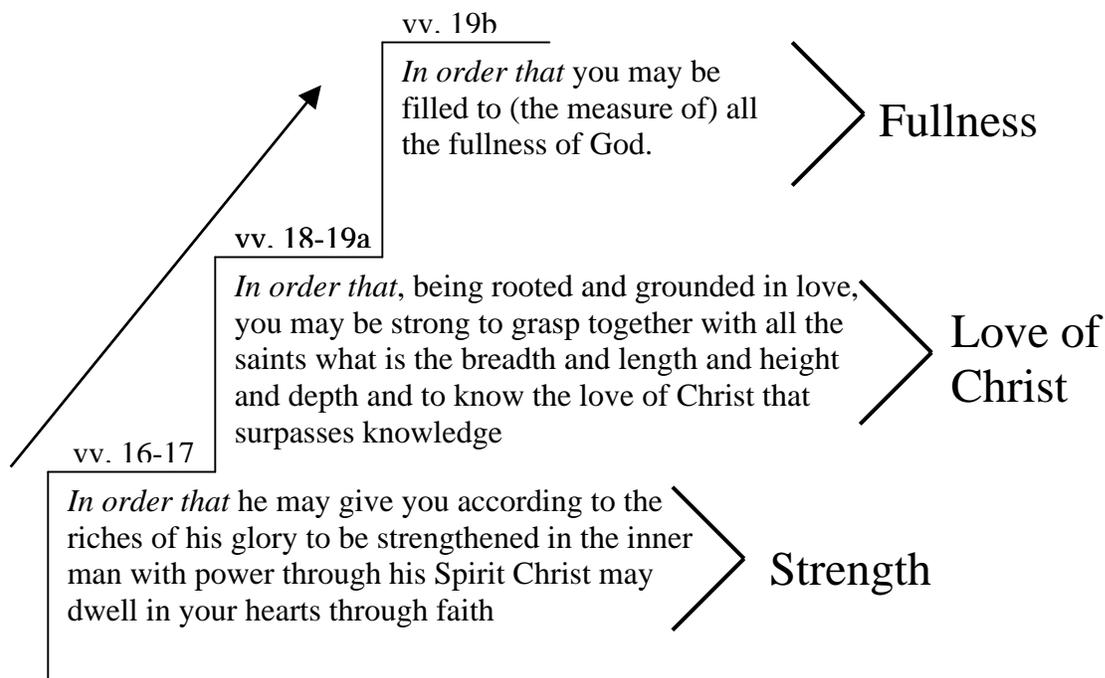
**3:15** The phrase *his whole family* is difficult to translate from the Greek text. The word for father is *patria*. It means, *lineage, descent, from a common father, or clan*.<sup>1</sup> Some translations render *pasa* (all) *patria* as *every family*.

For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. . . (NASB)

In context, however, Paul is drawing attention to the unity of all believers. Hence the NIV reads, *his whole family*.

## II. Paul's three desires for the Ephesians: 3:16-19

What is the content of Paul's request for the Ephesian church? His prayer, in Greek, has three purpose clauses which seem to build upon one another.<sup>2</sup>



<sup>1</sup> see Barth, I, p. 368.

<sup>2</sup> The translation here relies on Leon Morris, p. 100.

**3:16** Paul is praying for the continued filling of the Holy Spirit in the inner man. *The preposition “in” (eis — literally, into) suggests the depth of the Spirit’s penetration.* (Wood, p. 51) Paul sees a contrast between the *outward man* which is dying slowly (see 2 Corinthians 4:16; Colossians 3:9-10) and the spirit/soul of a man which is being renewed in the image of Christ.

We live in a *youth culture*. Everyone, it seems, wants to *look* like they are 26 years old. Cosmetic surgeons make a good deal of money in Southern California helping people prolong the inevitable signs of age. Botulinum toxin, usually called Botox, promises to take away the wrinkles in our face. Health clubs and physical fitness instructors do a brisk business providing outlets for those seeking to keep their bodies *in shape*.

How do we, as members of this culture, balance the truly important (pursuing God, holiness, preparing for the next life) with the relatively unimportant (keeping our muscle tone, staying slim, low fat eating, working on our heart rate, etc.)? Does your life reflect a proper balance in this area? What does a proper balance look like? What changes would you like to make in your life?

**3:17** The word Paul uses for *to dwell*, means *to settle down*. The word refers to a *permanent residence*. The Christian faith is for keeps. Paul prays to this end.

**3:18** Paul prays the Ephesians will grasp the width, length, height and depth of the love of Christ. He wants them to enjoy everything God offers his children! Simpson points out how different this was from the prevailing Gnostic teaching during the time of the Ephesians.

The ancient mystagogues [Gnostic teachers] restricted their choicest teaching to an esoteric circle, industriously sifted from the vulgar herd of auditors, admission to which was counted in itself no small privilege. But, Paul reckons every convert a candidate for honours, or he would not have offered such an exalted prayer on their behalf. (Simpson, p. 80)

The verb *to grasp* means *to seize, to lay hold of*.

When one ‘grasps’ a truth one is not hesitantly wondering; the verb points to sure knowledge. Such sure knowledge, of course, does not spring from human ability, which is why Paul makes it the object of prayer. (Morris, p. 105)

With the above in mind, evaluate your progress in the Christian faith. Do you grasp the width, length, height and depth of the love of Christ? What is the evidence of your grasp?

**3:19** The phrase *filled to the measure of all the fullness of God* is difficult to interpret.

The word *fullness* comes from the Greek work *pleroma* (πληρωμα). As a verb it has two meanings, *to fill*, or *to complete*.<sup>1</sup>

Fullness means to make full, or fill to the full, and is used many times in the New Testament. It speaks of total dominance. A person filled with rage is totally dominated by hatred. A person filled with happiness is totally dominated by joy. **To be filled up to all the fulness of God** therefore means to be totally dominated by Him with nothing left of self or any part of the old man. By definition, then, to be filled with God is to emptied of self. It is not to have much of God and little of self, but all of God and none of self.<sup>2</sup> (MacArthur, pp. 111-112)

Of course, no one has ever had *all of God and none of self* on this side of the grave. How then should this prayer in Ephesians 3 inform the way in which we pray this prayer for one another?

What does Paul mean when he says in verse 19, *of God*? These words, in Greek, can be either subjective (God's fullness) or objective (the fullness which God gives). Believe it or not, it makes a tremendous difference as to the meaning of Paul's prayer. Stott explains,

It is uncertain how this genitive [of God] should be understood. If it is objective, then God's fullness is the abundance of grace which he bestows. If it is subjective, it is the fullness which fills God himself, in other words his perfection. Staggering as the thought may be, the latter seems the more probable because the Greek preposition *eis*, which indicates that we are to be filled not 'with' so much as 'unto' the fullness of God. God's fullness or perfection becomes the standard or level up to which we pray to be filled. (Stott, p. 138)

John Calvin wrote of this text,

He who has Christ has every thing that is required to our perfection in God, for this is what is meant by the *fullness of God*. (from Hodge, p. 67)

The conclusion of Paul's prayer (3:20-21) is praise and doxology. Spend time giving glory to the God who is willing and *able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or think*. A good prayer culminates in praise.

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<sup>1</sup> In the New Testament the word is sometimes a technical term referring to the deity of Christ (see Colossians 1:18; 2:9). Chrysostom said, *The fullness of God is that excellence of which God himself is full*.

<sup>2</sup> Later in Ephesians Paul will talk of the fullness of the Spirit (5:18).

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*Sermon Notes. . .*

## Study Twelve

### The Unity of the Spirit

#### Ephesians 4:1-6

In Ephesians 1-3 we have learned of God's work of reconciliation. First, according to his divine plan, he reconciled sinful women and men to himself. This reconciliation created a new society devoid of religious, class, race and even sexual enmity. God created a new people, a new family in Christ.

After three chapters of lofty doctrine, Paul begins to spell out the implications of all which has preceded. Paul wants the Ephesian church to practice what they have learned. *God has made you one people, now act like it!!!*

The abrupt turn comes in 4:1. This verse introduces the second half of the letter. Paul writes,

*As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.*

More literally, Paul says, *walk* the walk of your calling. Don't just talk about it, do it!

The word *worthy* in Greek is *axios*. It means *bringing up the other end of the scales*. *Axios* is a word picture. It refers to balanced scales. In the context of Ephesians, Paul is saying, *These things (chapters 1-3) are true. . . now live your lives in balance with the great blessings you have received.*

E. K. Simpson states the transition with eloquence:

Hitherto, under Paul's trusty guidance, his crusaders have been treading the loftiest passes of revelation (Scripture), absorbed in the panorama of a massive mountain-chain of Christian doctrine, outspread around their line of march. Now it is time for them to descend from these craggy altitudes, intersected by many a cross-track opening into regions yet unexplored and cloud-capped, to the lower levels of everyday duty and demeanour; from the *credenda*, in short, to the *agenda*; for all doctrine truly held prompts to corresponding practice. (Simpson, p. 87)

We could outline Ephesians chapters 4-6 as follows:

- I. The unity of the church 4:1-16
- II. The purity of the church 4:17-6:24

Throughout Paul's letters we find a passion for ministry.<sup>1</sup> His intensity for the Lord's work is found at every corner of his rugged life (see 2 Corinthians 11:24ff.). When Paul met the risen Lord (Acts 9) everything changed. Now life was lived from the perspective of Christ. Saul the puffed up rabbi became Paul the slave/servant of Christ. His desire was for each believer to see himself or herself in the same way, as a servant or minister of Christ! But how does it work? What is God's plan for ministry? Who are the ministers? What are their qualifications?

Read Ephesians 4:1-12 with the following outline in mind:

- I. The foundation of ministry: UNITY (4:1-6)
- II. The provision for ministry: GIFTS (4:7-11)
- III. The performers of ministry: PEOPLE (4:12)

Make a few notes as you read. What is Paul up to here? Can you diagram the progression of his thought?

The foundation for the ministry of the church is the unity of the church. Jesus' prayer for his church was that it would be a unified church (see John 17:11-22).

**4:2** This verse includes a recipe of Christian character. We are to be people of humility, gentleness, patience and forbearance. The basis of this character is love.

The first of these words, humility, would have shocked the Ephesians. Paul uses the word *tapeinophrosyne*. It refers to the *crouching submissiveness of a slave* and was regarded as a *despicable trait* in Greek culture.<sup>2</sup> (Simpson, p. 88) The KJV translates the word *lowliness* which may capture the meaning better than the NIV. It is the same word

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<sup>1</sup> In 4:12 the word translated *service* in the NIV is *diakonias* in Greek. From this word we get the words ministry, minister and deacon.

<sup>2</sup> Aristotle, for example, praised the virtue of intolerance. He said one should strike back at every insult.

used of Christ in Philippians 2:8! Our calling is to emulate Christ in his humility for the sake of the unity of the church.

Was Ted Turner right when he said, *Christianity is a religion for losers* (Dallas Morning News)? How do we differentiate *lowliness* from *wimpiness*?

In verse 3 we are instructed to *keep* the unity of the *Spirit*. Unity in the church is not something created, it is something maintained. Paul is not speaking of an institutional unity. He is speaking of the inter-connectedness of all believers.

How should this understanding of unity in the church affect the way we conduct ourselves in the church?

How do the four character qualities of 4:2 help maintain the unity of the church?

**Humility**

**Gentleness**

**Patience**

**Showing forbearance**

What would *lowliness* or *humility* look like in our church? Have you seen it at SBCC?

Kent Hughes draws out the implications of 4:2:

The truth which radiates from verse 2 is that Christian unity doesn't begin with an external structure, but rather in the attitudes of the heart—*humility* and *mildness* and *patience* and *loving tolerance* of one another. “the unity of the Spirit” (v. 3) takes people who are *so* different and makes them live in soul-satisfying unity. What diversity there is in the average church! Think of all the body types: tall, short, round, thin, muscular, unathletic. Then imagine all the mental types: nervous, calm, mathematical, unmathematical, artistic, musical, other-than-musical, etc., etc. There are huge differences among us! But when the spiritual fruits of humility and patience reign, there is unity. Christian unity in profound diversity brings great glory to God! (Hughes, p. 124)

Think practically here. What has your experience in the church been? Have you ever been through a church fight? If so, were these character qualities evident or absent from the church boxing ring?

Would it be possible to have a church fight and still be practicing the *unity of the Spirit*? In other words, could a church *fight fair*?

Respond to the following:

. . . humility is essential to unity. Pride lurks behind all discord, while the greatest single secret of concord is humility. It is not difficult to prove this in experience. The people we immediately, instinctively like, and find it easy to get on with, are the people who give us the respect we consider we deserve, while the people we immediately, instinctively dislike are those who treat us like dirt. In other words, personal vanity is a key factor in all our relationships. If, however, instead of maneuvering for the respect of others (which is pride) we give them our respect by recognizing their intrinsic God-given worth (which is humility), we shall be promoting harmony in God's new society. (Stott, pp. 148-149)

**4:3** The maintenance of unity is hard work. In 4:3 Paul begins with a Greek word which could be translated, *being eager* or, *make haste*. The preservation of our God-given unity will take a lot of work, at times, in the body of Christ. It may do more harm than good to discuss this question, but think about it. In what ways have you shown an eagerness to preserve the *unity of the Spirit* in our church?

The word *gentleness* is the balance to humility. Aristotle defined this virtue as the mean between the excesses of anger and passive resignation. The person who has this quality is not beyond anger, but is angry at the right time. Paul, in employing this term for believers, is saying we are not called to be proverbial *wet noodles* who allow anyone and everyone to trample us for any reason.

How would you rate yourself in the areas of gentleness and humility (It is hard to think about this, let alone talk about it. . .)? What has helped you or could help you grow in these areas?

**4:4-6** contain the theological basis of the church's unity. We are all members of the same family! There is, Paul points out, only *one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God*.

Can you find the trinity in this list? The word *trinity* refers to the tri-unity of God. God is one (unity) and yet three persons. Notice how Paul grounds our unity in the unity of God himself. As God is one, the church is one.

Unity is an indispensable feature of any healthy church. Without unity the body of believers goes into pathetic spasms and convulsions. The watching world will want nothing to do with such an organism.

Compare

- Romans 12:18
- Romans 14:19

Make a habit of praying for SBCC in this regard. Let the prayer of St. Francis of Assisi become your own.

*Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace.  
Where there is hate, may I bring love;  
Where offense, may I bring pardon;  
May I bring union in place of discord.*

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*Sermon Notes. . .*

## Study Thirteen

### The Ministry of the Spirit

### Ephesians 4:7-12

*Church growth* is an industry. Books are written, seminars are offered, tape-series are sold. Church growth experts are looking for the right formula with which a successful church may be built.

The books and conferences may have much to offer, but Ephesians remains the seminal book of church life. Here Paul insists that the church God wants to build is Spirit-driven. Christ, by virtue of his work on the cross, gives Spirit-endowed gifts to his children, to prepare them for the work of the ministry. When the members of the body appropriate these grace-gifts, the body of Christ is built up and becomes a *mature* organism (4:14-16).

Read Ephesians 4:1-16. Compare translations if possible. This section of the letter should be familiar. What new insights come to mind as you ponder Paul's inspired thoughts?

#### Notes and Questions:

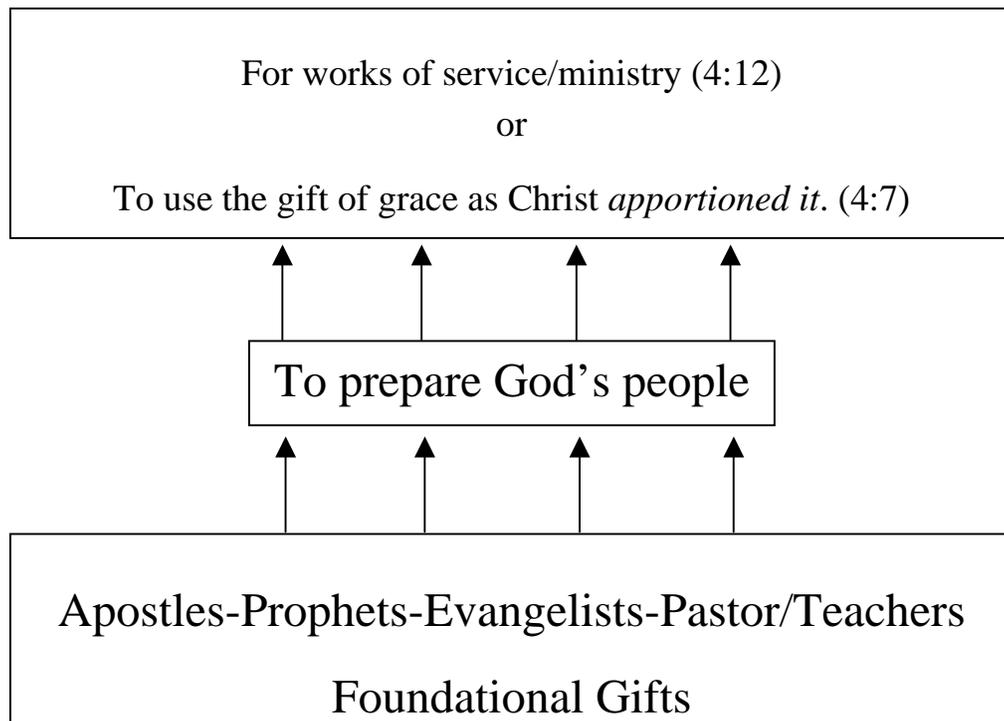
**4:7** Notice that Paul sees every member of the body receiving gifts of grace from Christ. In 4:7 we learn that our gifts are sovereignly given by a sovereign Lord.

By definition, gifts are something we receive, and we receive spiritual gifts through the working of God's grace. Believers' gifts are not determined by their preferences, inclinations, natural abilities, merit, or any other personal consideration, but solely by God's sovereign and gracious will. We are gifted according to His plan, His purpose, and His **measure**. We have no more to do with determining our gift than we did with determining what color of skin, hair, or eyes we would be born with. God is the source of electing grace, equipping grace, and enabling grace. (MacArthur, p. 136)

In the New Testament there are several lists of spiritual gifts given by the Holy Spirit.<sup>1</sup> Collectively, some 20 different gifts are mentioned, but no two lists are the same. Most students of the New Testament see these lists as less than exhaustive.

In Ephesians 4:11 Paul gives a list of gifts given to benefit the whole church. It would not be an overstatement to say that Paul lists the gifts which enable the members of the body to use their gifts.

We could diagram the entire section in the following way:



**4:7-10** are perhaps the most confusing verses in Ephesians. When all is said and done, Paul is probably talking about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). How does he do this?

Paul moves from the unity of the body (4:4-6) to the individual. *But to each one of us grace has been given. . .* He backs up verse 7 with a quotation from Psalm 68 and then another comment of his own.

Psalm 68 calls on God to come to the rescue of his people as he had done during the time of Moses.

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 12:6 ff., 1 Corinthians 12:1 ff., 1 Peter 4:10-11.

Initially, the Psalm celebrated an earthly triumph of the Israelites over their enemies and the return of the defeated foes with the spoils of war to the capital city. This serves also as a picture of God's victory over all his enemies during the exodus and his enthronement in the holy city. (Patzia, p. 236)

When connected to verse 10 we see that Paul is applying this Psalm to the ascension (the victory) of Christ into heaven (Acts 2).

Paul uses Psalm 68 because he understands Jesus' ascension to the Father as fulfilled prophecy. *As Moses was given the law for the people of Israel, Christ, as a second but greater Moses, gave the Spirit to the church, which, in turn, included the gifts mentioned in 4:11 (he . . . gave gifts to men).* (Patzia, p. 236)<sup>1</sup>

**4:9** contains another interpretive problem.. What does Paul mean when he says, *he also descended to the lower, earthly regions?* The options are plentiful. The *lower, earthly regions* could mean the earth, hell, the incarnation, the humiliation of Jesus on the cross, or Christ's gift of the Spirit at Pentecost.

Read this verse in context. Which interpretation makes most sense to you? Why?

**4:10** The Jews had a view of the universe which depicted seven heavens. Jesus is exalted higher than all of these to *the highest honor and glory possible.* (Foulkes, p. 116)

In 4:11 we learn Christ gave *apostles, prophets, evangelists* and *pastor-teachers* to the church.

The word *apostle* means *to send*. On the one hand, all believers are *sent ones*. We are all to fulfill the great commission of our Lord (Matt. 28:18). But in a narrower sense the

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<sup>1</sup> There is a technical problem in Paul's rendering of the Psalm:

**Psalm 68:18**  
**When you ascended on high,**  
**you led captives in your train;**  
**you received gifts from men,**  
**even from the rebellious.**

**Ephesians 4:8**  
**When He ascended on high**  
**he led captives in his train**  
**and gave gifts to men.**

The main distinction is in the line regarding the gifts. In Psalm 68 the gifts were *received from men*, while in Ephesians the gifts are *given to men*. Paul may have been quoting from the Syriac Old Testament (Morris) or he may have paraphrased for his own purposes. Interestingly, the sense of the Psalm is preserved either way. The victor in a battle would *receive* the spoils of war from his captives. But, . . . *conquerors in antiquity characteristically distributed some of the spoils of war to their loyal supporters.* (Morris, p. 123)

word refers to the original twelve disciples of Jesus.<sup>1</sup> This seems to be the way in which the word is used here. God gave the apostles for the foundation of the church (see 1 Corinthians 12:28).

*Prophets* spoke/revealed the word of God to men and women. The emphasis in Scripture is on the prophet receiving and then revealing the word of God.

In other words, a prophet was a mouthpiece or spokesman of God, a vehicle of his direct revelation. (Stott, p. 161 emphasis added)

There are no more prophets in this sense today. Otherwise we would have to add to the canon of Scripture as these men and women spoke the word of God.

*Evangelists* were those who took the gospel to areas where there was no witness to Christ. Epaphras, for example, took the message to Colosse and began a church there.

*Pastor-teacher* most likely refers to a single gift/office in the church.<sup>2</sup> Those with this gift guide and instruct the church.

The word for *pastor* in Greek is *poimên*. *Poimên* is the normal Greek word for a *shepherd*. The pastors of the church feed and care for the flock as a shepherd does with his sheep. But, notice, it is the sheep who go about the business of being sheep. It is the ewes and rams that produce more sheep and grow wool. So also in the church. Consider 4:12.

**4:12** After all of the above, this verse is very simple and easy. The role and function of pastor/teachers, evangelists, prophets, and apostles is that of preparation. The word translated *prepare* or *equip* means to *make fit, or complete*. (Morris, p. 127) The word was used for the repair of fishing nets.

What are the people of God to be prepared for? For works of *service* or *ministry*. This word was used for those who waited tables originally and was employed by the church for the office of deacon.

Markus Barth's commentary on this section of Ephesians is called *The church without laymen and priests*. He writes,

Indeed, the traditional distinction between clergy and laity does not belong in the church. Rather, the whole church, the community of all the saints together, is the clergy appointed by God for a ministry to and for the world. This way two

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<sup>1</sup> There was, of course, a deletion (Judas killed himself) and an addition (Matthias in Acts 1). Paul claimed to be given this primary *apostolic* authority along with the twelve (1 Corinthians 9:1 *Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not the result of my work in the Lord?*)

<sup>2</sup> The absence of the definite article in Greek before the word *teacher* leads us to believe Paul has one gift in mind.

widespread opinions are refuted: the assumption that the bulk of the church members are reduced to the rank of mere consumers of spiritual gifts, and the notion that the church as a whole must strive primarily for a “build-up” which benefits only herself. (Barth, II, p. 479)

If the job of pastor/teacher is to equip the people of the church for works of ministry, what does this say about the church as a whole?

What model of the church, then should we keep in our minds? The traditional model is that of the pyramid, with the pastor perched precariously on its pinnacle, like a little pope in his own church, while the laity are arrayed beneath him in serried ranks of inferiority. It is a totally unbiblical image, because the New Testament envisages not a single pastor with a docile flock but both a plural oversight (pastors) and an every-member ministry. (Stott, p. 167)

The church, then, is not a pyramid but a body. With Christ as her true head. The role of pastors is guidance, direction and equipping.

Santa Barbara Community Church has a plan for equipping each of us for works of ministry. This plan includes, but is not limited to,

1. our large-group gatherings for worship, prayer, communion, and teaching on Sunday afternoons.
2. participation in our homegroups for Bible study, fellowship, prayer and worship. We expect that each participant will come having spent some time in the word working through his or her study guide,
3. building relationships within the body of believers which will *spur [us] on toward love and good deeds*. (Hebrews 10:24)

Consider, and discuss the following questions:

How long have you been a part of SBCC?

To what extent have you availed yourself of your church’s equipping plan?

Is the plan working in your life? Where are your areas of ministry in the church? In the surrounding community?

Examine the following three quotations. Do they sound like something Paul might say? How does SBCC measure up? How do you measure up? Are the people of SBCC being equipped and prepared for ministry? What improvements can we make to our equipping plan?

One thing is supremely important; that *all* minister, and that nowhere is to be perceived a separation, or even merely a distinction, between those who do and those who do not minister, between the active and the passive members of the body, between those who give and those who receive. There exists in the *Ecclesia* (church) a universal duty and right of service, a universal readiness to serve, and at the same time the greatest possible differentiation of functions.

Emil Brunner, *The Misunderstanding Of The Church*

There is no priestly body within Christianity. It is a one-class society, though you would never guess as much, so grossly has conformity to pagan and Old Testament models distorted this unique facet of Christ's community. Although not all men are called to the function of Christian leadership, the church remains a one-class society. There is no suggestion to be found within the New Testament of what subsequently developed into the disastrous two-class system of clergy and laity.

Michael Green, *Freed To Serve*

. . . in recent years it seems many churches have drifted to an emphasis on growth, fellowship, and therapy. The local church must meet the felt needs of its members, but it cannot afford to do so at the expense of fulfilling its mission to the world.

Responding to the challenge of the nineties will mean mobilizing large numbers of volunteers to meet the needs of the homeless, hungry, ill and hurting. It will mean teaching welfare families how to work and helping them find opportunities to get off welfare. It will mean blitzing the prisons, working the inner-city streets. It would mean re-orienting our whole view of the church, redirecting our energies so we are reaching outward, not inward.

Charles Colson, *Christianity Today* (3/9/92)

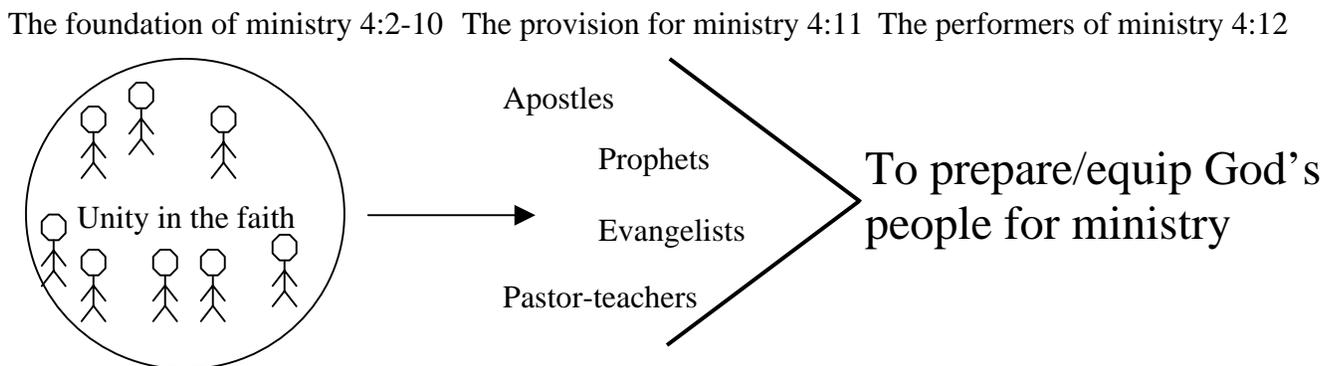
## **Study Fourteen**

### **The Goal of Ministry**

#### **Ephesians 4:13-16**

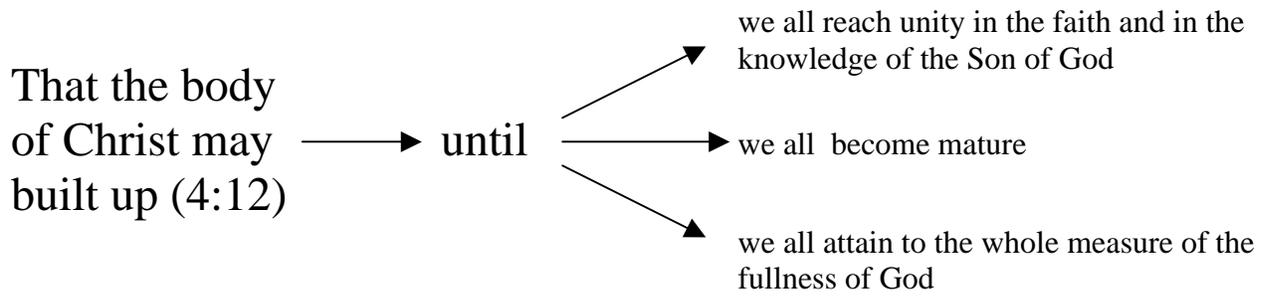
What is the church? What is the business of the church? What is the product? Who are the customers? How can we evaluate the success or failure of a given church? Are the numbers of participants, the size of the budget, and the growth of a congregation relevant factors in evaluating the success or failure of a local congregation? Does architecture, landscaping and interior design play a role in the success or failure of a church?

Last week we cut Paul off in mid-thought.<sup>1</sup> The opening 16 verses of Ephesians 4 are a plea for unity in the church before the apostle moves on to a more lengthy discussion of purity in the church. We could summarize last week's study as follows:



<sup>1</sup> Verses 11-16 are a single sentence in the Greek text.

But why are God's people to be equipped for ministry? What is the purpose of such *works of service*? Paul's preliminary answer is in verse 12. *So that the body of Christ may be built up.* Again, the *Why* question is appropriate. Why should the church be built up? What is the end Paul has in mind?



**4:13** reads in the NIV, *until we all reach.* . . . The word used means to attain, or to come to meet. Unity is given to the church but it is also something the church aspires to, something the church attains. We are to live out what we have become in Christ.

Are we doing this in SBCC? Do you have any thoughts for improvement in this area of church life?

The second phrase Paul uses is rendered *become mature* in the NIV. Literally Paul says, *into a perfect man.* The church is viewed, metaphorically, as a single person who is to be perfect. The Greek word for *perfect (telios)* means to reach one's designated end, to be mature, to be complete. *A perfect acorn* grows into an oak tree. *A perfect cow* produces milk. *A perfect dog* fetches the newspaper in the morning. What is a *perfect church*? List several marks of a church which has become mature? Plan to read this list to your homegroup.

**4:14** If Paul is a master at mixing his metaphors, in 4:14 he outdoes himself. G. B. Caird writes, *Christians are warned not to be babies, in an open boat at the mercy of wind and wave, driven off course by the roll of the dice!*<sup>1</sup>

Things which are very clear to us as twentieth century believers were, perhaps, a bit murky to the earliest disciples. The early church was in the process of formulating its doctrine. They wrestled with doctrines we take for granted (like justification by faith; see Acts 15 and the Jerusalem Council). At the time Ephesians was written, the New Testament was incomplete and letters from Paul were probably few and far between. The church at Ephesus was privileged to receive a hearty dose of Paul's teaching. For two years Paul lectured daily in Ephesus (see Acts 19:9-10). Nevertheless, they had far fewer theological resources (Bibles, books, church history, creeds) than we do.

Is the American disciple, the American church susceptible to *being blown here and there by every wind of teaching*? How so? What doctrinal challenges do we face? Where might we be tempted to be *blown here and there by every wind of teaching*?

David Wells, professor of Systematic Theology at Gordon-Conwell seminary has written widely on the problem of *modernity* for the church. The modern mind has a certain way of seeing, understanding, valuing and categorizing which, he claims, runs contrary to the Christian mind. Dig into, think through and respond to the following quotation. Are we (you) buying into what Wells calls *modernity*?

What damage has modernity done to the church's appropriation of the doctrine of God? I believe the greatest loss we have suffered is not a matter of any particular aspect of God but rather of his *place* in the church and, beyond that, in society. If modernity is successful in diminishing the reality of God, in emptying him of his significance by pushing him to the periphery of interest, then it will manage to strip the church of the one thing that makes it the church. The church is nothing if it does not belong to God, and it ceases to belong to him when it loses a full-blooded understanding of him, when it ceases to be fully obedient to him, when it no longer worships in awe before him, when it gives up faithful service in his name. (David Wells, God in the Wasteland 1994, p. 120-121)

Certainly Paul's emphasis in these verses is spiritual maturity. He wants the Ephesian church to grow up in Christ. What is the difference between spiritual infancy and

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<sup>1</sup> The word *cunning* refers to cheating at dice. *Craftiness* refers to a willingness to do anything necessary to attain one's goals.

spiritual maturity? What are the marks of a *mature* woman of God? How does a *mature* man think and act?

**Infant**

**Mature**

What has helped you attain your present level of maturity?

What should (would?) you say to a Christian whose development is arrested? To someone who simply has not matured in his faith?

What is your plan for growth in the future? Paul tells Timothy to *train* himself to be *godly*. What is your training plan? What are you doing to draw closer to God? What will contribute to your growth in the next 12 months?

**4:15** Paul uses a word which is impossible to translate without it sounding strange to our ears. The verse would read, literally, *But truthing in love*. . . The Greek verb conveys both speaking and acting. Christians speak the truth, but they also *do* the truth (see John 3:21<sup>1</sup>). Note, our *truthing*, in word and in deed is surrounded by love.

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<sup>1</sup> John 3:21 *But he who practices the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God.* (NASB)

Go back and re-read 4:1-16. Notice what a corporate affair the Christian faith is. We tend to see salvation as something which takes place between an individual and God. What do these 16 verses have to say about this?

Notice, especially, the very last phrase of vs. 16 (in the NIV). What is essential for the maturation of a church?

When all is said and done (4:16) the key to a mature life of ministry is maintaining connection with the head. Paul calls immature believers *infants*. When one looks at a baby one notices, in some cases, the child's head is too big for its body. But because of the close connection between the big head and small body, the child grows into proper proportion. So it is with the infant believer or the infant church. Our calling is to remain connected with our Lord. It is he who causes the body to grow.

Barth's translation of 4:16 brings out the necessity of our connection with Christ:

He is at work fitting and joining the whole body together. He provides sustenance to it through every contact according to the needs of each single part. He enables the body to make its own growth so that it builds itself up in love. (Barth, II, p. 426)

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*Sermon Notes. . .*

## Study Fifteen

### The Fruit of Ministry

### Ephesians 4:17-32

Thinking in isolation and with pride ends in being an idiot. Every man who will not have softening of the heart must at last have softening of the brain.

G. K. Chesterton<sup>1</sup>

The Scriptures make much of the way a person *thinks*.

Proverbs 23:7 says, *For as he thinks within himself, so he is.*

Jesus said, *For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders.* (Matthew 15:19)

Paul says that original sin affected our *thinking*. (Romans 1:21) Before being made new in Christ, our mind is set against the things of God. *The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.* (Romans 8:6-7)

The anemic Corinthian church was instructed to change their thinking: *Brothers, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults.* (1 Corinthians 14:20)

In Ephesians 4 the church is instructed to abandon the way of the *Gentiles* who live in the *futility of their thinking*. (4:17)

Instead of *thinking* in the way of the Gentiles, the Ephesians were to be *made new in the attitude of their minds*. (4:23)

What if the church does her work? What if she takes this whole idea of equipping and ministering seriously? What will the church become? What will the ministering church look like? At a minimum the church will become a society of people who think differently than they did before they came to know Christ. The church will become a

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<sup>1</sup> From *Orthodoxy*, Image Books, 1959, p. 42, Originally published 1908.

society of people who no longer conform to the pattern of the world, because their minds have been renewed (Romans 12:1-2).

In Ephesians chapter four Paul builds his argument. One thing leads to the next.

In 4:17 he begins to probe what it means for the church to be pure, to be holy. Ephesians 4:17-19, though shorter, is remarkably similar to Romans 1:18-32. In both passages we learn of the deleterious effects of sin on the sinner.

In Ephesians 4:20-23 Paul shows Christ re-making sinful men and women according to God's divine design.

4:24-32 gives five concrete examples of purified behavior in the church, God's new society.

Before reading on in this study, read Ephesians 4:17-32 in whatever translations you have available. What is the difference between life before and after one meets Christ? Compare these verses with Romans 1:18-32 and James 1:12-15.

**Ephesians 4:17-32**

**Romans 1:18-32**

**James 1:12-15**

How much of your pre-Christian self do you see in Paul's generic description of a *pagan* in vss. 17-19?

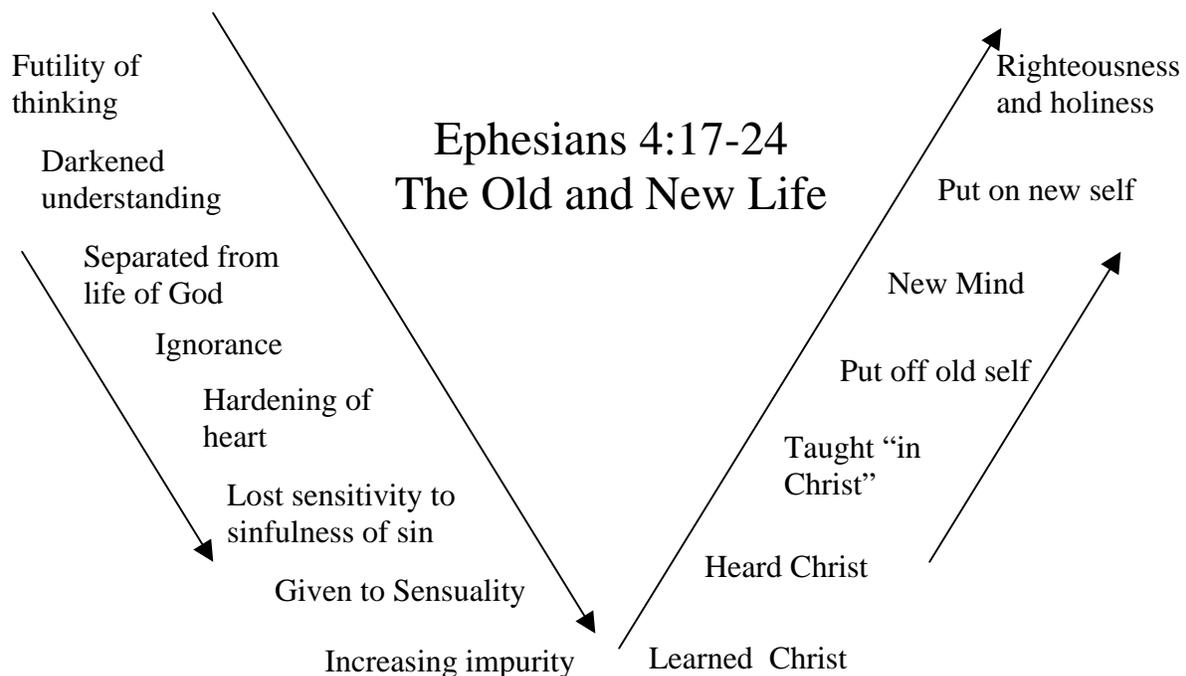
On balance, do Christians live *better* lives than non-believers? What about the *noble pagan*, the woman who gives of her time, money and resources to the poor, never cheats on her income taxes, is faithful to her husband, never cuts anyone off on the freeway, etc.? Does this so called *noble pagan* live life consistently with her principles? How would Paul respond to such a person?

For Paul, and the other writers of the Bible, how a person thinks will determine the course of his action (see above). The *truth* in Scripture is a powerful force able to shape a person (John 8:32). False teaching (pseudo truth) will corrupt those who listen. Ideas have consequences (Matt. 7:15).

Notice the downward spiral a sinful mind produces in vss. 17-19 and the renewing effects of knowing Christ in vss. 20-24.

J. H. Houlden comments on this passage,

Pagan immorality is seen as willful and culpable . . . , the result of their deliberate refusal of the moral light available to them in their own thought and conscience. (From Stott, p. 176)



The word for *futility* expresses both *utter uselessness and vanity*. The NEB translates this word, *the-good-for-nothing notions*. . .

Notice the contrast between those *darkened in their understanding* (4:18) and the Ephesian church which is *enlightened* by Christ. These people are *separated from the life of God*.

**4:18** The word for *hardening* referred to both a *stone harder than marble*, and to the formation of a callus on the skin. This leads to Paul's next image. To be hardened is to lose one's ability to be sensitive to sin.

When we have *lost all sensitivity* we have lost the ability to respond to moral instruction. This leads to their giving *themselves over*<sup>1</sup> to *sensuality* which leads to indulgence of every kind.

“Sensuality” (*aselgeia*) is license in the sphere of the physical and hence voluptuousness or debauchery. . . . In the New Testament it often refers to sexual excesses. This fearful self-abandonment leads to all kinds of filthy practices, which are so absorbing as almost to become a total preoccupation (*ergasian*). (Wood, p. 62)

The NEB translation is instructive:

. . . they are strangers to the life that is in God, because ignorance prevails among them and their minds have grown hard as stone. Dead to all feeling, they have abandoned themselves to vice, and stop at nothing to satisfy their foul desires.

The change in verse 20 is strong. *BUT YOU* in the Greek text. You Ephesians are different from the pagans, Paul says. The Christian life involves moral education. Disciples are men and women who *learn* to think godly thoughts and act in a godly manner.

Titus 3:14 Our people must learn to devote themselves to doing what is good, in order that they may provide for daily necessities and not live unproductive lives.

What follows in Ephesians 4:21 are three parallel expressions. The Ephesians, literally, *learned Christ, heard Christ* and were *taught in him*.<sup>2</sup> In simple terms, the antidote to paganism is Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, in Romans one it is God who *gives over* the pagan. Rom. 1:24, *Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another*. Rom. 1:26, *Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones*. Rom. 1:28, *Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done*.

<sup>2</sup> Barth writes of this section, *While the Greek text does not explicitly mention a 'school' or call the saints 'students,' the vocabulary and contents of 4:20-21 evoke the image of a school. In commenting on 4:17, Calvin summed up 4:20-21 by speaking of the 'teaching received in Christ's school.'* (Barth, II, 504)

How does one *learn Christ*? Think of your learning methods in other areas of life (doing the dishes, driving a car, multiplication tables. . .). Do these methods of learning apply to *learning Christ*?

How are you *learning Christ* during this season of your life?

What is the paganism of our time? How does it measure up to the vile paganism described by Paul? Is our society as corrupt as theirs? Are we as bad as they were?

How do you see this paganism affecting the church in the twenty-first century? How do you see paganism affecting Santa Barbara Community Church?

Paul speaks of being *made new* (4:23) and *putting on the new self* (4:24). These are not imperatives in the Greek text but infinitives (*to be made new, to put on*). As such, they describe what God has done for us. But the Ephesians are certainly to appropriate what God has done in their own lives.

In all this teaching the divine and the human are beautifully blended. In the command to exchange our old humanity for a new one, Paul is not implying that we can bring about our own new birth. Nobody has ever given birth to himself. The very concept is ludicrous. No, the new humanity we assume is God's creation, not ours. Nevertheless, when God recreates us in Christ according to his own likeness, we entirely concur with what he has done. We 'put off' our old life, turning away from it in distaste, and we 'put on' the new life he has created,

embracing it and welcoming it with joy. In a word, recreation (what God does) and repentance (what we do by his grace) belong together and cannot be separated. (Stott, p. 182)

When the Ephesians came to know and worship Christ he called them to a totally transformed life. They were to have new ethics, values and allegiances. Their former pagan way of life was to be no more.

**4:25-32** contain at least five areas where the Ephesians were to leave their pagan way of life behind and adopt a new way of behaving.

Think of each of these from the perspective of church life. How would a body of believers which practiced these virtues be affected:

<b>Virtue</b>	<b>Meaning</b>	<b>Effect upon the church</b>
<i>put off falsehood, speak truthfully</i>	literally, put off the lie <sup>1</sup>	
<i>“In your anger do not sin.”</i>	This quotation from Psalm 4:4 means, <i>Let not your anger be mixed with sin.</i> (Hendrickson, p. 218)	
<i>steal no longer . . .</i>	“Manual labor is more than a cure for theft or a method of personal gain. The apostle raises the motive of work to a higher level and indicates that those who labor honestly will be able to fulfill their corporate duty to <i>share with those in need.</i> ” (Patzia, p. 253)	
<i>unwholesome talk . . .</i>	The Greek adjective <i>foul</i> can “designate anything that is rotten, putrid, filthy, and therefore, unsound or bad. In the New Testament the term is used to describe bad trees, foul fruit, rotten fish.” (Barth, II. p. 518) <sup>2</sup>	
<i>don’t grieve the Holy Spirit. . .</i>	The word for grieve is “to cause sorrow, pain or distress.” “It appears that the author refers to the Holy Spirit because of his connection with a person’s speech (see. 5:18) . . .the misuse of the organ of speech is accordingly a wrong done to, and felt by the Spirit who claims to control it.” (Patzia, p. 254) <sup>3</sup>	

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<sup>1</sup> Hughes notes that lying was *endemic to the Greeks as well as Israel’s Semitic neighbors, and some who had recently become Christians had brought the practice right into the Church.* (Hughes, p. 149) The parallel passage in Colossians 3:9-10 reads, *Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.* In verse nine Paul uses a present imperative which could be translated, *Stop lying to each other!*

<sup>2</sup> Barth goes on to point out the New Testament counterpart to *foul speech* is speech seasoned with salt (see Colssians 4:6).

<sup>3</sup>F. W. Beare (1953) makes an interesting observation. *The sins against the brotherhood are also an offense against the divine Spirit which inhabits the body of believers.* (From Patzia, p. 254)

<i>Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling, slander and malice.</i>	<i>Get rid of</i> means “let it be removed,” “have nothing to do with it.” (See Wood, p. 65)	
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Think through this list from the perspective of the church. How would a church function which did not pay attention to this list?

What would happen to a church (SBCC for example) if it took seriously and applied Paul’s admonition to say *only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs*?

Share an example of being *built up* by a brother or sister in our church. How did this make you feel? What effect did it have on you?

St. Augustine (354-430) bishop of Hippo had a sign near his dinner table. It said, *He who speaks evil of an absent man or woman is not welcome at this table*. Let’s put this motto into practice at SBCC.

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*Sermon Notes. . .*

## **Study Sixteen**

### **Imitating God: The Lifestyle of Ministry**

#### **Ephesians 5:1-20**

What does a Christian look like? How is he to behave? What special clothes does she wear? What habits are to be formed when one is *in Christ*? How are spending habits to be affected? Can a Christian be a sports *fan*? Should a believer go to an NBA, NHL, or an NFL game and cheer (praise?) wildly? May a Christian buy an Eminem CD? What guidelines do the Scriptures give for our lifestyle?

Obviously the biblical writers do not directly answer these questions. But in Ephesians 5 Paul states a principle which should guide the life of every believer. We should be men and women who *imitate God*. Clement of Alexandria (155-220), a mystic, said we should practice *being God*. Perhaps Clement went a bit too far, but his shocking statement stems from Ephesians 5.

Before getting lost in the shuffle of all that follows in this study, take a moment and ponder the notion of imitating God. What does this mean to you? Certainly there is much about God which is beyond our ability to understand, much less imitate.<sup>1</sup> What do we know about God which we can imitate? Think of God's work in history and in your own life as you formulate your answer.

Read Ephesians 5:1-20. Keep the following outline in mind as you read.

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<sup>1</sup> Theologians often distinguish between God's *incommunicable* and *communicable* attributes. The former have no human reference point, no human analogy (the *aseity* of God refers to the fact that God has always existed, for example). *Communicable* attributes have an analogy to human beings. Love is an attribute of God and humans practice loving.

Principle: Imitate God (5:1-2)

Negatively:

Abstain from

1. Sexual immorality (5:3)
2. Impurity (5:3)
3. Greed (5:3)
4. Improper speech (5:4)

Because of these the judgment of God is coming (5:5-7)

Positively:

Demonstrate

1. You are light (5:8-14)
2. You are wise (5:15-17)
3. You are filled with the Holy Spirit (5:18-20)

### Notes and Questions:

**5:3** covers the full range of sexual sins. Paul uses two Greek words which are usually translated *fornication* and *impurity* (NRSV, NASB etc.). The two words together cover all varieties of sexual sin.

The Ephesians were steeped in a society of sexual license. Ephesus was the home of the Temple of Artemis<sup>1</sup> (*Diana* of Ephesus) which was four times the size of the Parthenon in Athens. This magnificent temple, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, was honored on coins and revered by *all Asia* (Acts 19:27). Diana was the Greek goddess of fertility and sexual orgies were a common, and popular, feature of worship.

Paul instructs the church that she is to be different. A new way of life is prescribed for the new people of God.

**5:4** deals with the speech of believers.

*Foolish talk* is from the Greek, *moros*. Moronic talk.

*Coarse joking* can be positive and refer to *wit* or *pleasantry*. (Patzia, p. 257)

Here, however it refers to smutty jesting about sexual matters.

As the writer of Proverbs says, *The tongue of the wise commends knowledge, but the mouth of the fool gushes folly.* (Proverbs 15:2)

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<sup>1</sup> Artemis was a goddess universally worshipped throughout the Greek world, but may have had pre-Hellenic origin, as for example at Ephesus, in which city her cult was undoubtedly grafted on to that of an Asiatic fertility goddess. . . . Homer gave her the title, 'Lady of wild things,' the virgin huntress, armed with bow and arrows. (Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, vol. I, p. 341)

Do you see the power of humor in your life? In our society? Consider the following thoughts on humor from Screwtape Letters.<sup>1</sup>

The real use of Jokes or Humour is quite . . . specially promising among the English, who take their “sense of humour” so seriously that a deficiency in this sense is almost the only deficiency at which they feel shame. Humour is for them the all-consoling and (mark this) the all-excusing, grace of life. Hence it is invaluable as a means of destroying shame. . . . Mere cowardice is shameful; cowardice boasted of with humorous exaggerations and grotesque gestures can be passed off as funny. Cruelty is shameful — unless the cruel man can represent it as a practical joke. A thousand bawdy, or even blasphemous, jokes do not help towards a man’s damnation so much as his discovery that almost anything he wants to do can be done, not only without the disapproval but with the admiration of his fellows, if only it can get itself treated as a Joke.

. . . flippancy is the best of all. Flippancy builds up around a man the finest armour plating against the Enemy<sup>2</sup> that I know. . . It is a thousand miles away from joy; it deadens, instead of sharpening, the intellect; and it excites no affection between those who practise it.

Your affectionate uncle,

SCREWTAPE (C. S. Lewis Screwtape Letters, 1961, letter 11)

How is it with you and your humor? Are you using humor appropriately? Can others in your home group hold you accountable in this area?

**5:5-7** are strong verses. They speak of the wrath of God on those who persist in disobedience.

Compare this text with

- Galatians 5:19-21
- 1 Corinthians 6:9-10
- I John 3:7-10
- Revelation 22:14-15

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<sup>1</sup> These fictitious letters are written from a senior demon to an underling and contain advice on how to subvert the faith of a new Christian.

<sup>2</sup> The *enemy* in these letters is God.

Summarizing these texts, Kent Hughes writes,

. . . the Scriptures are in concert: No practicing sinner, no unrepentant sensualist, has eternal life.

Do Christians fall into these sins? Of course! But true Christians will not persist in them, for persistence in sensuality is evidence of a graceless state.

We conclude on the authority of God's Word that anyone who is living a lustful life of sensuality and is unwilling to turn from it is lost and has no inheritance in the Kingdom of God and Christ. Such a person is an "idolater" because he has put his sensual desire in the central place only God should occupy. (Hughes, pp. 159-160)

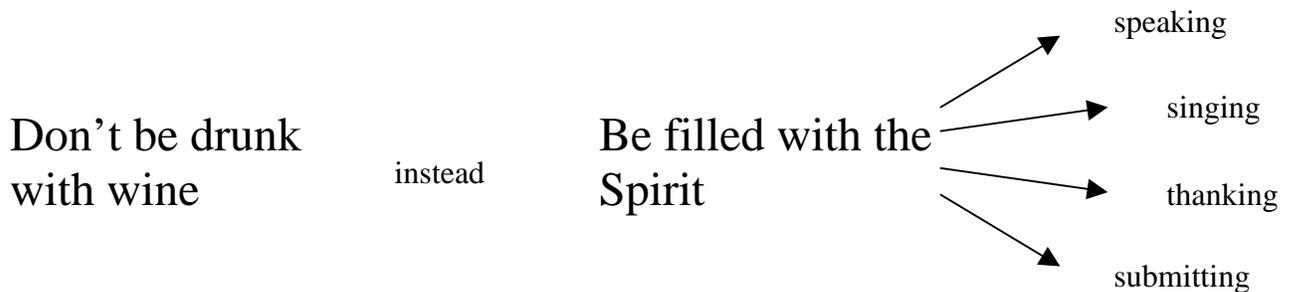
**5:8-14** states that the Ephesians are *light*. As such Paul seems to recommend an ignorance of the darkness. *For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret.*

How can we apply this to our time and place? Ours is an *open* society. We can hardly watch an hour of television without being exposed to sexual behavior outside of the biblical norm. Pornography is available from any computer equipped with internet service. Our schools provide *sex education* where, generally, the students will be exposed to the things Paul says are *shameful even to mention*. Many movies we watch include material which is shameful.

How can the body of Christ recover a sense of the shameful? What are we to do to protect ourselves and our children from such things?

**5:15-16** What does Paul mean when he says we should live as *wise* people? What does it mean to *make the most of every opportunity*?

The last part of our text concentrates on being *filled with the Spirit*. Paul's thoughts can be diagrammed as follows:



Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, a mid-twentieth century medical doctor who became the pastor of Westminster Chapel, London writes,

Drink is not a stimulus, it is a depressant. It depresses first and foremost the highest centers of all the brain. They are the very first to be influenced and affected by drink. They control everything that gives a man self-control, wisdom, understanding, discrimination, judgment, balance, the power to assess everything; in other words everything that makes a man behave at his very best and highest. The better a man's control, the better man he is. . . . But drink is something which immediately gets rid of control; that indeed is the first thing it does. (D. Martyn Lloyd Jones, Life in the Spirit in Marriage, Home and Work, 1975, p. 15)

The fullness of the Holy Spirit, we should note, has the opposite effect of alcohol. The *fruit*, so to speak, of alcohol abuse is *debauchery* (the Greek word means *profligacy* or *recklessness*). The *fruit* of the Spirit is described in Galatians 5. Note the contrast:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.  
Gal. 5:22-23

Think how the Holy Spirit is to permeate the life of the believer and the church. The believer is *baptized* in the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 12:13), *sealed* in the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13) and *guaranteed* a future by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:14).

Here the believer is instructed, commanded, to *be filled* with the Spirit. Paul uses a present imperative verb which could be translated *go on being filled*. In other words, the filling of the Spirit is to be an on-going activity for every believer.

But how do we fulfill this command?

Significantly the present, active verb is in the passive voice. *Let yourselves be filled with the Holy Spirit*. . . The filling of the Spirit is not something we conjure up by placing

ourselves in the right environment. Nor should the filling of the Spirit be associated with religious ecstasy. The Spirit's filling is not a reward for good behavior. The filling of the Holy Spirit is the result of our yielding our Spirit to God day-by-day, moment by moment.

What are the marks of a church *full of the Spirit*? Hint: see 4:19-20.

Is Santa Barbara Community Church a *Spirit-filled* church? What evidence would you give to support your answer?

We have been meeting in our groups for at least 16 weeks. Spend some time affirming one another. Who have you observed *imitating God* in your home group? What has this imitation looked like? How have you imitated the imitation?

## Study Seventeen

### The Way of Submission

### Ephesians 5:21-33

The war between the sexes, especially between husband and wife, appears to go all the way back to the sin of Adam and Eve. When this newly married couple decided to forego God's instructions and transgress his will, all of their relationships were altered. Their relationship with God was ruined, their relation with their work was subverted and their relation to each other was strained. The curse placed on Eve is telling.

To the woman [God] said, "I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you." (Gen. 3:16)

What does the second part of this judgment mean? At a minimum the verse states that the original harmony of the sexes, designed by God, was replaced by a degree of alienation and discord.

In the place of equality of the one with the other, and of the complementarity of the one to the other . . . there would come the rule of one over the other. Sexual complementarity was intended from the beginning to include masculine 'headship,' as Paul argued, but by reason of the Fall 'headship' degenerated into 'domination.'<sup>1</sup> (John Stott, *Involvement*, vol. II., p. 134)

God's redemptive work through history is his gracious work of *un-doing* the consequences of the Fall. If, as Paul writes in Romans 6:23, *The wages of sin is death. . .*, the good news of the gospel is that Jesus died to give us *life* (John 10:10; Rom. 6:23; I John 5:12 etc.). When it comes to the war between the sexes we find this same *redemptive un-doing*. Santa Barbara theologian and scholar Joan Fredrickson writes, *Prefall conditions are to prevail in the Christian home, and the church is to reflect those conditions.*<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Steven Goldberg wrote *The Inevitability of Patriarchy*, 1973, which argues from an academic, dispassionate perspective, *In every society that has ever existed one finds patriarchy (males fill the overwhelming percentage of upper hierarchical positions in political and all other hierarchies), male attainment (males attain the high-status roles, whatever these may be in any given society) and male dominance (both males and females feel that dominance in male-female encounters and relationships resides in the male, and social expectations and authority systems reflect this).* (Cited in Stott, p. 222)

<sup>2</sup> From *The Apple of His Eye*, p. 63. Unpublished manuscript. Later she adds, *Submission in the body of Christ is a prefall quality. We see it in the garden. The dominion given to the man and the woman was a dominion of nurture. The woman was created to complete man. Man was to acknowledge that she was a*

Before reading our text we should consider the historical situation into which Paul wrote.

**First**, it is well known that women had little advantage in the first century world.

Demosthenes, the Athenian orator, spoke for many when he said,

We have courtesans for our pleasure, prostitutes (i.e., young female slaves) for daily physical use, wives to bring up legitimate children and to be faithful stewards in household matters. (From Barth, II, p. 655)

At least two prominent rabbis urged their followers to recite the following morning prayer,

I thank the Lord that he did not make me a Gentile, . . . a woman, . . . or a slave. (From Barth, II, p. 656)<sup>1</sup>

**Second**, there was a Greek *feminist* movement. Barth writes,

While it was common for Greeks and Romans to speak of the “weaker” sex and to treat unmarried and married women with a corresponding combination of courtesy and contempt, there was also a counter-movement which promoted equal rights for females. . . . The cultural trend of the last centuries before Paul and of his own age went toward the emancipation of women—in the case of marriage, toward the unilateral bondage of wives. (Barth, II, p. 656)<sup>2</sup>

On balance, however, we can safely say women had few rights and were held in low esteem during the time of Paul.

Read Ephesians 5:21-33. Compare translations. What stands out in these verses?

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*part of his very body, “Bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh”, and he was to be knit together with her. This attitude and demeanor of nurture and mutual respect and mutual submission practiced in the home, then needs to be carried over into the church by both men and women (pp. 65-66).*

<sup>1</sup> It is hard for us, in our *christianized* society to realize the degeneracy of the first century world in this area. Charles Seltman writes, *A girl was completely under her father’s authority, a wife completely under her husband’s power. She was his chattel . . . Her life was one of legal incapacity which amounted to enslavement, while her status was described as ‘imbecilitas’, whence our word.* (Women in Antiquity, 1956, p. 136, 138)

<sup>2</sup> *The examples mentioned suffice to show several things. In the ancient world a variety of concepts co-existed with or followed upon one another regarding the position of women and the order and purpose of marriage. Different periods and different geographical areas produced differing views.* (Barth, II, p. 658)

Why does Paul compare the relation of husbands and wives to Christ and the church?

Find the five verbs Paul uses to describe Christ's relation to the church. What do these teach us about marriage? What do these verbs teach about the church?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

We should note that we are dealing with the fourth verb (participle) which describes what happens when we are filled with the Holy Spirit. We will find ourselves *speaking, singing, thanking, and submitting*. Submission *to one another*, whatever this means, is a sign of the fullness of the Holy Spirit. We should also note that this is a church wide practice. Much of what follows in Paul's instructions involves marriage and family. But the church, full of the Spirit, is to be in the habit of *submitting to one another*.

The Greek word Paul uses here is *hupotasso* (υποτασσω). Originally a military term meaning to *arrange or rank under*, by New Testament times the word meant *the readiness to renounce one's own will for the sake of others*. . . (Kittel, vol. 8, p. 45) Accordingly the word is translated *to submit, or to be subject to*.

In the Greek text there is no verb in verse 22. A choppy rendering of the Greek would read something like this:

*Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives to their husbands as unto the Lord. . . . Husbands love your wives. . .*

As we read through these verses, *children* and *slaves* are called to obedience to those in authority over them.

Stott writes,

Perhaps the most striking feature of the [passage] is that in each pair of relationships reciprocal duties are laid down. It is true that wives are to submit to their husbands, children to their parents and slaves to their masters, and that this requirement of submission presupposes an authority in the husbands, parents and masters. . . . [Yet] when Paul is describing the duties of husbands, parents and masters, in no case is it authority which he tells them to exercise. On the contrary, explicitly or implicitly, he warns them against the improper use of their authority, forbids them to exploit their position, and urges them instead to remember their responsibilities and the other party's rights. Thus, husbands are to love their wives and care for them, parents are not to provoke their children but bring them up sensitively, and masters are not to threaten their slaves, but treat them with justice. (Stott, p. 219)

In other words, in the kingdom of God there is an abiding reciprocity between the citizens of that kingdom. *If therefore, it is the wife's duty as wife to submit to her husband, it is also the husband's duty as a member of God's new society to submit to his wife. Submissiveness is a universal Christian obligation.* (Stott, p. 233)

What does Paul mean in 5:23 when he writes, *For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church . . . ?*

Compare 1Corinthians 11:3-12 with Ephesians 5:23-24. What in the Corinthian text do you see as cultural and therefore time-bound? What in the text is theological and transcultural?

The notion of headship is difficult to define and articulate. What does Paul have in mind?<sup>1</sup> Some suggest the word *responsibility* is a good synonym for *head*. As Christ was *responsible* for the church, even giving his life for the church, so also, husbands are to *responsibly* care for their wives and give themselves to them. *Headship* is not a matter of crushing authority but of tender responsibility.

Take a few moments in your homegroup and ask the husbands and wives in the room how they practice this passage?

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<sup>1</sup> See Ephesians 4:15-16.

What does *headship* look like in your marriage?

How is this call to submission and love played out in your marriage?

**5:33** Notice the last command in this section. Wives are called to *respect* their husbands. What happens to a marriage when a wife does this?

Husbands, what changes can you make in your husbanding to fulfill Paul's strong command? Respond to the following comment by Markus Barth:

Paul not only asks the husband (1) to subordinate himself to his wife as she is to do to him (5:21), (2) to exert his responsibility as the "head" only after the fashion of the Messiah who laid down his life as a servant of those he loved (5:23, 25b), and (3) to heed the full meaning of Gen. 2:24 ("... the two will become one flesh"). Much more the sum and refrain of his special exhortation to the husbands is this: "Love your wives" (vs. 25A); "the husbands owe it [to God and man] to love their wives" (vs. 28); "each one of you must love his wife" (vs. 33). In short, the apostle tells the husbands in three statements to "love" her, love "her," and "love her," and he has nothing to add beyond this. (Barth, II, p. 701)

The Spanish mystic Saint John of the Cross (1542-1591) said love consists *not in feeling great things, but in suffering for the beloved*. . . What does it mean for a husband to love his wife? Does this run against the grain of our culture?

Paul's model is, beyond question, ideal. When a couple is in the habit of *submitting* to one another, *loving* one another, etc., marriage becomes a delightful relationship. Who

wouldn't want to submit to such a husband? Who wouldn't desire to love such a wife? But rare is the husband who lives up to the call of Ephesians 5. Rare is the wife who is completely *lovable*. Truth be told, both husband and wife are sinful people who will make mistakes on a daily basis (hourly?). What then? How is the principle of submission played out in the real world?

Think through the following quotation as you formulate your answer:

Nowhere does the Bible say that love is the basis for marriage; but it does claim that marriage is the basis for love. Paul's command is "husbands, love your wives," rather than "Men, marry your lovers." Within marriage one is to love—within the covenant set up between not merely individuals, but families, and enforced by the church and the community. Marriage is easily defined in legal terms. It has a beginning that can be dated precisely. It is an institution, while love is not. Ideally, the two should be congruent, but the institution is the starting point in the New Testament. The cup is necessary before the wine can be poured. (Tim Stafford, *The Sexual Christian*, p. 13)

What would you say to a good friend who quoted Ephesians 5:22 in order to get his wife to do what he wanted?

What would you say to a wife who claimed Galatians 3:28 as her final proclamation of emancipation from the constraints of marriage?

How would church life (SBCC church life) be affected if we all applied Ephesians 5:21? Are we doing this?

## **Study Eighteen**

### **Family/Employee Relations**

### **Ephesians 6:1-9**

We noticed the terrible effects of the Fall upon husband/wife relations at the beginning of our last study. When we think back to the early chapters of Genesis we see the utter devastation sin produced in the entire family. As soon as we meet the first two brothers of history, Cain and Abel, we find one murdering the other (Genesis 4) and then fleeing the family unit.

If we think through even a biblical history of the family we don't find a harmonious story. Cain kills Abel, Lot and Abram separate, Sarah sends away Hagar, Jacob deceives Esau, Joseph is sold into slavery by his own brothers. . . The family was deeply fractured by the Fall, and, as in the case of male/female relations, the work of Christ is meant to undo the consequences of sin.

In Ephesians 6:1-9 we catch Paul in mid-sentence. He is probing the implications of the fullness of the Holy Spirit in earthly relations. Christians are to be people willing to submit one to another. While protecting a "divine order" in human relations (the husband is the "head" of his wife, parents have authority over their children and masters have power over their slaves), Paul urges the people of the Ephesian church to live lives of humility, graciousness and mutual submission.

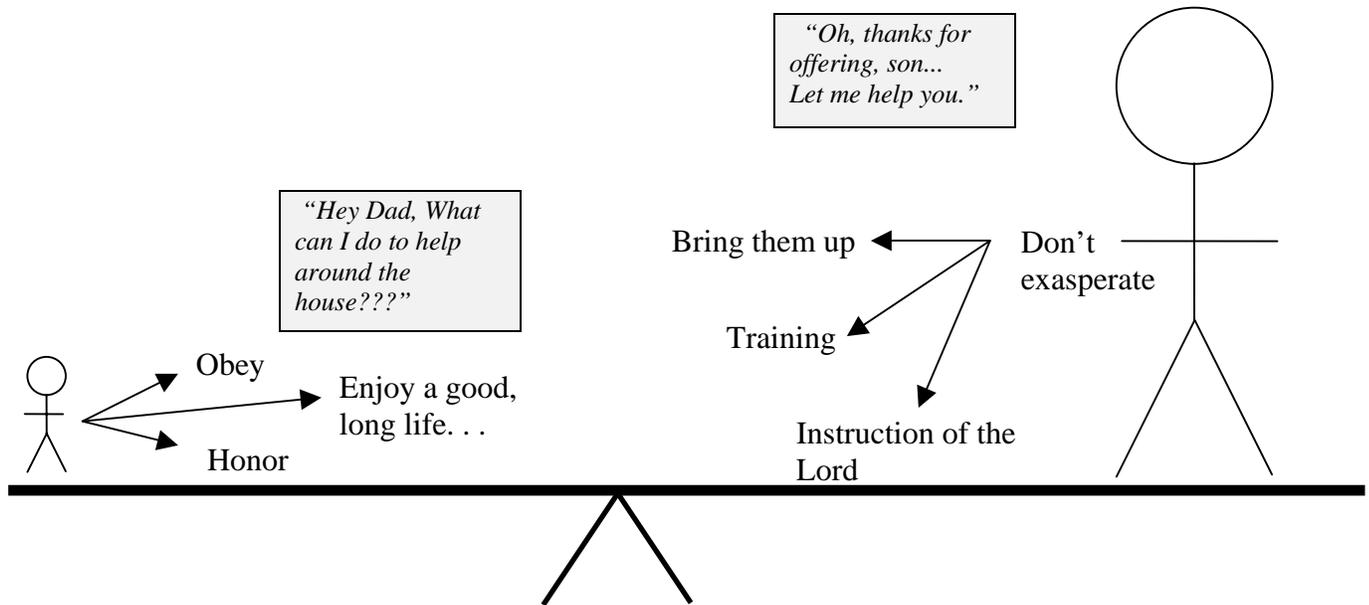
Our text falls into two distinct categories:

1. Parent—Child relations (6:1-4)
2. Master—Slave relations (6:5-9)

In 6:1 Children are entreated to *obey* their parents.

Each of us has (or had) parents. What is your experience of honoring your parents? Of obedience? Of rebelliousness? If you lived in the time of Deuteronomy 21:18-21 would you have been in trouble? Were (are) your parents believers? Would you like to emulate their style of discipline, training, instruction, etc.?

Notice the balance and reciprocity in Paul’s model:



Children in the first century world were the recipients of few rights and privileges. A father had absolute authority over his children. As a student of the times put it, *calloused cruelty* prevailed. Barclay writes:

There was the Roman *patria potestas*, the father’s power. Under the *patria potestas* a Roman father had absolute power over his family. He could sell them as slaves, he could make them work in the fields even in chains, he could take the law into his own hands, for the law was in his own hands, and punish as he liked, he could even inflict the death penalty on his child. Further, the power of the Roman father extended over the child’s whole life, so long as the father lived. A Roman son never came of age. (Barclay, p. 208)

It is into this setting that Paul wrote. How surprising, therefore, to find the Old Testament command to *obey*. Child—Father obedience was a civil requirement and an unquestioned assumption. Such was the liberating power of the Gospel. Children are given dignity and status among God’s people where formerly they had none.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> It is difficult to appreciate the different way children were treated and viewed in the Greek/Roman world. Unwanted babies were *exposed*, that is abandoned to die. The presence of children in a marriage was sometimes regarded as *a partial nuisance because they inhibited sexual promiscuity and complicated easy divorce*. (Stott, p. 238) Rodney Clapp points out in *Families at the Crossroads*, 1993, that our contemporary

6:4 has three specific words of advice for parents (fathers) in raising their children. If you have children (or hope to in the future) think through how you can implement each of these in your parenting:

<b>NIV</b>	<b>Meaning</b>	<b>Application</b>
<i>bring them up</i>	The Greek verb means <i>to nourish</i> , or <i>to feed</i> . It is the same verb we find in 5:29 where a man <i>feeds and cares</i> for his body. Calvin translates this, <i>let them be kindly cherished</i> . . . Hendrickson translates the phrase, <i>rear them tenderly</i> . . . (Hendrickson, p. 262)	
<i>training</i>	This is a strong word which means <i>discipline even by punishment</i> . (Hughes, pp. 200-201) <sup>1</sup> Read Hebrews 12:10-11. We find the same word employed there for both an earthly father's discipline and God's discipline of his children.	
<i>instruction</i>	Refers to verbal instruction or warning. The word literally means, <i>to place before the mind</i> .	

Notice this last word, *instruction*, is *in the Lord*. Parents are called not to raise citizens, but disciples. How do we do this?

Think back to Deuteronomy 6:4-9. What do these verses tell us about imparting our faith to our children?

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. **Impress** them on your children. **Talk** about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. **Tie** them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. **Write** them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

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affection for and nurture of children in the nuclear family setting is a relatively new phenomenon stemming from the time of the Enlightenment.

<sup>1</sup> It is the same word used by Pilate when he said he would *punish* Jesus and then release him (Luke 23:16).

In a sense Paul is sharing his Jewish background with his Greek friends in Ephesians 6. Consider the following proverbs. Are these proverbs offensive? What do they teach us in our setting about raising children? About being children?

Proverbs 29:17 Discipline your son, and he will give you peace; he will bring delight to your soul.

Proverbs 19:18 Discipline your son, for in that there is hope; do not be a willing party to his death.

Proverbs 1:8 Listen, my son, to your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching.

Proverbs 30:17 The eye that mocks a father, that scorns obedience to a mother, will be pecked out by the ravens of the valley, will be eaten by the vultures.

Proverbs 10:17 He who heeds discipline shows the way to life, but whoever ignores correction leads others astray.

Proverbs 15:5 A fool spurns his father's discipline, but whoever heeds correction shows prudence.

Proverbs 13:24 He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him.

Proverbs 15:32 He who ignores discipline despises himself, but whoever heeds correction gains understanding.

Proverbs 22:15 Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline will drive it far from him.

Proverbs 23:13 Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you punish him with the rod, he will not die.

**6:5-9** Paul addresses slave/master relations.

The Greeks and the Romans accepted slavery without a thought. Four centuries before the time of Paul, Aristotle argued that *a slave is a living tool, just as a tool is an*

*inanimate slave. Therefore there can be no friendship with a slave as slave.*<sup>1</sup> The institution and acceptance of slavery in the ancient world was such that it took centuries before slavery was abolished.

Of course the very word *slavery* in the North American mind conjures up a dark and embarrassing chapter of our history. In spite of our history, we do not consider slavery to be an acceptable practice because of the dignity of each individual.

When we read the New Testament we are shocked to find Paul seemingly accept the institution of slavery. Why doesn't Paul call for the immediate overthrow of slavery? There are many reasons for this *omission*.<sup>2</sup>

First, in the Roman world slavery was completely accepted and widely practiced. Roughly a third of the Roman world consisted of slaves.<sup>3</sup> Stott cites W. L. Westermann, writing for the *American Historical Review*:

The institution of slavery was a fact of Mediterranean economic life so completely accepted as a part of the labour structure of the time that one cannot correctly speak of the slave "problem" in antiquity. This unquestioning acceptance of the slave system explains why Plato in his plan of the good life as depicted in *The Republic* did not need to mention the slave class. It was simply there. (Stott, p.250)

Second, slavery in the Roman world, while severe, was not as harsh as it was in the United States. It was not uncommon for someone to sell himself into slavery or to buy back his freedom. Slaves infiltrated every occupation (from laborers to doctors). By the first century, slaves enjoyed the legal rights of free men and women.

While Paul doesn't call for the abolition of slavery, the radical teaching of equality in texts such as this one laid the foundation for its dissolution.

Paul does not advocate the immediate, outright emancipation of the slaves. He took the social structure as he found it and endeavored by peaceful means to change it into its opposite. . . . Slavery would be abolished *from within*, and a gloriously transformed society would replace the old. (Hendrickson, p. 263)

With the above in mind is it too much to say that slavery was akin to modern day employment? The *master*, to some degree, functioned as an employer of his slaves. He would see to it that they were fed, housed and that their medical needs were taken care of. The *slave* worked, in a sense, for these provisions.

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<sup>1</sup> Nichomachean Ethics 8.11. Cited in Under the Influence: How Christianity Transformed Civilization, by, Alvin Schmidt, p. 274.

<sup>2</sup> See *Slave and Slavery*, by A. Rupprecht in The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, vol. V, p. 457. . . for an extended treatment of slavery in Bible times.

<sup>3</sup> Barclay and others estimate there were 60,000,000 slaves in the Roman world.

If there is a parallel between slave and employee (*Slavery???* *You bet. . . if only you knew my boss. . .*) what does this text say to those of us who are employees? How do these verses inform our *work ethic*?

Apply Paul's commands to your work situation:

*obey*

*respect and fear*

*sincerity of heart*

*serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord*

Verse 9 is the shock of this section. *Masters, treat your slaves in the same way. . .*

What do these verses say to Christian employers? How should our employees be paid? How should we set up a biblical *benefits package*?

What are the underlying principles we can distill from these verses regarding relationships in general?

## **Study Nineteen**

### **The Believer's Battle**

### **Ephesians 6:10-12**

*Life's A Beach*, proclaimed a popular bumper sticker of the 1980s. The declaration expressed in three words that the good life is a life of leisure, sun tan, volley-ball, surfing, etc. Throughout church history the Christian's life is anything but a *beach*. Jesus promised his followers suffering, persecution and difficulties between his ascension and his second coming. Church history has fulfilled our Lord's prediction.<sup>1</sup>

“But before all this, they will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name.” Luke 21:12

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.  
1 Peter 4:12-13

Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring. All this is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering. 2 Thessalonians 1:4-5

In 6:10-24 we come to the end of Paul's magnificent epistle. He wants his readers to prepare for battle. Our study has divided the book into two sections: doctrine (Ephesians 1-3) and practice (Ephesians 4-6). We could have looked at the letter as three parts. Ruth Paxson divides the book *Wealth* (1-3), *Walk* (4-6:10) and *Warfare* (6:10-24). Watchman Nee's well known book shares this threefold division, Sit, Walk, Stand.

The point of the conclusion of Paul's letter should not be missed.

God has *blessed us in the heavenly realms*. . . (1:3).

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<sup>1</sup> Antonio Socci, an Italian Journalist, estimates that 70 million Christians have been martyred since the time of Christ. His analysis is more shocking when he claims that 45 million of those were killed in the twentieth century alone. (The New Persecuted: Inquiries Into Anti-Christian Intolerance in the New Century of Martyrs, 2002)

God has created a *new humanity*, a new, unified society of kingdom citizens. This new society is to bask in God's blessing while returning praise to Him (1:14 etc.).

The church is to *live a life worthy* of her calling (4:1-6:9) as a united body of believers submitting one to another.

But to see this as the end of the matter would be a tragic mistake. God has brought the church together in order to send it out as a military band. The body of Christ is called to do battle against the forces of evil and against the evil one himself. Paul calls his readers to *be strong in the Lord* and to *stand against the devil's schemes*.

Notice that in context, the believer's battle is a defensive battle:

Nearly all the weapons of our warfare described in Ephesians are purely defensive. Even the sword can be used as well for defense as for offense. The difference between defensive and offensive warfare is this, that in the former I have got the ground and only seek to keep it, whereas in the latter I have not got the ground and am fighting in order to get it. . . . Thus today we do not fight *for* victory; we fight *from* victory. We do not fight in order to win but because in Christ we have already won. Overcomers are those who rest in the victory already given to them by their God. (Watchman Nee, Sit, Walk, Stand, 1957. pp. 54-55)

Read Ephesians 6:10-24 from a few different translations. What initial thoughts come to mind? What questions does your reading provoke?

We could make a major study of this section alone. Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote two full volumes on these verses. In the middle of the seventeenth century the Puritan pastor William Gurnall wrote, The Christian in Complete Armour and presented it as a *little present* to his small church. The *little present* contains 261 chapters and 1,472 pages (think how long their home groups lasted. . .).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Seventeenth century literature is known for its elaborate sub-titles. Gurnall wins the prize. This work's sub-title is, *The saints war against the Devil, wherein a discovery is made of that grand enemy of God and his people, in his policies, power, seat of his empire, wickedness, and chief design he hath against the saints; a magazine opened, from whence the Christian is furnished with spiritual arms for the battle, helped on with his armour, and taught the use of his weapon; together with the happy issue of the whole war.*

Now look over our passage again with the following outline in mind. Jot down any additional thoughts or questions you have:

1. The Call: *Be strong in the Lord* (6:10-11)
2. The Conflict: *Rulers, Authorities, Powers* (6:12)
3. The Strategy: *The full armor of God* (6:13-18)

**Notes and Questions:**

**1. The Call: *Be strong in the Lord* (6:10-11)**

**6:10** The NIV reads *finally*. The Greek word could more accurately be translated *henceforward*. Barth translates the word, *For the remaining time*.

Paul has a limited period of time in mind. Its beginning is probably the making of peace between Jews and Gentiles through the cross and the resurrection, and the revelation of God's secret; it will be terminated on the day when the Bridegroom meets the Bride and the Lord holds judgment over all. The strife described in the following verses will be over and God's people will be liberated. (Barth, II, pp. 759-760)

The battle, therefore, is temporary. The church lives *between the times*, between the first and second advent of her Lord. Christ will come and have the final say against Satan.

Paul says we should be strong *in the Lord*. . . What does this look like? How does this strength differ from self-effort?

What is the role of discipline and training in such strength? Read the following passages. What do these verses add to Ephesians 6:10?

- 1 Timothy 4:7-8
- 2 Timothy 3:16-17

What is your personal plan for *training in righteousness*?

**6:11** The word which is translated in the NIV as the Devil's *schemes* is *methodeia*. This is the Greek from which we get our word *methods*. What are the Devil's methods in our time to subvert the faith of believers? What are his methods in your life?

Stott points out the subtlety implied in the word *methodeia*. It is the same word we found in Ephesians 4:14.

[The Devil] is a dangerous wolf, but enters Christ's flock in the disguise of a sheep. Sometimes he roars like a lion, but more often is a subtle as a serpent. We must not imagine, therefore, that open persecution and open temptation to sin are his only or even his commonest weapons; he prefers to seduce us into compromise and deceive us into error. (Stott, p. 265)

## **2. The Conflict: Rulers, Authorities, Powers (6:12)**

Ultimately the enemies of the believer are the demonic powers and Satan himself.<sup>1</sup> Our struggle, therefore, is supernatural and personal. The word *struggle indicates a hand-to-hand fight. . . . The root idea here is, swaying back and forth while locked in mortal battle*. (Hughes, p. 214)

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<sup>1</sup> In the latter half of this century much has been made of Paul's language. Gordon Rupp wrote Principalities and Powers in 1952 which attempted to *demythologize* Paul on this point. The *principalities and powers* were not seen to be demonic forces, but instead, naturalistic historical forces, earthly powers, institutions, etc. Markus Barth agrees. *We conclude that by principalities and powers Paul means the world of axioms and principles of politics and religion, of economics and society, of morals and biology, of history and culture. . . .* (from The Broken Wall, 1959, p. 82) Stott points out that this interpretation fails on two counts. First, it doesn't measure up to the text itself. Colossians 1:16, Ephesians 1:20-22 and the present text all have demonic beings in view. Second, it fails theologically. Jesus, Paul, Peter and other New Testament writers believed in the demonic and in the angelic. This was not a product of first century naiveté. The Sadducees, for example, were naturalists and denied the existence of such beings. *So if Jesus Christ our Lord believed in them and spoke of them, it ill becomes us to be too embarrassed to do so.* (Stott, p. 273. See Stott pp. 267-275 for an extended discussion on this topic.)

Calvin points out that the struggle is so severe that it can only be won if conducted in the power of God.

He [Paul] means that our difficulties are far greater than if we had to fight against men. Where we resist human strength, sword is opposed to sword, man contends with man, force is met by force, and skill by skill; but here the case is very different, for our enemies are such as no human power can withstand. (quoted in Hughes, p. 214)

Respond to the following comment by Dr. Lloyd-Jones. Do you agree? If so, what can you (we) do to undo our ignorance of *this great objective fact*?

I am certain that one of the main causes of the ill state of the Church today is the fact that the devil is being forgotten. All is attributed to us; we have all become so psychological in our attitude and thinking. We are ignorant of this great objective fact, the being, the existence of the devil, the adversary, the accuser, and his “fiery darts”. (The Christian Warfare, 1974, p. 292)

**6:12** shows the comprehensive nature of the battle. We wrestle against *the powers of this dark world*. Paul uses the Greek word *kosmokratores*, which was a term used in ancient astrology of the planets which controlled the destiny of each individual. *Kosmokratores* is a compound word made from *kosmos* (world) and *kratos* (rule). It pictures the global domination of the evil one.

Along with Ephesians 6:12, consider the following verses:

- 2 Corinthians 4:4
- 1 John 5:19

In his preface to The Screwtape Letters C. S. Lewis writes,

There are two opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors, and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight.

How can we avoid the errors of both the *materialist* and the *magician* as we prepare ourselves for spiritual warfare?

*Sermon Notes. . .*

## **Study Twenty**

### **The Believer's Armor**

### **Ephesians 6:13-24**

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

Such is Paul's eloquent, succinct and poignant statement of the believer's battle in the present age.

The calling of every believer is to employ the *full armor of God*. Paul uses the word *panoplia* which refers to *the full armor of a heavily-armed soldier*. (Bauer, p. 612)  
Notice the purpose of the armor: *that . . . you may be able to stand your ground. . . Wobbly Christians who have no firm foothold in Christ are an easy prey for the devil. And Christians who shake like reeds and rushes cannot resist the wind when the principalities and powers begin to blow.* (Stott, p. 275)

Note the emphasis of this section of Ephesians. God is the one who delivers the believer from the battle. The disciple's job is to prepare for battle. *The armor is all provided by God: it is for us to take it up and use it. And the victory, when it comes, will always be seen to have been accomplished by God, not by his people.* (Morris, p. 202)<sup>1</sup>

Paul describes six main pieces of a Roman soldier's equipment. He sometimes draws out the function of a particular piece of armor. Think through this list. How does each piece of armor apply to your life?

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<sup>1</sup> Interestingly Isaiah 59:16-17 pictures God himself using this same armor in spiritual battle.

<b>Armor</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Personal Application</b>
<i>belt of truth buckled around your waste</i>	none	
<i>the breastplate of righteousness in place</i>	none	
<i>feet fitted</i>	<i>the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace</i>	
<i>shield of faith</i>	<i>with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.</i>	
<i>helmet of salvation</i>	none	
<i>sword of the Spirit</i>	<i>which is the Word of God</i>	

Time and space do not permit a full un-packing of each piece of armor. But think about the *belt of truth*. Respond to the following quotation by Charles Colson. In light of this statement what does it mean for the believer to have *belt of truth buckled around his/her waist*?

“The inability to make moral distinctions is the AIDS of the intellectuals: an acquired immune deficiency syndrome. . . moral blindness of this caliber requires practice. It has to be learned.” [Charles Krauthammer, quoting Thomas Sowell] In a culture infected with moral AIDS, words lose all meaning; or, they are manipulated to obscure meaning. Thus, taxes become “revenue assessment enhancements”; perversion is “gay”; murder of unborn children is “freedom of choice”; Marxism in the church is called “liberation theology.” These are all good words (in the Nazi era “the final solution” had a nice ring to it also). And everyone just nods unquestioningly. But when words lose their meaning, it is nearly impossible for the Word of God to be received. If sin and repentance mean nothing, then God’s grace is irrelevant. Our preaching falls on deaf ears. This moral deafness leads to disaster. The Scriptures tell us it was when people accepted King Ahab’s gross evils as “trivial” that fearsome judgment befell ancient Israel.<sup>1</sup> (Charles Colson, Who Speaks for God, 1985, p. 68)

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<sup>1</sup> See I Kings 16.

To the *full armor* of God Paul adds still another weapon, prayer.

John Bunyan alluded to this weapon in his seventeenth-century classic, Pilgrim's Progress. *Christian* reaches a valley on his journey through life:

I saw . . . there was on the right hand a very deep ditch; that ditch is it into which the blind have led the blind in all ages, and have both there miserably perished. Again, behold, on the left hand, there was a very dangerous quag, into which, if even a good man falls, he finds no bottom for his foot to stand on. . . . About the midst of this valley I perceived the mouth of hell to be, and it stood also hard by the wayside. Now, thought Christian, what shall I do? And ever anon [immediately] the flame and smoke would come out in such abundance, with sparks and hideous noises (things that cared not for Christian's sword. . .), that he was forced to put up his sword, and betake himself to another weapon, called all-prayer.<sup>1</sup>

*All-prayer* is the final weapon of our spiritual warfare. Paul tells the Ephesians to *pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests*.

Stott writes,

Most Christians pray sometimes, with some prayers and some degree of perseverance, for some of God's people. But to replace 'some' by 'all' in each of these expressions would be to introduce us to a new dimension of prayer. (Stott, pp. 283-284)

Think through these verses as a unit. Do you sense the spiritual battle around you?

Paul uses the word *stand* four times. What does he mean by *stand*? Why this four-fold repetition?

Are you employing the armor of God provided for you? What does this look like?

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<sup>1</sup> Christian's prayer in the valley is simple, *O Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul*.

Do you rely on prayer for your own protection and for the protection *of all the saints* (6:18)? What is your prayer-life like? When do you pray? What are your habits of prayer?

Spend some time as a group thinking through the past fifteen weeks of this study. What have you gleaned from Paul's Ephesian letter? How has this epistle affect your understanding of God, of the church, of your Christian life? Think back to our first study in this letter. Re-read and re-practice 1:3. Bless God!