

Notes on Ephesians

Commentary and Application

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ISBN: 9798707061769

DEDICATION

For the saints, especially those in Dothan, AL who I labor alongside. Above all else - for Jesus, who loves me in my wretchedness.

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PREFACE

Loved one,

Inside this book are my own personal notes from months of preparation and teaching through Paul's letter "to the saints who are in Ephesus." I am quite aware that there are many Bible teachers who prefer to teach God's Word extemporaneously or sans notes. I was part of this school myself at one time. What I found along the way is that my memory is prone to failure, and theologizing on the fly is dangerous. Now, at least, if my theology wanders into the crowded field of heresy, it is recorded in black and white for the faithful (and hopefully gracious) brother or sister to come alongside and offer Biblical correction.

Please, don't take my word for it! Ultimately, we are all responsible to search the Scriptures to see if these things are so, for it is by Scripture alone that we know truth (Acts 17:11). You will also find that these writings are not more unique or exhaustive, or even particularly exceptional compared to other similar works. But they are born out of prayer, searching the Scriptures, and attempting to communicate the centrality and sufficiency of Jesus Christ. These notes will not give all the answers to all the questions. In fact, there are many places where questions are left open, or standalone sentences glare on the page like signposts pointing (I hope) to deeper study. It is my prayer that the serious disciple will himself search the Scriptures and hear from the Lord Jesus through the Holy Spirit. He is ever faithful to teach us.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

Anthony

Notes on Ephesians: Commentary and Application

EPHESIANS 1 PART 1 | 1:1-6

The author of this letter is Paul, also called Saul of Tarsus. The date of this letter is probably around 62 A.D. during his first Roman imprisonment. It is one of Paul's latest letters, only succeeded by Philippians and the Pastoral Epistles (1 & 2 Timothy, Titus).

He is writing to a church in Ephesus, located in modern day Turkey.

The culture of Ephesus was heavily intertwined with the worship of the female deity, Diana (Roman), also called Artemis (Greek).

“Her most noted temple was at Ephesus. It was built outside the city walls, and was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world...it was the work of 220 years; built of shining marble... Behind the shrine was a treasury, where, as 'the safest bank in Asia,' nations and kings stored their most precious things." (Acts 19:23-41)¹

“The ritual of the temple services consisted of sacrifices and of ceremonial prostitution...”²

Paul knew this church quite well. He passed through Ephesus at the end of his second missionary journey.

¹ Easton, M. G. *Easton's Bible Dictionary*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1893.

² Orr, James, M.A., D.D. General Editor. "Entry for 'DIANA; ARTEMIS'". *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*. 1915.

After that, Ephesus was visited by a man named Apollos. Then, Paul returned to Ephesus on his third missionary journey as the Lord allowed and stayed with them for probably around three years or so.

While at Ephesus, he taught them about the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, discipleship, the Word, and outreach. He performed miracles, and as “the word of the Lord grew mightily,” it greatly challenged the culture in Ephesus. This all eventually led to civil unrest and rioting, after which Paul encouraged the disciples there and left for Macedonia.³

His final interaction with the Ephesians is recorded in Acts 20, where Paul warns the elders of the church to watch out for false teachers, even telling them that savage wolves and men would rise up from among their own number, speaking perverse things and leading many astray.

It is here that Paul declared famously in Acts 20:27: "For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God."⁴

This is the bedrock of sound teaching - the **WHOLE** counsel of God.

It is from this context that we enter into this blessed letter that is rich with profound theological truth. Some scholars report that Paul uses the Ephesian epistle to address the universal Church.

³ Acts 18-19.

⁴ Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the New King James Version.

VERSES 1-2

Paul sets forth this common introduction that is often repeated.

It is remarkable to think that these words are inspired by the Holy Spirit over and over again in Paul's writings.

When we consider the need for such a persistent reminder of Paul's election, we come to the conclusion that the attributes of God's true messengers are similarly marked.

They are marked as servants of Jesus Christ, brought into ministry by the will of God alone. They are chosen, elected by God to serve in His Kingdom.

This is contrary to some modern notions of ministry. Some believe that an education, a commissioning agency, or an ordination certificate bring people into ministry.

We are reminded time and time again in Paul's letters that servants of Jesus Christ are called, brought into the ministry, equipped, and sustained by the will of God.

Any other attempt to fabricate such a calling will show in time as the Lord Jesus keeps His Church from those frauds and robbers who seek this blessed calling for any other reason outside of God's election.

The audience of this letter is the collective group of believers in Ephesus whom Paul calls the saints (holy ones) and faithful. These are attributes of the members of Christ's Body - holiness and faithfulness.

About such attributes, Henry Alford remarks in his commentary: “The [holy ones] ἁγίοις and [faithful] πιστοῖς denote their spiritual life from its two sides—that of God who calls and sanctifies,—that of themselves who believe...He also notices in these expressions already a trace of the two great divisions of the Epistle—God’s grace towards us, and our faith towards Him.”⁵

Paul commends to these saints the grace and peace of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

We must understand that these terms are not just conversational fodder - meant as flowery language but as true substantial, doctrinally significant blessings that belong to those who, as Paul says in verse 1, are IN Christ - positionally speaking.

VERSES 3-4

This opening sentence is packed with doctrine. The underlying point, as we will see, is the doctrine of grace.

The first thing we must acknowledge is that this sentence that Paul opens Ephesians with is about God! God the Father is the subject, and everything we read afterwards communicates something about God the Father and his relationship with us.

Paul begins by praising God. He is holy, good, gracious, and many other things deserving our praise. He is the One who delivers peace to those who are in Christ.

⁵ Alford, H. (1976). *Alford's Greek Testament: an exegetical and critical commentary* (Vol. 3, p. 69). Grand Rapids, MI: Guardian Press.

And God the Father, whom we bless and praise, has blessed us with every spiritual blessing - read that again: “who has blessed us with every SPIRITUAL BLESSING.”

The blessings that Paul focuses on here are spiritual in nature. God is Spirit, and the blessings He provides are also spiritual. Yes, He cares for our physical needs, but don't forget Jesus' words in Matthew 6:31-32:

“...do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' "For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things” (Matt 6:31-32).

How do we value our spiritual blessings compared to physical blessings or physical provision? Are spiritual blessings sufficient for us? I pray so! In Paul's mind they are everything, and He praises God that by His grace, He has given us all of these spiritual blessings.

Also note - where are these blessings? Paul tells us these are “in the heavenly places.”

*Note the redundancy of the preposition “in” - in Christ Jesus, in the heavenly places, in Christ, in Him, in love, in the Beloved. This informs where our focus is to be placed!

We focus so much on what is right in front of us, while Paul was refocusing very early in this letter on the weighty, substantial, eternal blessings of God the Father given to those in Christ.

This is a bold and poignant reminder of how the Father relates to us and how we relate to him as He directs our cares to the heavenly places.

Heavenly places is a phrase five times found in this Epistle and not elsewhere (Eph 1:20; Eph 2:6; 3:10; 6:12).⁶

It has often been said disapprovingly that some Christians are too heavenly-minded to be of any earthly good. I would contend that if we are not heavenly-minded, if we are not reliant on those spiritual blessings found in the heavenly places, then we can be of NO earthly good.

Saints, this is where we are supposed to be looking - at our Heavenly Father, in the heavenly realm, by the Spirit as we exist in Christ.

“If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth” (Col. 3:1-2).

Furthermore, we find in verse 4 the unsearchable depth of God’s grace bestowed upon the saints through election. God has elected those who are to be His from before the foundation of the world!

Just as Paul is an Apostle by the will of God, we are chosen by the will of God to work in His Kingdom.

⁶ Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. (1997). *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (Vol. 2, p. 341). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

This is a great mystery and one that has caused great consternation among the saints. It is on this divisive subject that we love to divide. We are quite willing to fight each other tooth and nail to demonstrate how smart we are and how sure we are of our own theological framework.

On this doctrine we have split the Church into “-isms.”

The two camps are known as either Arminianists or Calvinists and rely on the teachings of either Jacobus Arminius or John Calvin respectively.

Arminianists are known for their focus on the importance of the will of man in making a choice for Christ. On the other hand, Calvinists assert that it is God alone who elects people either to salvation or wrath.

Each camp has adopted a 5-point model to communicate their position and opposing the other view.

I would make it known to you today that many Christians believe they have a more complete view of these arguments than they actually do. These conversations deserve much more nuance and grace than only free will or only election.

Here's the long and short of it: both the will of man and election by God are taught in the Bible. That is why the conversation is ongoing. The problem is not careful theological thought, but that some people have tied their identity to these doctrines rather than to Christ.

One of our distinctives is a balanced theology. We don't deal in “-isms.” The center and core of our doctrine is Christ.

Additionally, Christians are to be known by their love for one another, not how well we can defend one side or the other. More often than not, what happens is that in our zeal, pride, and ignorance, we end up wounding other dear believers, whom Christ died for, just to prove a point.

One of my favorite examples of the intersection of election and free will is found in the Old Testament. God's covenant people, the Israelites, were chosen by Him, and yet they had to make a choice.

"I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, [that] I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; "that you may love the LORD your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He [is] your life and the length of your days..." (Deut. 30:19-20).

With Christ and the disciples Jesus is very clear that He chose them!

"You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and [that] your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you" (John 15:16).

Again, Jesus teaches on election:

"All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out" (John 6:37).

And in Revelation, we find the open invitation to "whoever desires."

“And the Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely” (Rev. 22:17).

And in John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

This is precisely why this debate has continued for the last 500 years or so - because the Bible teaches both that God has elected us to salvation and that people are invited to the Kingdom.

If you want to consider this even more deeply, consider this parable taught by Christ:

"Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. 'Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding.' "So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good. And the wedding [hall] was filled with guests. "But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. "So he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. "Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast [him] into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' "For many are called, but few [are] chosen" (Matt. 22:8-14).

So...some respond to the invitation, but they're not dressed for the occasion!

Loved one, you are chosen by God, invited to the wedding, robed in Christ's righteousness. Know that! AND you have to make a choice.

When we partition these two views as competing rather than complementary, we find some real nasty anti-gospel implications.

At its worst, free will only becomes a works-based theology where we are the hero of our own salvation because we made the RIGHT choice. That which you earn, you must sustain - this leads to legalism.

At its best, the doctrine of free will informs the Christian who has been elected by God that we have to make a choice every day, every moment, to follow after Jesus. Though we may fail many times, we continue to take up our cross daily.

At its worst, the doctrine of election condemns people to eternity in hell with no hope of reconciliation because one is either chosen or not. This leads to a disconnected evangelism by those of us who are ambassadors, AND this leads to an uncommitted discipleship by believers who never grow in holiness, instead choosing to abuse grace.

At its best, the doctrine of election acknowledges the depravity of humanity, promises us that we are saved by grace alone, and that we shall be carried to holiness by grace because Christ is faithful even when we are not. It renews our hope in Christ daily because it is not dependent on our own work.

VERSES 5-6

This was the plan! God was not caught off guard, scrambling to figure out how to save His creation, when we decided to go off the rails!

God is not reacting to a series of tragic misdeeds but is carefully ordering things to reveal Himself, His grace, His love, His mercy, and His holiness.

He determined before time to reveal His character and nature to mankind through Christ.

This means that the cross, the resurrection, the Church, the saints, and the work of the saints are all predetermined by God! And that is beautiful! God has eternally desired to reveal Himself and has been revealing Himself to His creation.

“The very time when the election took place proves it to be free; for what could we have deserved, or what merit did we possess, before the world was made? How childish is the attempt to meet this argument by the following sophism! “We were chosen because we were worthy, and because God foresaw that we would be worthy.” We were all lost in Adam; and therefore, had not God, through his own election, rescued us from perishing, there was nothing to be foreseen.”⁷

⁷ Calvin, J., & Pringle, W. (2010). *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians* (p. 198). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

Now, pause for a minute and consider the purpose of our election, the purpose of predestination. What is it? What does Paul communicate to the Church here?

The purpose of election is the glory of God.

We are chosen, adopted by Him, to be holy for His good pleasure, not our own. To be reconciled to Him - to have closeness with Him wherein we are made holy, as He is holy. We are predestined to His Kingdom so that He may be praised for His grace.

When the world looks on at us wretched, crooked souls who God "...has delivered from the power of darkness and conveyed into the Kingdom of the Son of His love," that glorifies and magnifies the grace of God (Col. 1:13).

Who would do such a thing for people like us!? Only the living, one true God, our Father in heaven.

And this thing is done by Christ, who is called the Beloved. Because He is Beloved, we are too.

This is the good message that we bear to others - God the Father has chosen you to come near to Him by Christ before the foundation of the world. Will you choose to answer that call? You are chosen - choose life.

"We dare not diminish what Paul writes here. Believers are chosen by God, and they are chosen before they *have done* anything or *have been* anything for God. The great light of this truth casts some shadows; namely, in trying to reconcile human responsibility with divine sovereignty. Yet the purpose of light is not to cast shadows but to guide our

steps. The light of God's selection gives us assurance to the permanence of His plan and His love towards us."⁸

⁸ Guzik, D. (2013). *Ephesians* (Eph 1:3–6). Santa Barbara, CA: David Guzik.

EPHESIANS 1 PART 2 | 1:7-14

At the very beginning of this letter, we find Paul wading into theologically deep waters.

When we consider these verses, we see that they do have some traits in common with the doxologies of the New Testament.

A doxology is used to communicate praise and doctrine simultaneously.

As one text puts it, “A ‘doxological’ approach to theology stresses the importance of praise and worship in theological reflection.”⁹

It is not only that we are considering substantial truth in an intellectual sense, but also in a spiritual/emotional sense. We are moved to praise and worship because of the truths that we are considering.

Perhaps one of the most famous doxologies in the NT is found in Jude:

“Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, And to present [you] faultless Before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, To God our Savior, Who alone is wise, [Be] glory and majesty, Dominion and power, Both now and forever. Amen” (Jude 1:24-25).

⁹McGrath, Alister E. *Christian Theology: An Introduction*. Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2017.

The dual nature of this Spirit-inspired literature, as it communicates both praise and doctrine, demands careful reflection. We aren't simply to KNOW the facts, but as the facts travel the distance from our head to our heart, they move us to worship in the immediate sense and to live lives of praise and worship to God in an enduring sense.

About our text Matthew Henry writes, "He begins with thanksgivings and praise, and enlarges with a great deal of fluency and copiousness of affection upon the exceedingly great and precious benefits which we enjoy by Jesus Christ. For the great privileges...are very aptly recounted and enlarged upon in our praises to God."¹⁰

It is with that in mind that we turn to our text. I want to read through verses 3-14 to gain the full picture and then return to verse 7 for our study.

VERSE 7

Verse 7 begins with the prepositional phrase, "In Him." This sets the context for the remainder of Paul's thought and will be repeated throughout his writing.

Please take a moment to consider what these words actually mean to us. What does it mean to be IN HIM? What are the implications for our lives? These are big thoughts!

I would submit to you that to be "In Him" indicates our full and total immersion (a true baptism) into the person and work of Jesus Christ.

¹⁰Henry, M. (1994). *Matthew Henry's commentary on the whole Bible: complete and unabridged in one volume* (p. 2307). Peabody: Hendrickson.

This carries on the thought found in verse 6 as Paul writes that God the Father has made us accepted in the Beloved.

Paul continues to explain to the Ephesians and to us, the descendants of the Apostolic Church, what it is that we gain as we exist in our immersion in Christ: namely, redemption through His blood.

This means that we have been set free because of Christ's payment. Our freedom cost something!

The payment made was not in silver, gold, bitcoin, or dollars but was purchased through something much more valuable. The currency used to purchase our liberty was the blood of Jesus Christ. It was a bloody affair, Christ on a cross, that loosed the bonds of our spiritual enslavement.

Christ's blood was poured out, drained from His Body, on our behalf. He gave it abundantly, not begrudgingly, according to the riches of His grace.

We cannot ignore the facts! Paul continues to drive home the dominant theme of God's grace towards us. In the first seven verses, he has already mentioned grace three times!

This will ultimately culminate in Ephesians 2:8 when Paul declares, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; [it is] the gift of God."

That is the point of grace. No matter how many times we repeat this in our lives, we can never say it enough. It is according to the riches of God's grace that we are redeemed from the penalty of sin and death, not because of anything

we have done. We have never possessed enough spiritual capital, assets, or cash to pay or bribe our way out of justice.

It is grace alone, loved one, by which we are redeemed. We are redeemed because of who God is and not because of any innate goodness on our own part.

VERSE 8

God has extended His life-giving, sin-conquering grace towards us abundantly, not miserly, **IN ALL WISDOM AND UNDERSTANDING.**

We should take a minute here to understand what Paul is saying.

The adjective “ALL” indicates to me that this is applied to the characteristics of God and not myself. He alone possesses all wisdom and understanding.

God’s plan of salvation by the blood of Jesus Christ is not uncalculated, reactionary, foolish, or without understanding.

On the contrary, God’s gracious plan of redemption through the blood of Jesus Christ is marked by ALL wisdom and understanding.

“Paul gives to the gospel the magnificent appellations of wisdom and prudence, for the purpose of leading the Ephesians to despise all contrary doctrines. The false apostles insinuated themselves, under the pretence of imparting views more elevated than the elementary instructions which Paul conveyed. And the devil, in order to undermine our

faith, labours, as far as he can, to disparage the gospel. Paul, on the other hand, builds up the authority of the gospel, that believers may rest upon it with unshaken confidence. All wisdom means—full or perfect wisdom.”¹¹

Paul also writes to the Corinthians, “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent." Where [is] the wise? Where [is] the scribe? Where [is] the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1:18-24).

Far from being reckless, ill-informed, or rash, Paul teaches the Ephesians that God’s grace, the riches of Christ’s blood applied to us in order to effect our freedom from sin, is both wise and understanding.

¹¹Calvin, J., & Pringle, W. (2010). Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians (p. 203). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

VERSE 9: THE GIFTS OF GOD ABOUND TO US!

We get to see that in God's unmatched wisdom and understanding, He has communicated THE MYSTERY OF HIS WILL to us, His creation!

How many times have you wondered, "What is God's will?"

There has been much teaching on God's perfect will versus His permissive will. The plain language version of that centers on the thought of what God desires for our lives versus what He will allow in our lives.

Oftentimes, we like to personalize God's will and ask, "What is God's will for my life in particular?"

I would submit to you that God's will for us individually and corporately is nested in what God's will is universally. AND Paul tells us here that God the Father has made the mystery of His will known to us because it pleases Him for us to know it, and He has intended to reveal His will to us.

This is a tremendous gift on top of our redemption, and it is by redemption that God changes our perspective and is pleased to allow us to see His will, no longer as a mystery, but as something we can know.

Story time: In the Army, we used to do planning for large operations. No matter where our particular unit fit in the organizational hierarchy, we were to understand the mission and intent of each level, two levels up.

We were to understand how our particular operation supported, or was “nested” within, the higher headquarter’s mission and intent.

Now, it’s not a perfect analogy, but my point is this: the will that God has for our lives individually is nested within the universal Body of Christ, within the eternal Kingdom of God.

It is God’s universal will that we are all to be advancing, not our own version of God’s will!

Everything we do is to be nested in how God is advancing His Kingdom.

VERSE 10: GOD’S WILL REVEALED

So...what is God’s will? If it is His good pleasure, and He has purposed in His heart to reveal it to us, what is it?

Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, tells us here: “And this is the plan: At the right time he will bring everything together under the authority of Christ - everything in heaven and on earth” (Eph. 1:10, NLT).

God’s will is to wrap all of creation up under the authority and power of Jesus Christ.

As one text reads, “God’s ultimate plan is to bring together—to ultimately resolve—all things in Christ, either through Jesus as a Savior or Jesus as a Judge; this will happen in the fullness of the times.”¹²

¹²Guzik, D. (2013). *Ephesians* (Eph 1:9–12). Santa Barbara, CA: David Guzik.

God's will for our individual lives is that we who believe would exist to advance God's will, not primarily for our own interests, certainly not by our own strength or resources, but because the Spirit of God lives within us and moves us to accomplish His will, because we have been immersed IN HIM.

But wait, there's more!

VERSE 11

More than redemption, more than being gifted with an understanding of God's will, we also receive an inheritance!

God has orchestrated all of this according to His own eternal purpose before time for His glory so that those who are being gathered together can see, acknowledge, and magnify the glory of the almighty creator and redeemer of mankind.

When all things are finally gathered together before Jesus Christ we who are His will enter into our inheritance once and for all.

VERSES 12-14: CARRYING OUT GOD'S WILL // THE SEAL OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

We find here an interesting distinction Paul makes between saints that speaks to the ongoing work of "gathering together all things in Christ." This speaks to the advancement of God's Kingdom in a very real, palpable sense.

We see two general parties of saints:

1. "we who first trusted..."

2. “you [who] also trusted after you heard...”

Paul’s own life existed within God’s perfect will to gather the elect in Christ.

The gospel didn’t stop with Paul, even as he considered himself as one who “first trusted in Christ.” He continued to preach the gospel, teach the whole counsel of God, and to make disciples. Having found God’s will, he lived for it. His own will was conformed to God’s will.

The gospel shouldn’t stop with us either. If it does, what are the implications of that? Are we not interested in advancing the glorious will of our God who has established this plan before time? I pray we are.

What was spoken and what was heard that moved these Ephesians from the realm of unbelievers to those who believed?

The Word of truth, the gospel of salvation!

This is amazing! Read again: “In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation.”

This is what brings people into the Kingdom, brings our will into alignment with the mystery of God’s will - the good message, redemption through Christ’s blood, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace, which He made to abound toward us.

Notice Paul doesn’t say that a series of extra-biblical reading material, a tract, a spiritual experience, laying on of

hands, debating, feelings, or emotions were the cause of belief.

BUT the substance that moves us from darkness to light is hearing the gospel, the Word of truth. Somebody told us the truth and we believed!

Paul says, “How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?” (Rom. 10:14).

Part of our blessed calling inside God’s purpose is to speak aloud the good message, the word of truth. Ultimately, this is what people believe or reject.

And then we receive ANOTHER GIFT on top of redemption, on top of understanding the will of God, on top of an eternal inheritance. We are gifted with the very Spirit of God - the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, who marks us as His own, who signifies to all powers and principalities that we have been redeemed by Christ.

The person of the Holy Spirit marks us in such a way that we are undeniably possessed by God.

“The word ‘seal,’ ...is often used figuratively for the act or token of authentication, confirmation, proof, security or possession...God by His Spirit indicates who are His, as the owner sets his seal on his property; and just as documents are sealed up until the proper time for opening them, so

Christians are sealed up by the Holy Spirit ‘unto the day of redemption.’”¹³

This is one of the ways that the Holy Spirit relates to the believer. We are marked by our family seal as a sign to all who see that we are part of the Kingdom of God.

Furthermore, Paul’s language here indicates that the Holy Spirit who we receive is a sign to us and to those around us that we are “under contract,” as it were.

The original language indicates, “...*earnest, earnest-money*, a large part of the payment, given in advance as a security that the whole will be paid afterwards.”¹⁴

And why has God done this thing? Why has God redeemed us by the blood of Christ? Why has he revealed the mystery of His will to us? Why has he called us into His will to participate in His ongoing work of gathering all things together in Christ? Why has He given us an inheritance? Why has He set His mark upon us by the Holy Spirit? Why has He gifted us with an inheritance?

To the praise of His glory. So that He may be made known and praised by and for the work of His hands. Our works fail so often, but He will never fail. His glorious work is revealed among His creation for His glory alone - His splendor, brightness, magnificence.

¹³Orr, James, M.A., D.D. General Editor. "Entry for 'SEAL'". "International Standard Bible Encyclopedia". 1915.

¹⁴Souter, A. (1917). *A Pocket Lexicon to the Greek New Testament* (p. 38). Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Some people argue that they can't see God at work, that the world is too dark. But look around, loved one, at the work that the Father has been doing by the Holy Spirit in the lives of His saints who were purchased through the blood of Jesus Christ.

The marks of His work are clearly evident. The gathering of all creation together in Christ is happening and shall one day be complete. And we get to be a part of that for the glory of God alone.

Be encouraged, loved one! You know God's will! Now live it out by the Holy Spirit that lives in you to the praise of His glory. Amen.

EPHESIANS 1 PART 3 | 1:15-23

VERSES 15-16

THEREFORE = In light of what has been set forth in verses 1-14, Paul is moved to action. He is moved to prayer.

Paul's letter to the Ephesians is rich with doctrine, especially doctrine regarding the Church.

The doctrines that Paul opens this letter with are expansive in their scope and scale. Truly Paul is calling to mind the power, glory, and majesty of God. These truths impact us so greatly when we take time to consider them that our spirits soar in praise, worship, and prayer.

These truths remind us of our closeness with the Father, Son, and Spirit and how we have become beneficiaries of God's incomprehensible grace.

These are the truths that Paul calls to mind:

- God the Father, whom we worship, has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places.
- He has chosen us before the foundation of the world.
- He has predestined us to adoption into His holy family.
- He has made us accepted in Jesus Christ by whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.
- He has poured out His grace upon us abundantly.
- He is revealing to us the mystery of His perfect will.

- He has given us an inheritance according to His purpose.
- He has sealed us for eternity by His personal presence in the person of the Holy Spirit, who dwells within and among us.

AND, God has done all of this according to His divine initiative for His glory alone.

All of this combined is a glorious portrait of intimate love, care, and overwhelming affection from God the Father for His children.

We could take each of these doctrines individually and study them for weeks! And these are the foundational thoughts that move Paul in further discourse to the Ephesians.

All of these mind-blowing truths frame Paul's continuing address. Paul understands that the very existence of the Ephesian church is a product of God's sovereignty, grace, and affection wrapped up in the doctrine that he sets forth as directed by the Holy Spirit.

It is that culmination of doctrines, realized in the Church, that moves Paul to prayer, having reflected upon their faith in Jesus and their love for all the saints.

Take a moment to note that faith in Jesus manifests itself in love - love for God and love for others. Love is the good fruit of a deeply rooted faith in Christ.

It is plain to Paul that the Ephesian believers lived out their faith practically by their love for "all the saints." They were

living out Jesus' words: "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35).

Notice, too, that Paul uses some very strong language here in describing his own prayer habits for them.

His prayers of thanksgiving for them were continuous, never ceasing.

Oh, that we would be people who thank God for other believers - knowing that it is by God's will and for His glory that they have been brought into the Kingdom.

VERSE 17

Paul also prays specifically that they would be supplied with the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, that their understanding would increase.

He desired that believers would grow to know God, to learn of His characteristics, and to develop a deeper understanding of these vast truths.

We will perhaps never truly understand the fullness of God's wisdom and character - it is, in fact, unsearchable, too deep for us to fully understand or define in this lifetime.

"Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable [are] His judgments and His ways past finding out!" (Rom. 11:33).

"Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the LORD, The Creator of the ends of the earth,

Neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable” (Isa. 40:28).

But we can GROW in understanding, in wisdom, and in knowledge as He reveals Himself to us by His Word and by His Spirit. God desires for us to grow in our understanding of Him.

“But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge” (2 Pet. 1:5).

We are to be growing in our faith progressively. As the Holy Spirit ministers to us by God’s Word within His Body, we are growing up in Him, adding to our faith a moral goodness/purity that comes by being made into the image of Christ, adding to our purity knowledge that comes by adopting the mind of Christ.

“But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18).

Luke tells us that Jesus taught the disciples after His resurrection: “He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures” (Luke 24:44-45).

Paul writes to the Corinthians, “Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature” (1 Cor. 14:20).

Where does this understanding and knowledge come from? “The God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory...” (Eph. 1:17).

It is God who gives us understanding. He gives this to us through a multitude of avenues - teachers, loved ones, dis-

ciples, etc. But all of those are under His will; it is God the Father who gives us wisdom, knowledge, and understanding about who He is.

How is it that we come to a deeper understanding, a deeper knowledge, of who God is and how He relates to us? We consider the great truths of God's Word! That is what Paul prayed for in verses 18-21.

VERSES 18-21

Paul didn't only pray for a general dispensation of wisdom and understanding or that everybody would just become smarter, but that they would come to know God more deeply through understanding specific truths about who God is and how He relates to His creation.

Specifically, Paul prayed the Ephesians would understand more, which are equally applicable to our circumstances, are the hope of His calling, the riches of the glory of His inheritance, and the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, as demonstrated by the resurrection.

We shall take each of these in turn.

1. The hope of His calling - God's calling is hopeful. This has vast implications for how we are to carry out the Great Commission of making disciples.

Do we truly believe that God's calling is hopeful and that it banishes despair and gifts believers with an eternally hopeful perspective?

If we truly grasped this hope, or rather are grasped by it, then we would not be ashamed of the gospel

since it is HOPE! And what do people need? HOPE!
And where do we find hope? In the person and work
of Jesus Christ!

2. The riches of the glory of His inheritance - the inheritance that is God's. What is that? This is theologically tricky territory because whenever we hear "inheritance," we might automatically assume it is a reference to our eternity with Jesus. And that makes sense - in verse v.11 Paul tells the Ephesians that they have obtained an inheritance in Him!

But, let's relook at the writing - "the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints."

Our inheritance is obtained in Him, His inheritance is obtained IN THE SAINTS! We are bound up together!

In the former times, God's inheritance was categorized as the nation of Israel.

"For the LORD's portion [is] His people; Jacob [is] the place of His inheritance" (Deut. 32:9).

"For the LORD will not cast off His people, Nor will He forsake His inheritance" (Ps. 94:14).

"He also chose David His servant, And took him from the sheepfolds; From following the ewes that had young He brought him, To shepherd Jacob His people, And Israel His inheritance" (Ps. 78:70-71).

BUT NOW, Paul says the riches, the glory of God's inheritance, are bound up in the saints - the holy

ones! Who are the saints? All those who have been made holy by faith in Christ, those who have been adopted into God's Kingdom and robed in His righteousness.

This is a remarkable demonstration of God's grace and His eternal value system, because while we are found to be completely spiritually destitute, we are given the Kingdom.

"Blessed [are] the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:3).

Do you see how God's inheritance has expanded!? From Israel to all who believe, because God has poured out His grace upon us, and that is glorious to Him and to us! He has made that which is spiritually devoid of intrinsic value to have eternal value by His grace.

3. The exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe.

He has demonstrated His power by making average, everyday people, dead in sin, poor in Spirit, alive to Him. This is accomplished only by His power! We cannot achieve this in our own power. We are without strength, unable to revive ourselves.

BUT, as Paul writes to the Romans: "For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly" (Rom. 5:6).

Notice how all that we have been examining is about what God has done for us, irrespective of what we have done for Him! It is all according to the riches of His grace.

This is all about His calling, His inheritance, His power! We are the beneficiaries of HIM.

Now, as we consider these deep theological truths, one might ask, “How can we know that any of this is true?!” Paul tells us that it is by the resurrection that we know it to be true.

VERSES 20-21

THIS IS HUGE!!! DO WE GRASP THIS?? We know of God’s power. We know truth, not because of a feeling, emotion, sixth sense, intuition, or clever proverbs. We know this is true and real because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ!

The things we have examined: Hope, glory, a heavenly inheritance, wisdom, understanding, knowledge, power - these things are primarily invisible.

BUT, God has stamped all creation with an irrefutable proof of His power, proof that His Word is certain, that all of these invisible ideals that we hang our hope on are coming to pass - the resurrection.

The resurrection is the central truth on which our faith hangs! Paul explains this in 1 Corinthians 15.

“But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching [is] empty and your faith [is] also empty. Yes, and we are found

false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up--if in fact the dead do not rise. For if [the] dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith [is] futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. But now Christ is risen from the dead, [and] has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man [came] death, by Man also [came] the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive” (1 Cor. 15:13-22).

Understand this truth - the man Jesus of Nazareth is alive today! That fact is more than theologizing about hope - it is truth, and it IS hope. It is the proof of God’s eternal power and authority.

It is THE singular fact that gives meaning to our faith and compels us to share hope and truth with others. Without it, the atonement, the Spirit, salvation are unprovable! By it we are certain of our hope.

Let us ask another question relative to our faith: Where is Jesus?

Paul addresses this thought here in a physical and authoritative way. The man Jesus of Nazareth physically exists in the heavenly realm, at the right hand of the Father.

We are very often taught that Jesus lives in our heart. Perhaps what people mean to express by this is that the hope of Jesus, or the doctrine of Jesus, or the Spirit of Jesus, exist within us. But the reality is that the physical man, Jesus of

Nazareth, who was resurrected bodily in the flesh, actually lives in heaven.

Authoritatively, Jesus exists over all principality, power, might, dominion, and every name that is named in all ages for all time.

There is nothing above Him. There is nothing stronger than Him. There is nothing that has a more expansive Kingdom. There is no one who has a greater name.

As Peter preaches in Acts, “There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

He is all powerful, He is God the Son, over all creation.

And what is remarkable is that we have a very special, intentional relationship with Jesus, “the name above all names,” established by the Father.

VERSES 22-23

What does that relationship look like?

Even as Jesus is over all things, and all things are in subjection to Him, the way He relates and communes with all creation is not the same.

He is specially, uniquely, and intentionally wed to the Church.

As a matter of fact, Paul tells us that the Church is the Body of Christ and that He is the head of that Body.

This is more than an incidental, or transient, relationship. This is an undeniable, indivisible relationship, just as your head is attached to your body. You cannot separate your head from your body and live. So it is with the Church.

Also note that it is Christ who is over the Church! The Church is His! No pastor, bishop, or elder shares headship with Jesus.

Where any part of the Church is found with anything else as the head - a board, conference, panel, etc. - there we find a church separated from Christ.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul explains to the Corinthian church that they are each individually members of one Body, bound together for the benefit of the whole Body. And here we find that the only person who fills the role of the head, that member that directs the rest of the Body, is Jesus Christ.

Since the Church is Christ's Body, this is massively important!

The Church matters in a way that perhaps we have devalued over time, not considering that we are devaluing the very Body of Christ represented in the earthly and heavenly realm.

Some have proposed that there is a substantial delineation between the universal and local church, that over time we have just corrupted the Body of Christ. Because of this, you can't trust any church, so you don't have to be a part of any church.

This further devalues God's Word and the Body of Christ.

But bearing that argument in mind, we come to some theory that bears considering.

Is there a difference between the universal and local church? Is Paul only talking about the universal Body, the universal Church?

Some Christians use this as an excuse to abstain from fulfilling their God-appointed role in the local body, the local church.

They say, "I don't need to go to church to be saved," or some other similar nonsense.

Barring the discussion on the poison of pride that gives birth to such thought, marked by an unteachable heart, an ungracious spirit, and selfish consumerism, the Church is important to Jesus because it is His Body, so it ought to be important to us!

"And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as [is] the manner of some, but exhorting [one another], and so much the more as you see the Day approaching" (Heb. 10:24-25).

"The universal church is often termed invisible, yet the New Testament never speaks of the invisible church. Even as members of a local church are concrete people, so are members of the universal church...As for membership in an invisible church without fellowship with any local assembly, this concept is never contemplated in the New Testa-

ment. The universal church was the universal fellowship of believers who met visibly in local assemblies...The one universal church is manifested in a particular locality, yet each individual assembly is the church in that place.”¹⁵

We are part of the universal Church expressed locally in Dothan, AL, along with our sister churches in this city who are also visible expressions of Christ’s Body.

“She is the continued revelation of His divine life in human form...”¹⁶

This is so huge! The Church matters to Jesus! Further in this same letter, Paul will refer to the Church as the very bride of Christ - his wife! We don’t HAVE to GO to church; we ARE part of the Church if we are Christ’s. We GET to be part of His bride and His Body. We GET to show the world Jesus as we love one another because of our faith.

That is what we will continue to develop as we continue in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, this doctrine of the universal Church expressed locally by the saints, God’s inheritance among all the nations of the earth, advancing His Kingdom by His Word, by His Spirit, by His will, and for His glory.

¹⁵Saucy, Robert L. *The Church in God's Program*. Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1978.

¹⁶Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. (1997). *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (Vol. 2, p. 344). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

EPHESIANS 2 PART 1 | 2:1-10

*Contextually, this follows “Jesus as head over the Church” (1:22-23) and culminates in 2:22 with God building His Kingdom, His Church, with Jews and Gentiles alike. There are some important doctrines to examine along the way, as they relate to how God is building His Church and what that teaches us about who He is.

Chapter one concluded with the Apostle Paul detailing how God has demonstrated the immensity of His power (1:19) by raising Jesus Christ from the dead.

Because God the Father has raised Christ from the dead, we are certain that His Word is true and that His promises are coming to pass.

Paul also relayed to the Ephesians that God has set Jesus Christ over all things authoritatively and that a special relationship exists between Jesus and this divine institution we call the Church, wherein He is the head, and the Church is His Body.

As one commentator succinctly writes, “She [the church] is the continued revelation of His divine life in human form.”¹⁷

¹⁷Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. (1997). *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (Vol. 2, p. 344). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

Paul continues to lay out for the Ephesians the doctrinal and practical truths of Christ's Church as He serves as the head of the Body.

Paul moves from a heart-felt prayer for the Ephesians, that they would come to a deeper understanding of God's character for them, to a reminder of their former character apart from Christ.

Paul prays earnestly that they might understand God's hope, God's inheritance, and God's power. Then, in our current text, he reels them back in to examine their past.

This is needed because sometimes, especially after spending some time with the Lord and being conformed to His image, we can become sanctimonious, "holier than thou." We forget where we came from.

Rather than adopting the humility of Christ, we consider ourselves to have fully attained His power and authority, all the while ignoring the fullness of His character characterized by love and grace.

VERSES 1-3

Paul reminds the Ephesians of their previous state relative to God in order to further develop their understanding of who God is, how powerful He is, and How vastly His favor extends to them.

I would call this a portrait of an average human. This is man's natural state apart from Christ.

*Textual note: the phrase in verse 1, "He made alive," is found italicized in the NKJV because it is not found this

early in the Greek text, but rather is inferred here from verse 5. The reason for this is because “He begins with an incomplete sentence; the participial clause with which verse 1 begins (“and you being dead”) demands a finite verb such as “he saved you” or “he brought you to life.” But the sentence is left incomplete as the writer expands not only on his readers’ previous condition of spiritual death (verses 1–2) but on the condition of all mankind (verse 3). In verse 4 he starts a new sentence in which the thought is completed (at the end of verse 7); in verse 5 he picks up the participial clause which appears in verse 1, but changes from the second person plural “you” to the first person plural “we” (“and we being dead in transgressions”).¹⁸

Paul’s point here is all about the universality of spiritual death: “You all were dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1).

There is no one exempt from this condition. One is not required to be especially wicked or diabolical to fit into this category. Spiritual deadness is our common state.

There’s much conversation and controversy in the current culture about whether or not people are born a particular way. This conversation is had in regards to the LGBTQ community. It may even be had for people who are predisposed to addiction.

Leaving that question aside for the moment, I promise you that you were born dead in sin and trespasses.

¹⁸Bratcher, R. G., & Nida, E. A. (1993). A handbook on Paul’s letter to the Ephesians (p. 40). New York: United Bible Societies.

As David writes, “For I was born a sinner--yes, from the moment my mother conceived me” (Ps. 51:5, NLT).

“These wicked people are born sinners; even from birth they have lied and gone their own way” (Psa. 58:3, NLT).

This message is a hard one to preach, but it is the truth and deserves consideration.

We must be clear to state that God’s holy Word describes all of us as dead because of sin. No heartbeat, no consciousness, no willpower, no ability to spark ourselves back to life. Dead.

What is sin? Perhaps you’ve heard that word your whole life without considering it. The Biblical meaning for sin is failing to hit the mark.

“**ἁμαρτία**, -ας, ἡ,- *a failing to hit the mark...whether it occurs by omission or commission, in thought and feeling or in speech and action.*”¹⁹

Can you land a helicopter anywhere? No. There’s a mark to hit or you might die. That’s sin.

What are trespasses? Entering into those areas which should not be entered into. Consider a “No Trespassing” sign. It is a willful violation of a stated boundary.

¹⁹Thayer, J. H. (1889). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: being Grimm’s Wilke’s Clavis Novi Testamenti* (p. 30). New York: Harper & Brothers.

Illustration: Impact areas on military bases are the areas where ordinance is exploding or waiting to explode. These areas are off limits because they may kill a trespasser.

We have borne in our souls the natural penalty of ignoring God's boundaries and falling short of holiness - death.

All of us in our previous lives before Christ were doing our own thing, according to our own conscience, whatever we felt was right and good, whatever we felt was satisfying, irrespective of God's holiness.

Perhaps we did so without even giving a second thought to God's holiness and how much He desires for us to be like He is, to be with Him.

Here is a loving reminder for the proud soul still in that life of doing whatever is right in their own eyes, making snap judgments on morality and goodness that fit within their own desire for personal gratification - please know that you are not a pioneer or unique or clever. You are predictably living out your life as mankind has done for centuries.

Over three thousand years ago it was written, "In those days [there was] no king in Israel; everyone did [what was] right in his own eyes" (Judg. 21:25).

"There is a way [that seems] right to a man, But its end [is] the way of death" (Prov. 14:12).

Let's not get cocky, though, loved ones. We all walked according to the course of this world! Whatever the prevailing wisdom of the age was when we were separated from God, we all lived that life.

And then Paul gets real, and he writes something that should terrify us down to our bones. He says that in the Ephesians' former state, and universally, we all followed somebody who he refers to as, "the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who works in children of disobedience" (Eph. 2:2).

Who is that?! This term is a Biblical euphemism referring to Satan.

Satan is also referred to as, "the god of this age" (2 Cor 4:4), "the ruler of the darkness of this age" (Eph 6:12), the father of lies (John 8:44), and accuser of the brethren (Rev 12:10).

Sound unbelievable? Believe it! Not all of Satan's devices come packaged in red tights with horns and a pitchfork.

Now, not all of our sin is because of Satan; a good bit of it is because we are naturally dead in our sins. We don't know anything different except darkness and sin and disobedience, because we were born that way!

Paul's point here is that we all once lived apart from Christ, according to, in subjection to, in agreement with, and under the influence of...Satan.

That may seem like a hard pill to swallow! Good people who are otherwise uninterested in Christ or holiness or the Church or God may balk at the suggestion. They may not support or even believe in an almighty God, but certainly they would reject the idea that they are in league with Satan!

They may claim to be indifferent to the whole conversation. I would suggest that might make Satan quite pleased indeed.

The truth is that one cannot be apathetic to the “prince of the power of the air” (Eph. 2:2); we live in his realm!

AND we WERE part of his tribe. We can easily look back and catalog our disobedience toward God, our rebellious hearts or our apathy.

That is the spirit of Satan: opposed to holiness, opposed to God the Father, Son, and Spirit.

How does this manifest itself practically?

We conducted ourselves in the lust of the flesh - we lived for those things that brought temporary, bodily pleasure. Paul also points out that we lived for those things that, while they are evil and destructive, fulfilled the base desires of our MINDS, TOO!

Some people like to deal with sin with technicality, by saying that they can indulge in sin mentally, but if they don't physically put their body to the task, they haven't really sinned. Not so! Our minds play an equal role in wickedness.

And because of that, because we were in an alliance with Satan, because we were disobedient, because we lived solely to please the base desires of our bodies or to get our neurons firing in a way that hurt us spiritually and denies the holiness of God, we were, by nature, children deserving of wrath with no substantial redeeming qualities.

This is hard to preach, loved one! I wish I could say that God's Word tells us that "everything is awesome, everything is cool when you're part of a team," but it's just not so.

We were rotting on the inside, putrefying before Christ. This is our previous state apart from Christ, and it's so important to recognize that.

For those who have not come to know that they are dead - separated from God - hear me, you are rotten, decaying on the inside. Your soul has been wounded mortally, and there is no way out.

This was our former state; this is where we all came from, just like everyone else.

But there is hope, because God raises the dead! We who are Christ's have experienced a resurrection!

This is remarkable, because these beat up old souls are the building materials that God chooses to build His Church with!

You and I are like old refurbished barn wood, or more like an old rotten pine tree limb swelling with water and falling apart in our hands. God made us new in order to demonstrate to the universe His vast power.

VERSES 4-5: BUT GOD!

Knowing full well that we are the walking dead - falling apart at the seams in our sin and unwillingness to obey Him, God does a miracle. He makes us alive, just like He

made Christ alive! And how has He made Christ alive? All the way!

We say, “How can I know this is true?” As sure as Christ’s resurrection is the evidence, we too are the evidence! Look around! The Church is the evidence.

God took a pile of stinking corpses and made them alive, more alive than they’ve ever been, so alive that we shall never die.

Why? Because of who He is. We are characterized by death, sin, and desire for the flesh and mind. God is characterized by an overwhelming wealth of mercy and love.

Where we deserve to be torched and buried eternally, God displays forgiveness, resurrection, and affection for us.

God favors us more than we can imagine, even when we are spiritually dead, and He wants to be with us forever! He wants us to be like Him!

He desires this so much that...

VERSES 6-7

HE RAISED US UP TOGETHER - the same language used to reference the resurrection.

Just as God raised up Christ from the dead, so too God has raised us up in Christ. We have a seat reserved for us with Christ in eternity.

Paul’s language is quite remarkable. He writes as if the thing has happened, and yet it is still coming to pass.

Wallace notes: “This type of writing is not very common in NT writing, but when it is used, it is used intentionally to stress the certainty of the event.”²⁰

This is the tension of Biblical literature referring to future events yet to be. They are secured by Christ in the past while we are prepared by the Holy Spirit in the present.

The purpose of this mirrored resurrection, Christ’s and ours, is because God desires to clearly demonstrate His favor towards us through kindness for all eternity. Not because of who we are, but because of who He is! We admittedly don’t deserve grace or kindness, and yet God is building a Kingdom that is characterized by His Spirit and His attributes, including grace and kindness.

VERSES 8-10

The whole of the matter condensed. We are saved, brought to life, and brought into God’s Kingdom because He favors us, irrespective of our own merit.

How do we grasp this saving grace or let it grasp us? Faith. Belief.

“On one side, we must look at God; and, on the other, at man. God declares that He owes us nothing; so that salvation is not a reward or recompense, but unmixed grace. The next question is, in what way do men receive that salvation which is offered to them by the hand of God? The answer is, *by faith*; and hence he concludes that nothing connected

²⁰Wallace, D. B. (1996). *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (p. 564). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

with it is our own. If, on the part of God, it is grace alone, and if we bring nothing but faith, which strips us of all commendation, it follows that salvation does not come from us...When, on the part of man, the act of receiving salvation is made to consist in faith alone, all other means, on which men are accustomed to rely, are discarded. Faith, then, brings a man empty to God, that he may be filled with the blessings of Christ.”²¹

This belief is believing God down to our core, just as Abraham, “believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness” (Gen. 15:6).

Where does this faith come from? Can I muster it up? Can I use clever questioning techniques to get somebody to pay lip service to belief? No. Faith, belief, is a gift from God. Since our natural state of being is spiritual death, we have no ability to conjure faith within ourselves. We must be quickened to life by the Holy Spirit. The very faith we have is a gift of God.

In this we see our true form: beggars for God’s grace, devoid of even our own faith, much like a desperate man who cried out to Jesus, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24).

But God - demonstrating His grace in kindness raised us up by His grace as we believe.

BUT WAIT, there’s more!

²¹Calvin, J., & Pringle, W. (2010). *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians* (p. 227). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

Some people get hung up here, pausing too long at verse 9, and argue that what we do in our lives doesn't matter since we are saved by grace through faith.

Paul clarifies this sentiment in verse 10.

VERSE 10

WE ARE THE WORK OF GOD! HE IS SHOWING OFF TO ALL CREATION HIS NATURE BY HIS HANDI-WORK - US!

What were we created for? What were we resurrected for? Why did God shower His grace upon us? **FOR GOOD WORKS, TO REPRESENT HIM.**

Even as our old nature was characterized by death, and the fruit we brought forth of that life stunk of death and decay, now our new lives are marked by life!

You are a good work of God, you have a new nature - one of holiness. The fruit that we now bring forth is good, and it is a testament to the mighty power of our God, who resurrects the dead.

What's more is that God has prepared these works for us beforehand. He has predestined good works for us, that we should walk in them and bear witness to His goodness.

Since you are a new creation, since you are alive, then you will bear good fruit. Since we have received grace through faith, we can't help but walk in good works - it's who we are in Christ, because that is His nature, and He is making us like Him.

All of that to demonstrate His power. He takes the useless, discarded, damaged, decaying, wounded, skeptical, hurt, abused, downcast, and impoverished, and He raises us up to holiness and new life. Who else can do such a thing!? No one but our God.

You have been made new, loved one. Be new.

As Jesus taught, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matt. 5:16).

EPHESIANS 2 PART 2 | 2:11-22

Paul continues to set forth the facts about how God the Father is building for Himself a holy temple.

This temple is not made with human hands but is made up OF the saints, the holy ones, that God has redeemed in Christ.

Moreover, God has leveled the field between Jew and Gentile in the person of Christ. The temple that He is constructing is a holy edifice, constructed for His glory, built upon Jesus Christ and God's Word.

The building materials for this temple continue to be the theme in Chapter 2, couched between Paul's assertions that God has set Jesus Christ as head over the Church, His Body (Eph. 1:23), and Christ is the chief cornerstone (Eph. 2:22).

This is a beautiful reminder that Christ is the "fullness who fills all, in all" (Eph. 1:23). He is the head of the Body, the roof over our head, and the floor beneath our feet; He is everything. This is another striking example of how the saints abide in Christ.

It is only by His grace, His divine favor towards us, that we are brought into His divine household - His Body the Church.

Paul makes this fact plain in Ephesians 2:5 - "by grace you have been saved," and again in 2:8-10:

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; [it is] the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

VERSES 11-12: REMEMBER

Remember where you came from - this is a reminder of God’s power demonstrated in Christ.

Paul exhorted the Ephesians to bear in mind their previous state before receiving God’s grace, before being brought into the Kingdom. This is important because by remembering their previous state, they could remember God’s power to give life. They could remember how they truly received His grace freely and not because of any work of their hands.

God did not pour out His favor upon them because they were uniquely qualified for citizenship in His Kingdom. He did so as a demonstration of His own power and His own character towards the very vilest of human beings.

Unfortunately, there are many Christians today who, after receiving God’s grace and following Jesus, forget where they came from. They forget how astonishing God’s grace was when they first encountered it.

There are many Christians who deny their past altogether. I find this particularly unbearable, because to do so is to rob God of His glory and to deny the work He has done in our lives, especially if we are presenting ourselves to others as “born perfect.”

Since God takes broken instruments like us and builds unto Himself a holy temple, then He should get all of the glory that He is due!

Whenever we hide our unseemly pasts because we are embarrassed, we are, in a way, not allowing others to see just how powerful and gracious our God truly is.

Were you an addict? Give God the glory that you're not anymore! Were you an adulterer? Give God the glory that you're not anymore! Were you a foul-mouthed slanderer? Give God the glory that you're not anymore! Were you an average, every-day, "good-ish" person yet still alienated from God and from His nation? Give God the glory that you're not anymore!

Let us declare His praises to all who will hear, that He takes what is old, what is outside of His Kingdom, and makes us new and holy so that He might dwell among us!

Please understand that this isn't glorifying our sin; it is glorifying God. This isn't being weighed down by the guilt of our sin either. God the Father has taken all of that guilt and shame out of the way by the blood of Jesus.

"He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor punished us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, [So] great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; As far as the east is from the west, [So] far has He removed our transgressions from us. As a father pities [his] children, [So] the LORD pities those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we [are] dust" (Ps. 103:10-14).

REMEMBER where you came from! God turns all of our stories of hopelessness into stories of hope, and they magnify His power towards the broken, unseemly, undeserving, strangers, Gentiles - outside of God's covenants of promise - who were once a people without hope, apart from God.

Paul isn't exaggerating for dramatic effect. He is setting out the facts: "You were once Gentiles in the flesh, who are called uncircumcision" (Eph. 2:11). This is the language that Paul likes to use when illustrating the new relationship that God has established in Jesus.

In the former times, before Christ, God's covenant promises extended explicitly to the nation of Israel, the Jewish people, those who were by blood and family lineage born into God's covenant.

The men in this covenant were marked by circumcision as infants - a mark in the flesh.

But now, Jesus has brought two very different people groups and cultures together into one family tree in Jesus, by grace, through faith.

"How has Jesus done this thing?" one might ask. Paul continues by explaining the work Jesus has done to accomplish this adoption, this grafting in, this leveling of the field.

VERSES 13-18: RESCUE

Paul describes what Christ has done in the face of our alienation.

When we were outside of the Kingdom with no right to know God or to know holiness or to know peace, that is when Jesus Christ, God the Son, worked on our behalf.

You will notice that all of what Paul writes about in regards to working is about the work that Christ has accomplished, not any other person.

Gentiles are described as foreigners, distant from God, not speaking the same language, excluded from the rights of true citizens. No work we do can change that - it must be God's work.

So let us look at all of those things that Jesus has done and is doing for the sake of those He loves, as set forth by Paul.

He brought us near by His blood. While we were far off, dead to sin, He shed His blood to make peace with those who were His enemies. Blood was required to pay for our wickedness, and rather than extracting that penalty from humanity, Jesus gave His own in our place.

He IS our peace. Very interesting language. He IS our peace. The verb, the action, is that of "being," a reflective, or an equative, verb. It reflects the truth that Jesus IS peace for us. He doesn't simply deliver, bring, promise, or make peace, though He does all of those things. Part of who Jesus is, His existence, His makeup, is peace.

He has made two parties, once divided, into one party in His Body. This speaks of Jews and Gentiles. Jesus has brought together His covenant people who believe, along with us unclean, savage Gentiles, into one Body. Christ is not divided. There is no separate version of this where Jews

and Gentiles are divided and have separate ceremonies and rules and traditions, because we are ALL saved by grace in His Body.

Paul further remarks on this by declaring that Jesus has broken down the middle wall of separation. Paul is not referring to the curtain in the inner Temple that once stood in Jerusalem, but a wall that divided what was called the Court of the Gentiles from the rest of the sacred grounds.

Interestingly enough, Paul writes this letter during his first Roman imprisonment, having been initially assaulted in Jerusalem by his own Jewish countrymen at the Temple for supposedly profaning the Temple by bringing an Ephesian Gentile named Trophimus past the wall of separation! This would have been a scandal indeed (Acts 21:28-29)!

This was not true; they had only seen Paul with Trophimus in the city and assumed that he profaned the Temple. But, it is interesting that Paul here chooses to write about this wall in such a theologically rich way.

“In the year 1871, while excavations were being made on the site of the temple a pillar was found 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”²²

While the Temple was highly venerated by the Jewish people, it was intentionally built with reminders of human sin, God’s holiness, and the separation of people.

Jesus has destroyed the wall that separates us! We have a place in the Kingdom!

Furthermore, Jesus has abolished all of the hostile feelings and actions bound up in the law of commandments.

Unfortunately, there are some who still cling to the Old Jewish traditions and laws - they admire the institution, ignoring the fact that Jesus has put an end to the law, having fulfilled every requirement of the Law in His body for those who could never do so.

“Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us” (Gal. 3:13).

And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross” (Col. 2:13-14).

He has created one new creation from the two old peoples by making peace through the cross.

²²Orr, James, M.A., D.D. General Editor. "Entry for 'PARTITION, THE MIDDLE WALL OF'". "International Standard Bible Encyclopedia". 1915.

The ingredients that Christ has to work with are not ideal. On the one hand, He has a people characterized by a “form of godliness, but denying the power” (2 Tim. 3:5) found in the Jewish body; on the other hand a rag-tag bunch of pagans worshipping anything that moves!

And from that, by His great power, He has created a third class - believers, people of the Way, Christians saved by grace who are now part of His bone and His body, regardless of what tribe they once belonged to.

He has preached to those Gentiles who were far off and to those Jews who were near.

It is Christ’s message that moves people from their old tribe into His heavenly Kingdom. This message is preached to both Jew and Gentile alike. There is no different message, no different path besides Jesus - “I am the way, the truth, the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6).

This is the work of Christ! Look at what He has done! All of this, His work, grants access to the Father to those who believe.

We BOTH (Jews and Gentiles) have access by ONE Spirit. Just as Christ is not divided, neither is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is unified. It is that same Spirit, that lives in each and every believer, by which we have access to the Father.

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

VERSES 19-22: THE RESULT

Because of all of that, the work Christ has done, you are no longer strangers or foreigners of the covenants of promise!

Remember the Ephesians' previous state - aliens, foreigners, without hope!

That is the state of many walking around today, and it was our state as well, strangers and foreigners, alienated from God, separated from Him by our own sins and trespasses.

REFERENCE verse 12.

Our new status is that of full-fledged citizens of God's household. This gives us reason to rejoice! This is why we ought to remember where we came from. Our relationship with God is not a lateral move. We didn't move from one awesome house to another. We were moved from a dank sewer of existence to God's Kingdom of light.

And in all of this, through Jesus, God is building a house for Himself. The house that He is building, stretching through the millennia, is the Church, composed of Jews and Gentiles alike, all founded on His Holy Word (that of the Apostles and Prophets) with the chief cornerstone being Christ.

Do you understand the enormity of what Paul writes here? The foundation holding up the structure is God's Word, anchored in the person and work of Christ! By the Apostles and the Prophets, God has delivered to us the blueprint for His eternal dwelling place and has been communicating for ages what He is doing.

Peter even says that the Prophets came to know that God was speaking through them about this glorious salvation through Jesus:

“Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace [that would come] to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven” (1 Pet. 1:10-12).

What is it that holds the whole building together? That chief cornerstone, Jesus Christ.

There is no other foundation. Not people, personalities, brands, self-help books, nothing!

“For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 3:11).

Jesus Christ IS the cornerstone, not an amendment or haphazard addition to the foundation.

IN HIM, UPON HIM, the whole building is being joined together and grows into a holy dwelling place for God. There are no special exceptions for the various sects, denominations, legalists, moralists, etc. The foundation is Christ alone.

Well, if God's Word to mankind, that message proclaimed by the Apostles and Prophets, inspired by the Holy Spirit, joined together with the person and work of Jesus Christ, is the very immovable foundation of our faith, of the Church, what else is this temple made up of?

You and I, loved one! We are the stones being fit together, growing together into this holy temple. He lives within us and among us by the Holy Spirit.

“As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord [is] gracious. Coming to Him [as to] a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God [and] precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 2:2-5).

Not only has He redeemed us by His work. Not only has He made the two people groups into one new people group. Not only has He built a holy Church from wretched sinners like us.

He has also established a new royal priesthood, which we are a part of even as we comprise the very temple of our God. Where once the priestly office was restricted to a certain group of people, we are all now part of what is sometimes called “the priesthood of all believers.” We have work to do in God's temple, loved one.

The everlasting work of Jesus is made up of Himself, His Word, and His people. This is the temple God is building unto Himself for a glorious purpose.

As the result of Christ's work for our sakes, it is our blessed joy and honor to serve in His royal priesthood, proclaiming His praises as He continues to build His Church brick by brick, soul by soul.

EPHESIANS 3 PART 1 | 3:1-12

The text we consider now is rich with the doctrine of the Church.

If you have ever wondered what is the purpose of the Church, we find some of that addressed here.

The purpose of the Church is dynamic, multi-faceted, more than simply a one-string guitar. We see in this portion of Scripture the high calling and purpose of the Church, namely, to demonstrate God's power before all creation.

VERSE 1

Paul lays out his condition as a prisoner.

At this time, he is actually imprisoned by the Romans around the year 60-62 AD. Paul is writing to the Ephesians from his first imprisonment in Rome.

It is interesting, then, to consider how Paul views his identity in the world - not only as a prisoner by a powerful government for his faith in Jesus, but a prisoner OF Jesus.

Yes, he is imprisoned by the Romans. BUT, Paul recognizes that his true captor is Jesus. This speaks to both the sovereignty of Christ over his present circumstances and his enduring relationship with Jesus.

It is worth considering, too, that Paul frequently characterizes his relationship with Jesus in subservient terms - as a slave, a bondservant, a prisoner, a messenger, etc. He writes

of himself as somebody completely under the will and direction of Jesus.

This speaks to the Lordship of Jesus - He is the ruler over the Apostle's life completely.

Paul has no delusions about who works for whom. Rather than seeing Jesus as his servant, existing to bring him health, wealth, and happiness, Paul understands that his entire life is in the hands of Jesus, which may include suffering and even physical imprisonment at the hands of an unfriendly government.

Far from bemoaning his circumstances or railing against the sin of the government, Paul magnifies the Lord Jesus in his circumstances, knowing that Jesus is the one who has so ordered this in his life.

This reminds me of Jesus' own imprisonment at the hands of the Romans, when Jesus tells Pontius Pilate, "You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above" (John 19:11).

So it is with all believers. Our times are in His hands (Psalm 31:15).

"O LORD, I know the way of man [is] not in himself; [It is] not in man who walks to direct his own steps" (Jer. 10:23).

Paul also recognizes that the suffering he endures, his imprisonment, is for other believers.

Specifically, he sees his current suffering FOR YOU GENTILES. All of his service is others-centered, and it is for the

sake of those who were otherwise considered unclean or outside of God's covenant before Christ.

Are we willing to suffer for others? Sometimes we may be willing to suffer a little for ourselves, but what about for others?

VERSES 2-4

The Ephesians HAD heard of the grace that God had given Paul. Paul had a very close relationship with the Ephesian church.

“When he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. 37 Then they all wept freely, and fell on Paul's neck and kissed him” (Acts 20:36-37).

The word “dispensation” here in the NKJV is rendered in other versions as “stewardship” and is related to the management or stewardship of a household, or the overseeing of accounts or goods.

The complete idea here is that God the Father has poured out His grace on Paul and delivered to him a stewardship, a responsibility to care for and dispense the gospel.

How wonderful! The duties that God gives each of us are as a result of His grace. He doesn't NEED us, and we certainly don't deserve to work in God's Kingdom. All of the blessed work we GET to do in the Kingdom is a gift of grace. Oh, how this adds depth to our understanding of God's grace towards us, not only in forgiveness and newness of life, but adding everlasting worth to the work of our hands in God's Kingdom.

The idea of stewardship is not uncommon in the New Testament. Jesus teaches about just and unjust stewards as well (Matt. 20, Luke 12, Luke 16).

Paul also addresses the idea of stewardship to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 4:1-2:

“Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.”

Here’s what happened -- God flipped Paul’s entire world upside down.

Paul’s writing carries with it the sense that they could fact check his life and the events surrounding the gospel. Paul was an open book. The amazing thing about Paul’s life and all of Scripture is that it is open for investigation. Go and see if these things are so!

We have documented Paul’s conversion story and moving encounter with God’s grace in Acts chapter 9.

Just like the Ephesians, we can read about the amazing work God did in Paul’s life and gain a better understanding of how that shaped and moved him.

God very clearly worked in his life and snatched him into the ministry, despite his initial opposition to the gospel, murderous heart, and legalism. That is grace. Paul knew it and wanted everybody else to know it.

VERSES 5-7

Considering THE mystery, which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men - that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs of the same Body, partakers of God's promise through Jesus.

What God did in Jesus' time was unique across eternity.

Paul speaks of a mystery that was not made known to people in past times but was explicitly revealed in that time.

Don't be afraid when you hear or read the word mystery. These mysteries didn't mean covering up things, but rather revealing truth that was at one time hidden.

This term MYSTERY is used quite a bit here in chapter 3. Let us turn our attention to understanding what this means.

“There is a serious problem involved in translating *μυστήριον* by a word which is equivalent to the English expression ‘mystery,’ for this term in English refers to a secret which people have tried to uncover but which they have failed to understand. In many instances *μυστήριον* is translated by a phrase meaning ‘that which was not known before,’ with the implication of its being revealed at least to some persons.”²³

These “mysteries” are the veiled things that God has been communicating through the ages.

²³Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 344). New York: United Bible Societies.

At the very first, these truths were communicated through the general revelation declared by creation, as recounted in Romans 1:

“Since the creation of the world His invisible [attributes] are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, [even] His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse” (Rom. 1:20).

These mysteries were also communicated to and through His covenant people, the Israelites, as recorded in the Old Testament through the laws and ordinances of Israel. This is reflected in Temple worship, the priesthood, and the ceremonies.

While some Hebrews certainly believed that the point of such things was simply obedience in order to please God, the author of Hebrews writes that God had something much bigger in mind.

“For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, [and] not the very image of the things” (Heb. 10:1-4).

Or as Paul himself writes to the Colossians:

“Let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ” (Col. 2:16-17).

The mysteries of the Kingdom of God were also communicated from the mouth of God as Jesus taught in parables.

“And He said to them, "To you it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but to those who are outside, all things come in parables” (Mark 4:11).

So what we see is that the gospel, that grand mystery of God reconciling His creation unto Himself, through the person of Christ, has been communicated to creation over and over again in different veiled ways, all with the express intention of leading the way to the big reveal.

In this context, the term “mystery” doesn’t equal secret. There are no people excluded from the mystery. Rather, the term “mystery” refers to these vast, core-shaking truths that are being revealed to and understood by creation through time.

In past times, God communicated these truths by “sowing seeds” as it were, building the evidence, so that in these latter times an examination of the evidence would stand up firmly and declare plainly the truth of the matter - Jesus Christ has reconciled man to God in His body.

Since the former times, the ages past, the curtain has been pulled back. The truth is declared in plain, explicit terms to this age. The messengers of those mysteries are God’s holy Apostles and Prophets.

Apostle - a messenger, especially one sent out with a specific message.

Prophet - someone who speaks forth God’s Word. Someone who says, “Thus saith the Lord...”

We have to reframe the idea of prophecy to make sure that we aren't only fixated on foretelling future things. So much emphasis is placed on that, and we lose perspective that the majority of prophecy in the Bible is not foretelling, but forth-telling.

The Apostles and Prophets belong to God. They are His. AND, as we will see a little later in Ephesians 4, they occupy a special place in the Body of Christ, the Church.

Furthermore, the Mystery is made clear: in the person and work of Christ, the Gentiles should be fellow heirs of the same Body, partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel.

This is huge!

According to the Jewish faith, all other nations were/are outside of God's covenant promises.

But in Christ, now these people, the majority of humanity, are able to be fellow heirs, part of God's promise. This is good news! For those in all of creation who have that burning desire in their hearts to know God, to know truth, to know love - you can! By Jesus Christ you can!

This is why God pulled Paul into the ministry and made him one of His own holy Apostles.

Think about it. God pulled one of the biggest legalists around into His ministry of grace BY grace.

Paul was a Hebrew through and through. Before encountering Jesus, every fiber of his being would have been opposed to fellowship with Gentiles.

“Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, [of] the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless” (Phil. 3:5-6).

Paul’s ministry was by grace alone! And it demonstrates God’s power, taking a die-hard legalistic Jewish man and making him a chosen vessel to preach forgiveness of sins through Christ to the Gentiles.

He had once despised this message, opposed the saints, opposed Jesus, and imprisoned those Jewish people who professed Jesus, and now he finds himself as the biggest proponent of the gospel and the most prolific New Testament writer.

God’s power is demonstrated in Paul’s life as effective and real.

Is it in ours? What has God snatched you from? What disqualified you from the good message? How is God showing the world His grace through our lives?

Because He is! He is preaching the gospel through us daily! Lord, help us to show your vast power by taking those who were once outside of your covenant and making us yours.

VERSES 8-12

Paul recognized his state - the least of all the saints. This isn’t false humility. Paul had much to be contrite for. He had much to repent for.

“For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God [which was] with me” (1 Cor. 15:9-10).

A recipient of grace is a messenger of grace. Those who have experienced grace the deepest understand it the most.

Paul’s motor, the thing that moved him, was the grace of God that he had experienced. With this, we have a pattern for our own lives!

The message that Paul preached and that we preach, the good message, is that within Christ exists this treasure trove of unsearchable riches. That doesn’t mean you can’t find them; it means you can’t find the bottom.

And what are these riches? God’s grace poured out upon us!

For his own part, Paul’s special purpose, appointed by God, was to reveal or to illuminate this good message in a way that brought clarity and understanding about the work that God was accomplishing in Christ to all people.

And, there is a fellowship, a *κοινωνία*, with the revealed MYSTERY - a shared livelihood, a connection that exceeds the superficial, religious surface and penetrates to the core of who we are, thereby changing our trajectory for the Kingdom’s sake.

If our lives have pretty much been on the same path that we were on before Christ, do we have fellowship with this heavenly mystery? I wager not.

This mystery was HIDDEN in God from the beginning of the ages. The gospel, the inclusion of the Gentiles, the limitless riches of Christ to pay the bounty for all sin, all of that has been in God's heart since the beginning of time!

Know this! Understand this! Meditate on this! Pray for the Holy Spirit to teach you what this means!

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made” (John 1:1-3).

Jesus is eternal, not incidental. He is not the panic button. He is not some step in an emergency procedures manual.

It is important to know this, because it has the power to shift our theology and understanding of God the Father and Christ the Son.

Some people view Christ as a sort of backup plan, a last resort or escape plan, a backup quarterback of sorts, who was only put in the game because people kept messing up.

This type of theology ignores the fundamental character of God.

If this Jesus is simply Plan B triggered by our own failed actions, then what kind of God do we serve? That would be a God who can't control His creation, who is subject to our actions, who is in a game of chess with his creation trying

to out-manuever our sin, and who is limited in power, since His first plan failed, after all!

On the contrary, the God of the Bible is all-knowing, all-powerful, and ever-present. He has carefully designed all of creation to move to His Word, according to His purpose, and he has orchestrated His eternal purpose from before time! Let that blow your mind.

He existed before all things, and through Him all things were made so that the mind-blowing wisdom of God would be demonstrated to all creation, including those unseen spiritual hosts that look on at God's handiwork in awe.

And how has God revealed the universe-shaking truth of His power, His foresight, His intention to redeem mankind from every nation, tribe, and tongue? Through the CHURCH, LOVED ONE!

The Church matters in ways we cannot even begin to fathom! You are a living testimony to angels and powers and principalities in heavenly places of God's strong hand and His redemptive plan!

Where the humanist looks on the decay of society and wonders if we can ever live again, where the moralist looks at creation and wonders if we will ever be pure, will ever have a heart, will ever know love, God declares, "Look at the work of my hand accomplished in the messiah Jesus -- look what I have wrought in my self!"

The result is this holy edifice - the Bride and Body of Christ - the gathering together of called out ones, the Church.

Such a power that has to all those who believe, that we who were once alienated from God, outside of God's promises, can now approach the Father, Son, and Spirit with boldness and confidence through faith because He has made us one with Him.

“For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones” (Eph. 5:30).

EPHESIANS 3 PART 2 | 3:13-21

After laying out his own experience with Jesus and his Spirit-inspired understanding of the revealed purpose of the Church (to demonstrate God's wisdom and power to all creation, v.10), Paul returns to a very real and personal, one-on-one level with the Ephesians.

He has been very plain with them that because of Jesus, now they are fellow heirs of the Kingdom, part of a unified Body, and partakers of God's promise, regardless of whether they are Jew or Gentile.

That truth is illustrated in the very real, visible manifestation of the Church. That is true today as well.

We are one family! One Body! Not to be divided along any other qualifying boundary outside of Christ.

Paul will continue to develop this point of doctrine as we go along, but here in our text we see the practicality of that. We see the "so what" of that sentiment.

Theoretically, as part of the Church, one Body, one family in Jesus, we rejoice and weep together. We are to be sharing a common experience together, bound together by the person and work of Christ as we are carried along by His Spirit and His Word.

"For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also [is] Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body--whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free--

and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. ...And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with [it]; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with [it]" (1 Cor. 12:12-13, 26).

VERSE 13

So, very practically, Paul asks them not to lose heart at his tribulations, recognizing their fellowship, their life-sharing with one another, and the eternal purpose of the Church as displayed to all powers and principalities in order to demonstrate God's confounding wisdom.

The Ephesians needed this encouragement, and so do we. It is certainly easy for us to lose heart when we feel so strongly about one another within the Body and we see them suffering or struggling or going through the wringer.

In Paul's case, he was imprisoned, he was experiencing suffering.

Three to five years prior to writing this letter, he had been mocked, mobbed, and publicly arrested. People had plotted to assassinate him, and he suffered through a shipwreck, all of that just prior to writing to the Ephesians.

Not to mention the many other sufferings and tribulations that Paul experienced during the decades before as he faithfully served the churches.

"I have worked harder, been put in prison more often, been whipped times without number, and faced death again and again. Five different times the Jewish leaders gave me thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I

was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. Once I spent a whole night and a day adrift at sea. I have traveled on many long journeys. I have faced danger from rivers and from robbers. I have faced danger from my own people, the Jews, as well as from the Gentiles. I have faced danger in the cities, in the deserts, and on the seas. And I have faced danger from men who claim to be believers but are not. I have worked hard and long, enduring many sleepless nights. I have been hungry and thirsty and have often gone without food. I have shivered in the cold, without enough clothing to keep me warm. Then, besides all this, I have the daily burden of my concern for all the churches” (2 Cor. 11:23-28, NLT).

Shall we ask, “Where is your victorious life, Paul?!” “Does God hate you, Paul?!” “Is there some secret sin in your life, Paul?!”

Some today may be tempted to characterize such hardship as just that - departure from God’s favor! It seems that Paul isn’t living the victorious life that we all think we deserve! What is going on!?

In Paul’s eyes and in light of the overwhelming weight of Scripture, Paul’s suffering was for the glory of God, AND he also viewed his suffering as part of the glory of the Church - it was for them! It was others-centered, “...which is your glory.”

Some people contrive suffering to bolster their own reputation or credentials within ministry, which is monumentally wicked.

Paul didn't contrive this, he endured this as directed by God and by the grace of God, with an eye toward serving the Body.

The risk to the Body is to be overcome with grief when we consider the suffering of our fellow members to the extent that we are paralyzed by fear.

Perhaps we come to a place where we see the suffering of others and rather than rejoicing that we have been counted worthy to endure suffering, we become terrified of the momentary discomfort.

The early church certainly needed the encouragement to endure, to view suffering from an alternative perspective - one that didn't see the prospect of suffering as grounds to quit but rather grounds to glorify God.

The Apostles after being arrested, beaten, and threatened not to teach anymore about Jesus felt this way: "So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name" (Acts 5:41).

Paul wrote to the Romans that "...we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance" (Rom. 5:3).

"My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials" (James 1:2).

"But rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings..." (1 Pet. 4:13).

“I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world” (John 16:33, NLT).

So Paul’s exhortation to endure, to not lose heart, is part of a recurring theme of enduring as followers of Jesus in the face of suffering.

*VERSES 14-15: PAUL’S INTRODUCTION TO A PRAYER
HE IS OFFERING ON THEIR BEHALF*

This is actually a restatement of verse 1: “For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles” (Eph. 3:1).

This is restated because Paul never got around to saying what his purpose was between verses 1 and 14!

This isn’t entirely surprising given Paul’s literary style. Rather than being overly brief with his writing, Paul often starts with an idea and gets carried away into explaining some deep theological truth along the way.

In fact, verses 14-19 are considered one sentence in the original language.²⁴

So Paul circles back to his point - “For this reason I am praying for you, kneeling down before God...” (Eph. 3:14).

“For what reason?” we ask. For you to know the fullness of God more deeply.

²⁴Bratcher, R. G., & Nida, E. A. (1993). *A handbook on Paul’s letter to the Ephesians* (p. 82). New York: United Bible Societies.

Notice in Paul's prayer his acknowledgment of who God is, who Jesus Christ is, and how He has brought the entire eternal family into unity in Jesus. God has established one family through Jesus.

This is contrary to the notion of "all roads lead to God." The one family in God's Kingdom bears the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

VERSES 16-19: WHAT PAUL PRAYS FOR SPECIFICALLY

Specificity in prayer is important, not because our prayers should always be a laundry list of wants and needs, but because of the work of Jesus Christ, we have been given this awesome privilege to communicate directly with God in all openness and transparency.

Where once we were unclean, wretched, prohibited from approaching God because of our sin, now we are able to "...have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him" (Eph. 3:12).

"Whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do [it]" (John 14:13-14).

As Paul prays here for the Ephesians, so too it is our blessed privilege to pray for others, especially those in the Church!

Oh, what things Paul prays for! While we are very often focused on the physical realm in our prayers -- healing, provision, etc. (all good things to pray for) -- Paul prays for

the riches that far surpass our momentary needs and desires.

He prays for weighty, substantial, spiritual things, the worth of which far surpasses any wealth on this earth.

- That He would grant you to be strengthened - We are weak! We need strength. Should we hit the gym? Well...maybe. But Paul says that his desire, his prayer to God is that the Ephesians would grow stronger in their inner being. How? The Holy Spirit!

Oh, the disproportionate care we place on our outward health, our physical health, while ignoring the inner man! What if our outer person physically reflected our inner person!?

- That Christ may dwell or abide in your hearts - metaphorically speaking - acknowledging that the bodily, risen Christ dwells at the right hand of the Father in heaven. BUT, we also must acknowledge the spiritual nature of Christ.

Christ does dwell among His saints literally by the Holy Spirit. The Father, Son, and Spirit are not three separate beings who are merely neighbors in the heavenly realm. They are one, comprising the God-head.

As a matter of fact, we see the triune God represented right here in verses 14-17: “I bow my knees to the Father...(v. 14); ...that He would grant you...to be strengthened...through His Spirit (v. 16)...that Christ [the Son] might dwell in your hearts(v. 17).”

- That you may have the ability to comprehend, to know the multi-dimensional love of Christ. Christ's love for us is nearly incomprehensible. This is something that we grow to know as we abide in Him and He in us.

BUT, notice the condition by which we know Christ's love more fully: through faith as we are rooted and grounded in....love.

AND...WITH ALL THE SAINTS!

This is not a solo venture as some propose. Not just me and God. It is a personal relationship, but one that is marked by fellowship, a shared life in God's covenant community, the Church.

Notice the theme. All throughout this passage, Paul addresses the audience in the plural, not the singular, and he writes about "the whole family in heaven and earth... (v. 14)"; "...with all the saints... (v. 18)"; "...in the church... (v. 21)."

As Christ indwells us, we collectively find ourselves planting roots in foreign soil, namely, the eternal love of Jesus Christ. This is how we are able to comprehend, or to grow to comprehend, the vastness of Christ's deep love, which is certainly beyond finding out in totality this side of heaven.

Paul's final request is that they may be filled with all the fullness of God. What does that mean!? How is this even possible?

How can we be filled with ALL the fullness of God? The earthen vessels that we are, can we even contain such magnificence without being blown apart in the process?

This is part of the mystery of what God is doing among His saints AND why he chooses the imperfect to be conformed to His image and bear His likeness.

Consider, loved one: you have been chosen by God to be filled completely by Him, anchored in Christ, filled with the Spirit, and changed into something greater than you once were, not in a sense that focuses on worldly measures of success.

Paul's entire prayer ignores all worldly ambition here and is keenly focused on the spiritual - that they would grow and be strengthened together as one Body in comprehension, knowledge, and fulfillment of those attributes of God by which we are changed, the exceeding fullness of God and His love towards us.

It is a high expression: "We should not dare to use it if we did not find it in the scriptures. It is like those other expressions, of being *partakers of a divine nature*, and of being *perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect*. We are not to understand it of his fulness as God in himself, but of his fulness as a God in covenant with us, as a God to his people: such a fulness as God is ready to bestow, who is willing to fill them all to the utmost of their capacity, and that with all those gifts and graces which he sees they need. Those who receive grace for grace from Christ's fulness may be said to be *filled with the fulness of God*, according to their capacity, all which is in order to their arriving at the

highest degree of the knowledge and enjoyment of God, and an entire conformity to him.”²⁵

VERSES 20-21: PAUL'S MID-EPISTLE DOXOLOGY

We are only half-way through the letter, and Paul is moved to worship.

A doxology is used to communicate praise and doctrine simultaneously.

As one text puts it, “A ‘doxological’ approach to theology stresses the importance of praise and worship in theological reflection.”²⁶

It is not only that we are considering substantial truth in an intellectual sense but also in a spiritual/emotional sense. We are moved to praise and worship because of the truths that we are considering.

Imagine the Apostle sitting to write or dictate, going through these soul-moving doctrines on the Church: grace, access, the bringing in of the Gentiles to the family of God, love, faith, sovereignty, suffering, holiness, etc.

And finally his heart and his thoughts burst into worship. When we truly give time to consider these things, to meditate on them, our hearts soar too!

²⁵Henry, M. (1994). *Matthew Henry's commentary on the whole Bible: complete and unabridged in one volume* (p. 2312). Peabody: Hendrickson.

²⁶McGrath, Alister E. *Christian Theology: An Introduction*. Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2017.

This is WORSHIP! It is ascribing glory and worth to God, keeping the eyes of the reader, and the eyes of the Apostle, fixed on Jesus.

When we start talking about doctrine, spiritual growth, the need for maturity, growing to know God more, etc., we can develop a very self-centered concept of worship.

Truth is still truth - we do need to grow, Jesus desires to make us holy, He died so that we could be, and He rose again so that we could be with Him forever. The gospel is decidedly relational.

But, it's not only about you and me and making our lives better! It's about Jesus and how He operates way above and beyond what we can even imagine in order to make His power known - AND He does those things IN US!

We are the vessels that Jesus chooses to demonstrate His power through and IN, not just individually, but collectively as we comprise the Church.

Notice where Christ's glory resides - IN the Church and IN Himself (v. 21). But as a husband and a wife, these two are not divided. They are one flesh, one bone.

“For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord [does] the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones” (Eph. 5:29-30).

It is our privilege, our holy responsibility, and the purpose of our calling and election to glorify Jesus as the Church.

Not man, not celebrity, not wealth, not buildings, organizational structures, or doctrinal flavors, but God's glory alone!

This glory exists forever, and it is not passing away, no matter what our opinions are on the current state of the Church. Christ is preserving a bride for himself that is glorious and is His. And NOTHING can move that, not even us wretched humans when we intentionally or unintentionally obscure His glory. He will be praised. He will keep His Church.

Our very first love above all else, even as we are rooted and grounded in love, is Jesus. Let Him be lifted high!

Where the Church lacks love for Jesus, where we turn to glorify other things over Jesus, that's a problem.

“To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, ‘These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: “I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary. Nevertheless I have [this] against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place--unless you repent””” (Rev. 2:1-5).

But let us endure. Let us hold fast to our first love. Where we need to, let us repent. Let us do the first works - glorifying Jesus in His Church.

Amen - verily, so be it, it is so.

EPHESIANS 4 PART 1 | 4:1-7

Chapter 4 of Ephesians marks a delineation of sorts. As has been said before, this lays out for us the practical shift between doctrine and duty.

The doctrine is all of the foundational truth that propels us in our holy calling, our duty.

As we move through, you will see that we still learn very much about the doctrine of the Church as we consider the duty of the believer called into the Body.

Doctrine and duty are not competitive. They are complementary - they go together.

There is a danger of overly delineating.

It is possible for one to know all of the doctrines down to the finest detail intellectually and yet be found dead spiritually.

The problem with such a case is that one who KNOWS the doctrines of God's Word, specifically in our case, one who knows the doctrines of the Church, can be unmoved by the profundity of such truth.

In this case, we can say this person has not made full contact with the doctrine, because the nature of God's doctrines, God's truths, God's Word, is that it is so powerful that it does move us when we come into contact with it.

"For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven,
And do not return there, But water the earth, And make it
bring forth and bud, That it may give seed to the sower And
bread to the eater, So shall My word be that goes forth from
My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall ac-
complish what I please, And it shall prosper [in the thing]
for which I sent it" (Isa. 55:10-11).

So, Paul has been laying the groundwork, the doctrine of
the Church, for the Ephesians.

He has prayed fervently that God would grant them the
ability to understand this mystery, and now he comes to the
duty of it all.

This is the "so what?"

This is the duty flowing from the doctrine, or the activity
that follows the academics, or the works that follow the
Word.

What we examine this morning is what will occur when we
are obedient to God's Word, led by His Spirit, warring
against the flesh, and in close FELLOWSHIP with the Lord
Jesus Christ.

What we see this morning is that when we are part of His
Body, the Church, and when we take His Word seriously,
then we resemble somebody a lot more like him and a lot
less like ourselves.

VERSE 1

Restatement of "I...the prisoner of the Lord..." *REFER-
ENCE Ephesians 3:1.*

Paul is driving home his current state - a prisoner, not of the Romans (though he is), but of the Lord Jesus Christ. He has been captured by grace, bound to the Lord Jesus by the Holy Spirit, and both driven on and constrained by the great Judge, Jesus Christ.

This speaks somewhat to Paul's free will. While others argue that we may do what we please, that we may leave the fellowship of the saints if we wish, we may leave the faith, Paul, having experienced so certainly the reality of the risen Christ, had no other options. He viewed himself as a prisoner. Compelled, moved, very literally by the hand of God. There was no alternative course of action for Paul.

We also see that Paul is not above using strong language to urge believers to heed God's Word and to take their calling seriously.

The temptation for the Bible teacher/preacher is to "set it and forget it" in regards to declaring the great doctrines.

After all, the messenger is not responsible for how the hearer responds.

BUT in Paul's case, having such a close relationship with the Ephesians and a care for their eternal well-being, he is more than willing to debase himself, to beg them, to exhort them strongly, to carry out this holy calling in their lives practically, to walk worthy of their calling with urgency and a sense of purpose.

He did so not from a position of lofty intellectualism or from a position of a foreman directing the labor of lesser

workers, but as one who walked the talk, who in essence was saying, “Let’s do this thing together.”

Paul had the miles under his feet to speak from an informed position, knowing the cost and knowing the required encouragement to the saints to keep going, press on.

What are the marks of walking the talk? What are the marks that we may show that we are walking worthy of our calling, having been called to the faith by Jesus Christ?

What does that look like?

This isn’t legalism; it’s a litmus test. Are we genuinely tied to Jesus?

What we look like is a good indicator of who we are aligned with. As Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:2-5,

“And you [He made alive], who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others” (Eph. 2:1-3).

That was our former state, that’s what we looked like. Rotten. Decaying. Dead in trespasses and sins.

So what does it look like to be made alive, to be following Jesus, to be conformed to His image by the Holy Spirit?

VERSES 2-3: WALK THIS WAY

Here's how believers walk, here's how believers look who are following after Jesus.

When we arrive at this Scripture, we must take it as more than just theory. It demands that we take a look in the mirror and answer the question, "Who do I look like? Do I look like I've always looked, or do I look like Jesus?"

We love to cover up our rough edges, rudeness, brusqueness, impatience, arrogance, pride, vulgarity, etc. by saying "that's just the way God made me."

BUT, the Bible tells us that we "must be born again" (John 3:7), we must be changed to the image of Christ, and we must have His mind (1 Cor 2:16).

So, are we becoming more entrenched in and excusing of our wretchedness, or are we being made into new creations (2 Cor. 5:17)?

The marks of Jesus are supremely difficult for us to manufacture. The only way these can truly be ours is if we have been made new by Him.

Lowliness - this is humility, taking the servant's place, not elevating ourselves or self promoting. Rather, deferring to those brash, loud souls who are bulldozing their way through life, showering them with...grace and service.

Gentleness - to adopt a nature that is approachable and not harsh or combative or rough.

Long-suffering, or patience - when we observe the Lord's interactions with the Disciples, and when we consider our own relationships with Jesus, we come away knowing that Jesus is supremely patient with us. So we ought to be with others.

Patience isn't required when everybody is meeting our expectations, but when people fail to live up to our expectations.

This is closely tied to bearing with one another. Rather than writing one another off, blowing each other off for slights and hurts (real or perceived), the nature of Christ is one of bearing with us.

We are beneficiaries of His patience and grace. If Christ dismissed us every time we failed, we would be lost long ago. But, He is hanging on to us, carrying us to the finish line.

The NASB renders "bearing with one another," as "showing tolerance for one another..." The NLT renders this as, "making allowance for each other's faults..."

Part of this great doctrine of fellowship with the Body of Christ, and adopting His mind and heart is to allow others to be messed up and bearing with them through it.

This is a high-definition way to illustrate Christ's immeasurable love and patience with us, because He endures with us and knows our faults better than we do ourselves!

Under what conditions do we exercise these attributes? In love. That's why I wrote that these characteristics of a wor-

thy walk are nearly impossible to fabricate. Because, we can “do” these things from a wrong heart, but it will show out.

When we are “patient” through gritted teeth, when we are “gentle” by simply avoiding people altogether, when we fabricate humility for our own selfish gain, that will all show out.

BUT, since we are Jesus’ people, moved by His hand, then we will do these things, and people get to meet Jesus on a daily basis as He works in us in love.

“Love is...the *bond that unites* all the virtues (which otherwise have no unity) *in perfect harmony* or *the bond of perfect unity* for the church...”²⁷

“But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection” (Col. 3:14).

VERSE 3

Let us consider a few more marks of those walking worthy of their calling.

They are the saints who work hard to keep the unity of the Spirit.

Such saints are characterized by their willingness to expend energy, zealously, eagerness, and devotion to maintain unity.

²⁷Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature* (3rd ed., p. 966). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

It takes effort to remain unified. Why? Because the Spirit and the flesh war against each other.

Many churches have been torn apart by selfish ambition, denying gentleness, lowliness, patience, and care in favor of power struggles and strategies meant to divide the Body.

But unity is one of the marks of Christ that we don't get to dismiss out of hand. Endeavoring to maintain unity peacefully (not by force or bullying others) is a mark of Christ.

“...peace binds together the Church as a condition and symbol of that inner unity which is only wrought by the indwelling Spirit of God.”²⁸

Unity for the future Church was at the forefront of Jesus' mind as He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night of His betrayal.

“I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, [are] in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me” (John 17:20-23).

²⁸Alford, H. (1976). *Alford's Greek Testament: an exegetical and critical commentary* (Vol. 3, p. 113). Grand Rapids, MI: Guardian Press.

VERSES 4-6

Paul brings home this definition of Scriptural unity even further.

This is important because we live in an age where people find it convenient, even advantageous, to unify over many things that really further divide us. We have a version of segmented unity where people have unified over the minutiae of living rather than Christ.

But the believer, the Jesus follower, IS bound up in a nearly unimaginable unity that is not segmented along lines of personal identity, but only by the identity of God - Father, Son, and Spirit.

It is here that we lay down our own tastes and preferences, our own identity, our very lives, in favor of truth.

“And He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again. Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know [Him thus] no longer. Therefore, if anyone [is] in Christ, [he is] a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (2 Cor. 5:15-17).

One Body - this is the true universal, everlasting Church, wherever they may meet. Not according to denominational slant, but according to the calling and will of God.

One Spirit - there are no “alternative” versions of the Holy Spirit, bearing in mind that the Holy Spirit is the third per-

son of God moving among His saints, within us, and through us individually and collectively.

Some see the Holy Spirit as a tool to employ in ministry, and then we like to fragment and categorize the Church, the Body, over how enthusiastically they exercise the gifts of the Spirit.

This is an errant view of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is God. He is building His Church as He sees fit, and WE are the tools in His hands - not the other way around.

“...one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills” (1 Cor. 12:11).

The Spirit and the Body go together, seamless parts of a divine union. Just as our bodies devoid of our spirit are empty, so too, the Body of Christ devoid of His Spirit is lifeless.

One hope of your calling - there is only one hope, to be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ, and that hope does not differ from saint to saint. The cross is the great equalizer. It is in the light of the gospel that we see and acknowledge our sin, depravity, and wretchedness.

We realize that we are not uniquely qualified to look upon anything holy, nor to draw close to God. We are not better than any other created being. In fact, we may very well be substantially worse than others!

Our family name, our ethnicity, or heritage will not reconcile us to God - only the blood of Jesus will do that.

This is our hope, and it is the same hope that believers have had since the resurrection.

One Lord - it is a sweet sentiment that all roads lead to God or that simple morality will win the day, but there is only one Lord over all creation, and it's not us!

No matter how hard we strive or what great strides we make in regards to human effort, we remain part of creation under the mighty hand of God who has set Jesus Christ as head over all.

One faith, one belief, not many. The same ancient faith that has been passed down and preserved by the Holy Spirit for millennia.

“Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me’” (John 14:6).

One baptism - “...there is one initiatory rite, in which all believers engage, and it is the one symbolic and public demonstration of the believer’s response to God’s grace in Christ.”²⁹

Why is baptism important? Laying aside the lengthy discussion on the rich symbolism of baptism, it is important because in baptism the believer demonstrates their obedience to Christ’s commands as we willfully, joyfully, hopefully, and faithfully submit ourselves to Him, declaring openly that we are willing to share in His death and we look forward to sharing in His resurrection.

²⁹Bratcher, R. G., & Nida, E. A. (1993). *A handbook on Paul’s letter to the Ephesians* (p. 96). New York: United Bible Societies.

In some denominations, the importance of Baptism has been diminished. But Paul writes very strongly of it here, including it as one of the foundational tenets and marks of the unified Church.

One church historian wrote that to participate in baptism in the first century was essentially a public initiation into an illegal cult.

It cost the early Christians something to do this. Their public confession of Christ, their baptism, marked them as part of the Body of Christ, under His Lordship, and it could cost them their very lives.

It was an outward declaration to others of the work God had done in their hearts. It was a sign to the other members of the Body that they were all in, willing to go the distance, and that they had counted the cost.

VERSE 6

The final unifying factor that Paul identifies is “One God and Father of all Who is above and through all and in all” (Eph. 4:6). So then, as members of His Body, we will bear His name and we will bear His nature.

We are instructed repeatedly in the New Testament to adopt His characteristics of gentleness, lowliness, and patience, bearing with others. Why?

Because they don’t come naturally; our flesh often wins out in the battle against the Spirit.

We often acquiesce to our selfish desires: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (1 John

2:16). And then we convince ourselves that we are fine the way we are and that everybody else needs to change around us.

But Christian, if all the world around us is apart from Christ, why do we expect them to behave like Christ?

The question we must ask ourselves as we observe Paul's instruction to the Church is, "Do we look like Jesus? Or are we trying to make Him look like us?"

When we excuse ourselves from obediently being conformed into His likeness, we demonstrate our rebellion against God and against His Word.

We are to be walking worthy of our calling by His grace, and if we are truly following, then we will look like Jesus.

EPHESIANS 4 PART 2 | 4:7-11

The Practical Living Out of the Doctrine of the Church

Paul moves from discussing unity to diversity within the Body.

We don't, nor should we, look identical to one another based on worldly metrics. That's not unity; that's homogeneity.

Rather than contriving a series of qualifiers by which we admit or dismiss others into or from our club, we as believers are to resemble Christ.

We find our unity not in an allegiance to our flawed identities, but in the perfect identity of Christ. We are unified by, bound together by, Jesus Christ, who is conforming us into His identity.

It is upon that doctrine that we carry out our individual duties, responsibilities, and roles in love for the betterment of all AND the unity of the Body.

As Paul opens up to the Ephesians this truth, he spends much time instructing them on their mutual interdependence and diversity. We are functionally unique as individuals within the Church, but we have the same Spirit, and we cling to the same essential foundations of the gospel.

This is what unites us, as Paul succinctly writes in verses 4-6: “[There is] one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one

baptism; one God and Father of all, who [is] above all, and through all, and in you all.”

VERSE 7

As part of Christ’s Body, the Church, unified in the truth, each one of us has received Christ’s grace for a unique purpose.

Since the Church is Christ’s Body, He is building it up as He sees fit. He has done so by placing each member just as He sees fit and apportioning to each individual a specific function within the Body for the service of all.

This serves as a demonstration of His grace towards us, His unwarranted favor towards us. We don’t HAVE to serve within the Body. We GET to serve. We have been favored by God as He allows us to and invites us to partake in the blessed privilege of serving in His Kingdom.

And He has given us everything we need to fulfill our roles through His grace, which works effectively in and through us.

If you ever feel unqualified to serve, unequipped to serve in your own strength, that is true!

But, His grace is not defective, nor is it ever insufficient to fuel us for our work in the Body. We can never say our work went undone or unsuccessfully when we are operating in the grace of Christ.

The truth is that we are all unqualified and under-equipped, but it is His grace that makes the work that we do in His name sufficient, so that He may have all of the glory, and

we will know for sure that no work of our hands was brought to success by our own effort.

“No one deserves or has earned spiritual gifts...”³⁰

I would add that none of us has the ability to conjure up, fabricate, or force spiritual gifts. What we have received are truly gifts, not talents, not skills, but gifts that are matched against our inadequacies.

And we see that these gifts, the gifts to serve as a member of the Body, are according to the measure of Christ’s gift. So while each one is given a different role in the Body, we also recognize that God does not give the Spirit by measure. He is not withholding His grace from us but has apportioned it to us freely, abundantly, and very often overwhelmingly.

It is when we experience that truth and truly see the vastness of God’s grace that we are in fact propelled by His grace and by His Spirit to take our unique place as a worker, a servant, in His Kingdom.

It is grace that compels and propels those who truly have experienced it.

“For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God [which was] with me” (1 Cor. 15:9-10).

³⁰Guzik, D. (2013). *Ephesians* (Eph 4:7–10). Santa Barbara, CA: David Guzik.

VERSES 8-10

Paul's proof text is found in Psalm 68:18: "You have ascended on high, You have led captivity captive; You have received gifts among men, Even [from] the rebellious, That the LORD God might dwell [there]."

You will notice that the Old Testament text reads that God RECEIVED gifts from men.

And now we must ask ourselves, "Is Paul misquoting Scripture? Has he forgotten the Word?" Based on Paul's life, upbringing, and training, it's far more likely that Paul did this on purpose.

Paul flips this notion on its head. Whereas the psalmist David was clearly declaring how God was being worshiped and men were offering gifts to Him, Paul is saying that God is giving gifts to us!

"When he ascended to the heights, he led a crowd of captives and gave gifts to his people" (Eph. 4:8, NLT).

"Paul intends to [show], that this ascension of God in the person of Christ was far more illustrious than the ancient triumphs of the Church; because it is a more honourable distinction for a conqueror to dispense his bounty largely to all classes, than to gather spoils from the vanquished."³¹

This is the benefit of the new covenant and the dispensation of grace and the Holy Spirit among the saints: God is con-

³¹Calvin, J., & Pringle, W. (2010). *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians* (p. 273). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

cerned with you and has not left you as an orphan unattended and unable to carry out the role that He has separated you for.

While the ascending and descending and receiving and giving gifts can at times be confusing, the plain interpretation is that Christ touches all and is Lord of all, heaven and earth, of all creation, and the result of His ministry is our gain, having received gifts from His hand though we deserve none.

“Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you” (John 16:7).

Jesus entered our world, and through the fullness of His work, we are left an inheritance in His Kingdom. While He prepares a place for us, He has not abandoned us but has carefully and uniquely equipped each of us as He desires to work in His field.

He has not left His bride to fend for herself or to be marked by chaos, in-fighting, and confusion but has gifted us individually and corporately so that we may grow up into His fullness.

The Church is not some post-apocalyptic wasteland run by ambitious warlords but is carefully ordered by Christ for His purpose.

VERSE 11

What does this look like? We find in verse 11 the multi-fold offices given by Christ for the benefit of the Church.

There is much confusion and strong opinions in broader Christendom on these various church offices.

However, there is an order here that is clear if we would simply submit to God's Word.

Perhaps you've never considered why Jesus has designed these roles in His Church.

But, as it has been passed down to us by the Holy Spirit, we must acknowledge that it is important for us to understand how Christ has appointed workers in His Church and why He has done so.

It is at this point that we must acknowledge and recall that all saints are not given one or all of these gifts but only some.

“[Are] all apostles? [Are] all prophets? [Are] all teachers? [Are] all workers of miracles? Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?” (1 Cor. 12:29-30).

The answer to Paul's rhetorical question is no! So, we reiterate what we've been driving at - that Jesus Christ is equipping His Church uniquely, and He does so intentionally, using His own special people.

We must also acknowledge that HE HIMSELF has created these offices within the Body, and HE HIMSELF has gifted the Church with them!

We must be careful not to degenerate, degrade, or reject these offices that Christ Himself has given to us because we

are too prideful or because we've been wounded in the past.

As far as I can tell, one person's disobedience or twisting of the Scriptures does not give the faithful believer license to ignore the Scriptures.

So let us submit to God's Word and pray for understanding.

When we arrive at verse 11, we come to a list of workers within the Kingdom, within the Church: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers.

This has led to much conversation over how many of these roles are still applicable to the Church today. Are there five relevant offices? Four? Or three?

Fivefold: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. Threefold: evangelists, pastors, and teachers.

This view holds to the idea that the roles of Apostle and Prophet have fallen away since the Apostolic age.

This line of thinking argues that they have fulfilled their role as founders of the Church and that these roles have ceased (Eph. 2:20).

That can be born out of a prideful assessment on our part that we have grown and matured to such a state that we no longer need messengers and men who speak forth God's Word.

The trip-up in understanding why or how these roles exist is found in the understanding of what we are talking about.

It is the difference between a proper noun and a common noun. In regards to the term apostle, it is the difference between a capital “A” and a lowercase “a.”

The proper noun, “Apostle(s),” refers to those special messengers of the first century who had seen the risen Christ and were commissioned and sent out by Him specifically.

However, the common noun for an apostle in the original language can refer to anybody who has been sent out bearing a specific message.

In that sense, then, it is very possible that we merely call our modern day apostles something else. We call them missionaries or church-planters, people sent out specifically for the purpose of bearing the good message of Jesus and establishing churches.

Prophets are those people who speak forth God’s Word, not necessarily foretelling, but forth-telling, opening their mouth as directed by the Holy Spirit and declaring, “Thus says the Lord...”

In that sense, there are many people who are doing this Biblical work today who shun the notion of being a prophet but are in fact carrying out the very real prophetic work in a didactic sense, forth-telling God’s Word.

Then we have the evangelists, those people equipped by God with a special gift to declare the good message to the unconverted and uninformed.

Then we come to the conundrum that has caused even more discussion in theological circles: pastors and teachers. Does this refer to one role or two?

While we discussed earlier that there are two main schools of thought regarding the offices gifted to the Church (five-fold or threefold) by Christ, there remains one more - the fourfold school of thought.

This school of thought relies on a reading of the original language that conjoins the two offices into one. Or, as one scholar translates this term, “teaching shepherds.”³²

“The debate over this text has focused on the issue of whether one gift or two are mentioned. Most commentators have seen only one gift here...The uniting of these two groups by one article sets them apart from the other gifted leaders...In light of the fact that elders and pastors had similar functions in the NT, since elders were to be teachers, the pastors were also to be teachers.”³³

All pastors are to be teachers, but not all teachers are pastors.

³²Barth, Karl.

³³Wallace, D. B. (1996). *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (p. 284). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Furthermore, we must acknowledge the specific word choice for “pastor” carries with it the sense of, “one who takes care of sheep or goats.”³⁴

“Pastors [teaching shepherds] had charge of a given church...As *teachers* these people presumably instructed a given congregation in the facts and the faith of the Christian religion. In a number of languages *pastors and teachers* may be rendered as “those who help the believers and teach them” or “those who guide the believers and teach them...”³⁵

This is not necessarily hierarchical, as some would like to set forth, but adjacent to one another and all under the Chief Shepherd and Overseer of our souls.

Some who argue for an authoritarian model point to 1 Corinthians 12:28: “And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues.”

I would submit to you that these are named in order of appearance or sequence rather than authority.

There is a very real, narcissistic danger that is perpetuated in the world today, where men have become infatuated with

³⁴Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 517). New York: United Bible Societies.

³⁵Bratcher, R. G., & Nida, E. A. (1993). *A handbook on Paul's letter to the Ephesians* (pp. 101–102). New York: United Bible Societies.

the titles of the offices and have shunned the very real duties of the office - to care for the people, to preach the good-message, and to evangelize.

People self-anoint as apostle, prophet, pastor, etc..., forgoing the marks of humility in order to present themselves as somebody greater than they are.

Contrary to Scripture, they think more highly of themselves than they ought (Rom. 12:3).

This is also contrary to Jesus' instructions to be the least and to be the servant of all.

Recall that the disciples argued over who was the greatest and were corrected for it.

“Then He came to Capernaum. And when He was in the house He asked them, ‘What was it you disputed among yourselves on the road?’ But they kept silent, for on the road they had disputed among themselves who [would be the] greatest. And He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, ‘If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all’” (Mark 9:33-35).

The same argument exists today. The same desire to be on top, to be number one, to rule over others - that is the lust of the flesh and the pride of life warring within us.

But there is only one person who is head over the Church, and that is Jesus Christ. The rest of us fit together like carefully joined stones in Christ's divine building and purposefully designed members in His Body.

Peter issued an exhortation to pastors in the Church at large when he wrote,

“Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away” (1 Pet. 5:2-4).

Those who are called to this work are given a divine responsibility that comes with a warning - check yourself!

Where the Spirit of Christ is, there is the servant, the shepherd, and the prophet who carries out their work in all diligence and humility with their eyes firmly on the cross and their hands firmly on the plough.

As Christ emptied Himself, so, too, do we joyfully empty ourselves for the sake of Jesus' flock.

It's important to know how Christ has ordered His Body and why He has appointed specific workers within the Church. He has done so intentionally, because He is teaching us about who He is through this divine organization.

To what end? For the continual equipping of the saints - that's you. For the work of ministry, of service. For the building up of the Church.

Why do we do it? This is all to serve you, to equip you, loved one, for the work of ministry. It is for you! This is our blessed calling and purpose, and we glory in it.

EPHESIANS 4 PART 3 | 4:11-16

The Parts and Purpose of the Body of Christ, Continued

Paul moves from discussing the unity of the Body in general to the diversity of its members.

Each one is graciously given work according to the measure of Christ's gift for the purpose of serving within the Body, to be part of His Body in the realest sense.

There is a practical bearing out of our diverse gifts within the Body and a mutual interdependence upon one another, a support and care for one another, all under the headship of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ Himself appointed unique, distinct members within the Body alongside one another, not in a hierarchical sense but an adjacent, parallel sense for a special purpose.

VERSE 11

HE HIMSELF gave some to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, and teaching shepherds.

The purpose of the offices given to the Church by Christ is not for their personal glorification but rather for the equipping of the saints, the whole Body, for the work of ministry!

It's for you! Jesus cares enough for His people to provide us with every spiritual gift that we need from His treasury

to march toward eternity, growing along the way, for His glory.

This is where we get the idea of the upside down pyramid which is contrary to our human inclination for power and control. Christ has gifted the Church with people at the bottom - servants.

*VERSES 12-16: THE WHY, THE WHEN, THE BENEFIT,
AND THE FINAL RESULT*

V. 12: Christ gave specific servants unique gifts in order to EQUIP the entire community of saints for “ministry” and for the building up/strengthening of the Church.

The purpose of these specific offices is in direct relation to equipping/preparing believers to serve others.

There is a common belief that only those who are considered “clergy” bear all of the responsibility for working in the Kingdom.

Some of us wrongly hold to the idea that making disciples, serving people, evangelizing, and caring for others is the sole responsibility of people that are in “full-time” ministry.

The reality is that all who follow after Jesus are called to “full-time” ministry if we take our salvation and God’s Word seriously.

Our place in the Kingdom, our status as one of God’s saints, is forever! There is no provision in God’s Word for clocking in and out of the Kingdom and compartmentalizing our lives in such a way that we are in “part-time” min-

istry, living half our lives in the world and half our lives in the Kingdom.

We live our whole lives in the world as ambassadors from the heavenly Kingdom, imploring people to be reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:20).

The division of our lives into some parts that are obedient to God's Word and other parts that are under our own lordship is really just a way for us to craft a living that we are more comfortable with, that really ignores the imperative to work out our salvation in the here and now (Phil. 2:12-13).

Perhaps we're not feeling conflicted or rebellious at all, just a bit crunched for time. We even say things like, "I just don't have the time to serve as I would like."

Loved one, the time you have is the time you have, and none of us are getting more time on the clock!

So we pray, "Teach us to number our days! To take this seriously!"

"A Psalm of David. I said, "I will guard my ways, Lest I sin with my tongue; I will restrain my mouth with a muzzle, While the wicked are before me." I was mute with silence, I held my peace [even] from good; And my sorrow was stirred up. My heart was hot within me; While I was musing, the fire burned. [Then] I spoke with my tongue: "LORD, make me to know my end, And what [is] the measure of my days, [That] I may know how frail I [am]. Indeed, You have made my days [as] handbreadths, And my age [is] as nothing before You; Certainly every man at his best state [is] but vapor. Selah" (Psa. 39:1-5).

There is nothing else greater or more important in your entire life than serving the living God in whatever way He has called you to do so.

Additionally, if you have been slow to start because we feel unqualified and unequipped, take heart! Jesus has made provision for certain people to serve in the very real role of equipping the saints for the work of ministry.

The first step, though, is obedience to God's Word as we come to the understanding that the saints are responsible for carrying out the work of the ministry as directed by the Lord Jesus Christ, led by the Spirit, and equipped for the task by Jesus Christ and the faithful pastors and teachers that He has set among us for our edification and care.

As a church, this is what we're driving at here! This is the whole point of consistent, expositional teaching of God's holy Word - that as it lands on the fertile hearts of the saints, it will bear fruit unto God's glory by the work of the saints, who, being saved by grace, are created to walk in good works.

We're not here to simply listen to a speech and some music and catch up with each other, but to be equipped together for the work that happens outside of these walls.

The works of the Church, the duty of the Church, extends far beyond these walls, demonstrated in the little moments of our daily lives as we contend earnestly for the faith (Jude 1:3).

V. 13: How long will this divine order last? When do we get to divest ourselves of these offices?

Not until the very end, when shall be marked by unity of faith, the knowledge of the Son of God, a perfect person, measuring up to the stature/fullness of Christ.

This lasts until we are perfected, until the end of the age.

It's important to know this, because sometimes we like to take artistic license with church organization. Some people would prefer to do away with the whole thing because they've been wounded or seen how wrong things can go.

So the inclination is to blow it up rather than returning to God's design.

These Scriptures teach us that Jesus has designed this holy Body intentionally, and it shall endure until we are perfected and we finally resemble Him.

Remember that Jesus declared that the gates of hell shall not prevail against His Church (Matt. 16:18), and Paul writes to the Philippians that He who began this good work in us is faithful to complete it (Phil. 1:6).

Amazingly, what we see is that in Christ's model for the Church, there are some everlasting benefits for the believers in fellowship with one another. Paul expounds upon this in verse 14.

V. 14: The benefit of such instructors and the saints working in ministry is stability, certainty in doctrine, and refuting false teachers who draw away unstable believers through clever plotting, slick marketing, and blatant lies.

Whenever we stray from God's Word and begin to invent church offices, extravagant ministry titles, marketing machines, etc., we are very open to being deceived.

Deception most often comes packaged in something that looks attractive; otherwise, people wouldn't participate.

When we change the foundational principles of the Church because we've chosen to ignore the Scriptures, then we can very easily dismiss other portions of Scripture that don't fit our carefully crafted models.

This has been very recently demonstrated in churches who espouse a liberal theology that denies the authority of Scriptures. They want to bear the name "church" without bearing the marks of the Church, one of which is dependence upon God's Word.

“...undermining the authority of God's Word...is not the way of humble orthodoxy. It is neither humble nor orthodox to undermine the inerrant, authoritative Word of God. There is nothing hip or cool or relevant about asking a new generation [the lie of the devil], “Did God actually say...?” The doctrine of God's authoritative Word should be absolutely humbling. We are weak. We are biased. We are sinful. We idolize ourselves. And God has a powerful Word that stands over and above us. We must submit. Mark Dever has said it well:

‘...Churches which are tentative and decry dogmatism may sound humble, but it is not

truly humble to do anything other than to submit to God's Word.'

Christian humility is to simply accept whatever God has revealed in His Word. Humility is following God's Word wherever it goes, as far as it goes, neither going beyond it nor stopping short of it. The humility we want in our churches is to read the Bible and believe it—everything God has said...It is not humble to be hesitant where God has been clear and plain."³⁶

The result of opening the Scriptures, searching them consistently, daily, to see if what we are claiming is true is that we will be able to spot the frauds more easily when they are presented to us.

So many people have been wounded by snake-oil salesmen masquerading as pastors and teachers because they have not taken it upon themselves to read the Words for themselves in context.

And then, discovering they've been had, they vengefully believe that all other believers and ministers must be the same and turn away from truth altogether or begin to reinvent the truth on their own terms.

The wonderful thing is that we CAN KNOW truth, we can refute doctrinal error, we can discern deceiving plots meant for brand building and money grabbing.

³⁶Taylor, Justin. "An Emerging Church Primer." 9Marks, Last modified February 25, 2010. <https://www.9marks.org/article/emerging-church-primer/>.

The main things are the plain things.

And, the main things are marked by holiness, set apart by Christ for His bride as He cares for her across eternity.

V. 15: The result of living this out in real time, looking toward the perfect end that Christ has planned for us, is that we will **SPEAK THE TRUTH IN LOVE**, as others have spoken the truth in love to us.

It has been quoted often that St. Francis of Assisi once said, "Preach the gospel, use words if necessary." We have debunked this myth in the past, but it bears on our conversation as we consider the church offices that Jesus Christ gifted us with for our instruction, edification, and equipping.

Consider them again: apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers.

All of these offices have a high degree of spoken ministry. What we say matters.

The very real imperative to **SAY SOMETHING** is important in the Christian life as each of us endeavor to carry out the holy calling that Christ has issued to us.

"How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!" (Rom. 10:14-15).

In agreement with WHAT we say, how we speak the truth matters too! Love is not ugly.

Or as Paul writes to the Corinthians concerning their exercise of spiritual gifts, “Love suffers long [and] is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil” (1 Cor. 13:4-5).

To be like Christ is to speak the truth from a position of patience, kindness, security, humility, and even politeness, certainly not rudely or in an ugly way.

We often say, “the truth hurts,” and that may be true, but we are not to be the one to inflict the wound. That role is reserved solely for God. He is the one who wounds, that He may heal (Deut. 32:39, Hos. 6:1).

We must be careful not to overstep our bounds in our zeal.

The result of being part of the Body under the headship of the Lord Jesus Christ and the tutelage of His appointed workers while we carry out our own unique calling is that we GROW UP!

Here we must acknowledge the apparent juxtaposition between the Biblical imperative to press on to maturity, to grow up, to not be as children tossed back and forth by every new wave of doctrine or thought AND to receive the Kingdom of God as a little child (Luke 18:17).

While these two ideas may seem at odds with one another, they are perfectly compatible. We are growing up into faith, into belief, that the world strips us of as we age.

The more we mature in Christ, the less jaded we are by world events and the softer we become towards others and towards God. The more willing we are to take Christ at His Word and the less likely we are to rely on our own wisdom.

We are growing into a childlike faithful dependence upon the Lord Jesus Christ.

We are growing into Christ, who is the head of the Body, the Church.

Paul reiterates this. He mentioned already in verse 13 that we are growing together into the full stature of Jesus Christ. Now again, he says we are growing up IN ALL THINGS, not just a few, but all, and we are growing into Him.

So we ask, “Who do you look like?”

When Emmy was a girl, people would always say, “She looks just like her Daddy.” She did, she does, she bears my image.

Are we growing up into our heavenly Father? Do we look just like our Dad? Paul says that the result of being part of the Body is that we do resemble Him, and we will resemble Him as we continue to grow.

V. 16: It is because of the head, Christ, that we are a Body.

Each joint, ligament, tendon, muscle, and organ has a role and is inextricably linked to the others for the benefit of all.

Each saint supplies something to the whole.

We don't belong to the Body primarily because we get something out of it, but because we are placed here by Jesus Himself to supply something to it!

The complaint, "I don't get anything out of it," is a very self-centered way of viewing communion with Christ's Body when we are to be others focused. Are we supplying anything to others at all? Or are we wrongly expecting everybody else to pour into us as we exert little to no effort or concern for this holy Body?

We see here that when each part "does its share," the Body grows; this is organic church growth.

Some decades ago, a movement sprang into Christendom called the Church Growth Movement. Two of their main points are:

1. Numerical growth is a good indicator of success
2. The tastes and preferences of the unconverted should determine the strategy of the Church.

These are simply false.

Regarding numerical growth, research shows that "Half of the 320,000 protestant churches in North America have an attendance around 80 people (children and adults); 60 percent have less than 100; 85 percent have 200 or less."³⁷

Regarding pandering to the unconverted, the Church isn't meant to be religious theatre. This is not the place where

³⁷Vaters, Karl. *Small Church Essentials: Field-Tested Principles for Leading a Healthy Congregation of Under 250*. Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2018.

the unconverted come to hear a pep talk. The Church isn't made for unbelievers. It is made up of the gathering together of the holy ones, God's saints, formed into one Body. This is the holy Body and Bride of Jesus Christ designed to minister to and equip the saints for reaching the unconverted in a hostile world.

In dealing with this issue, Mark Dever writes:

“How exclusive, then, should our churches be? Should our churches adjust our times of meeting, the length of our sermons, and the style of our music to the unbelievers we want to reach? How much is our gathering for the sake of those who are not Christians? Do we understand our meetings mainly in terms of evangelism to non-Christians, or do we understand them to be primarily for the building up of the members in Christ?...“Belonging before believing” is a popular idea among church leaders these days. And of course we should be extremely welcoming and friendly with nonbelievers in our churches, even inviting them deeper into our lives. But we must be careful about telling non-Christians the theological lie that they, in the most profound sense, belong. In the most profound sense they don't...We should show unbelievers that there is something more than horizontal community or a vague sense of God's presence in our congregations.”³⁸

³⁸Dever, Mark. *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013.

The simple answer to how the Church grows is found in Acts 2:47: “The Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.”

Notice that it is the Lord adding to His Body, and those who are added to it are saved, they are converted, they are believers.

Jesus Christ is building His Church as the head, and we as the members are assisting in that labor as is pleasing to Him - edifying, building up our body, our church, in love - not ambition or anything else, but love.

A healthy church body, in love with Jesus, connected to the head, and each member connected to one another, builds itself, strengthens itself in the will of the Lord and for His glory.

EPHESIANS 4 PART 4 | 4:17-24

Paul addresses the differences between the believer and the unbeliever and issues the call to action for those who are part of Christ's Body.

This is the very real, practical living out of our faith after all of the preaching, listening, and theorizing is finished. After God's Word has had its way with our hearts, the results look a certain way.

As we discussed last week, a healthy church, connected to the head, builds itself up in love as Jesus builds the Church.

One question we may ask now is: "What does a healthy member look like? What fruit is borne out in the life of the believer who is connected to Jesus Christ the head and the other members of the Body?"

VERSE 17

Paul's language is quite strong here when it comes to walking out our faith.

This is not a recommendation or a suggestion; this is actually testimony founded upon the truth of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul is solemnly insisting upon the importance of Christians abandoning the way that we once behaved and lived our lives.

This is so very important. In the society we live in today and in the world of cheap grace and cheap discipleship, we very much would like to excuse our addiction to our past lives.

Where the Bible tells us that we are made new creations in Jesus (2 Cor. 5:17) and implores us urgently to walk in newness of life, there are many who prefer to continue in our old half-hearted ways.

This command, issued by Paul, who lived two vastly different lives - one as an enemy of Christ and the Church and the other as a chosen vessel of God to preach the gospel - is to no longer walk like everybody else.

That seems simple enough, and we know it to be true and fruitful, but the carrying out of the deed is a bit more difficult.

Additionally, knowing how technical we like to be as humans, Paul paints a picture for us so that we may know exactly what he is talking about -- this is what it looks like to be an unbeliever, to be one who lives apart from Jesus.

Before we climb up on our high horse, let us consider the audience for this letter - the church in Ephesus! And let us consider how strong Paul's language is toward these saints.

It is the saints that need to be reminded of our calling, not the unbeliever.

We ought not expect unbelievers to live like Christians; that is an unreasonable expectation.

It is the believer, the saints, the holy ones, who are made new and who, being compelled, moved by the Spirit, carry out lives of holiness as torches in a dark place.

Paul wrote a little about this need for discernment and understanding regarding the difference between the believer and unbeliever:

“I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. Yet [I] certainly [did] not [mean] with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner--not even to eat with such a person. For what [have] I [to do] with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? But those who are outside God judges. Therefore ‘put away from yourselves the evil person’” (1 Cor. 5:9-13).

So let us approach these marks of the unbeliever with humility and grace. And let us endeavor to search out that within ourselves which the Holy Spirit would have us to leave behind as we draw near to Christ.

VERSES 17B-19: THE MARKS OF THE UNBELIEVER - THOSE DIVORCED FROM CHRIST

Paul mentions “the rest of the Gentiles.” It is believed that the church at Ephesus was composed primarily of Gentile believers rather than Jewish believers.

This would have been unique in the first century church, and their new lives would have made them stand out sharply in their society where pagan worship and ritual prostitution were considered marks of a spiritual person.

Very simply, these marks should not be found among the saints because they are not marks found in the person and work of Jesus.

“For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness. Therefore he who rejects [this] does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit” (1 Thess. 4:7-8).

The first mark is a useless mind, a mind devoid of truth, focused on things that are useless or empty.

This is quite common today, because we are engulfed in a cloud of endless communications meant to fill our minds with useless jibber jabber and worthless, inflammatory, degrading content.

Along with this useless, empty, futile mind is a darkened understanding.

That certainly makes sense. How can we have an enlightened understanding that allows us to consider holy, weighty matters when we spend all of our time and energy contemplating useless material?

Is it any wonder that Paul exhorts the Colossians, “Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth” (Col. 3:2).

We see that the result of this cultivated ignorance and darkness is alienation from God. That means to be separated from God.

This is a feeling that many of us have experienced, and in the life of a believer, this very often comes upon us when we separate ourselves from God, choosing rather to fill our time with mindless activity as opposed to drawing near to Him.

“Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse [your] hands, [you] sinners; and purify [your] hearts, **[you] double-minded**” (James 4:8).

The person in this position is marked, sadly, by ignorance and a blindness in their very heart.

What Paul is describing is a perfect storm in the mind of the unbeliever, one who is committed to futility with a darkened mind, separated from God, which breeds further ignorance and blindness.

The problem with those in this state can often be that they are accompanied by a spirit of self-assuredness. There’s so much garbage out there that fills people’s minds that they become convinced they have it all figured out!

This wretched situation has the tendency to drive one past feeling. No longer is there a consideration of what is objectively right and good and true but a sort of relative or subjective morality that characterizes their understanding.

Paul described people like this leaving the faith, leaving the Church, who had their consciences scarred past feeling.

“Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron” (1 Tim. 4:1-2).

Furthermore, the walk of an unbeliever is marked by Lewdness - **ἀσελγεια, ας**: “behavior completely lacking in moral restraint, usually with the implication of sexual licentiousness...extreme immorality.”³⁹

This shouldn't be shocking to us! This is exactly how the Bible says people lived in Paul's day, and it's exactly how people live in our day who are apart from Jesus.

Paul continues to build on this notion of abject immorality by saying that those outside are workers of uncleanness.

This term Paul uses here is related to filth, dirt, garbage, and even the unclean remains which fill graves or tombs. It carries with it the notion of corruption.

So the unbeliever is marked not simply by passive moral impurity, but they are actively working to bring about filth, garbage, corruption. And all of this is worked WITH greediness.

Think about that! Working uncleanness with greediness! So not only do we see a spreading of, a working out of, filth and moral decay, but we see it all done with a great appetite for more and a great appetite to monetize it!

³⁹Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 770). New York: United Bible Societies.

I'm sure a thousand examples of what we just read are going through your minds right now!

These are hard to consider, even uncomfortable, but we must take the time to understand the details associated with this in order to understand the weight of Paul's words.

Why? Not only so we know what we're looking at, but so we understand the expansive love of Christ!

It is to such people that Christ comes! It is in such a world that the Church exists! It is in this realm of absolute filth that you are called to bear witness to the truth, to testify in the Lord, just as Paul did!

This reminds us of the absolute upside down nature of the Kingdom and the glory of grace! That grace is, in fact, extended to people just like this, like us, because the cross is the only cure for such wretchedness!

VERSES 20-21

BUT, even as we consider these things that make us squirm in our seat - that is not Jesus! Let no one say different!

Christ does not endorse these marks of sin found in humanity. He died so that they might be done away with!

It has been said before that Jesus loves you right where you are, exactly as you are, but He loves you too much to let you stay there!

There is objective truth, and it is in the person and work of Jesus Christ, who pulls us out of the darkness.

This glorious transformation has been occurring in people's lives for millennia as Jesus makes holy vessels out of us crack-pots.

“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor. 6:9-11).

VERSE 22

So, the further exhortation to the Ephesians and to us, following on the command to no longer live like the rest of the world, is to actively remove, to peel away, to separate from the old person we once were.

We have a responsibility to lay aside our old nature rather than excusing it away as “just who I am.”

Notice that Paul doesn't say, “Let somebody else do it for you,” but it is the hearer (Gr. “you all” - 2nd person, plural) who bears the responsibility for casting aside the wretched old person we once were, which he describes as growing corrupt or decaying. That decaying process is exacerbated by giving into these selfish desires of ours that tell us the lie, “It's okay if I do this. I'm just like everyone else in the world.”

We're not supposed to be like everyone else in the world!
We're supposed to be holy ones shining like a million
lamps in a dark world!

Do you hate the stench of your old decaying self enough to
cast it into the grave? To be truly raised to a new life? Be-
cause that is what we are each called to as members of His
Body!

VERSE 23

Paul goes on to issue another command: be renewed in the
spirit of your mind.

We have spent much time discussing how the unbeliever is
marked by a useless mind, a darkened understanding, a
blind heart.

Now he comes to the renewal, the regeneration.

Where are we renewed? In our feelings? In our emotions?
No. While those things may come to pass, the command is
to be renewed in our mind or in our understanding!

Interacting with Jesus in truth changes our minds! It re-
forms our understanding, and we are to commit to reform-
ing our understanding by the Spirit even as our own spirits
are reformed!

Change your way of thinking, or rather allow the Spirit to
change your way of thinking. Take on the mind of Christ
that is given to the saints: "...But we have the mind of
Christ" (1 Cor. 2:16b).

This new mind leads to a new worldview, a new focus, a new way to process what the eyes see, what the ears hear. It results in a new heart, a new mind, a new person, formed in the likeness of Christ.

VERSE 24

We are commanded to actively put on the new man.

God is creative. He makes things by His Word. He makes holy things by His Word, and He has made provision for us to be made new as well.

Those who belong to Christ are to be new - not half people, not people dragging a stinking corpse of regret, sin, and past living behind us. That is all to be done away with as we embrace the truth found in Jesus.

And in many ways, what we describe as the death of the old man and the raising to life of the new man is prefigured in the work of Christ Himself, who literally put to death His members, leaving us an example, and was raised to life by the Spirit of God.

This same miracle occurs in the life of every believer as God delivers us from death into life. As He makes us new and truly holy and truly righteous.

The long and short of what Paul is saying here to the Church, having considered our unique bond with one another and with Christ, is that we are new creations, so we ought to live like new creations.

We recoil at the thought! Me?! Holy and righteous? No, I'm just a wretched sinner.

Yes, that is where you came from, but where you are going is far different.

Our God is the One who formed humanity out of the dust of the earth, and He is making new creations out of the filth of our past lives.

If you have believed in Jesus Christ and have put off the old man in accordance with His will, then you are holy and righteous because God has made you and remade you in His image to live lives of holiness and righteousness for His glory.

“The loss of God’s image upon the soul was both the sinfulness and misery of man’s fallen state; and that resemblance which [the soul] bears to God is the beauty, the glory, and the happiness, of the new creature.”⁴⁰

Walk in newness of life, loved one. Be new. Be holy, just as your Father in heaven is holy.

⁴⁰Henry, M. (1994). Matthew Henry’s commentary on the whole Bible: complete and unabridged in one volume (p. 2314). Peabody: Hendrickson.

EPHESIANS 4 PART 5 | 4:25-32

As we press on through Ephesians and we come to the practical carrying out of our faith, it is important for us to remember how we arrived where we are.

Taken in a vacuum, these imperatives, commands, and exhortations to practical Christian living in the present can come across as merely a set of rules - a law, so to speak, a way for people to be assured that they are living good, upstanding lives.

This type of thought has been twisted to present the false proposition that IF we do these things, THEN we will be saved, or IF we do these things, THEN we will be pleasing to God, or even the slippery lie: IF we do these things, THEN we are good people.

And, while we find ourselves examining very real commands toward holy living and toward obedience to God's Word, the truth of the matter far surpasses the superficial, physical carrying out of a set of rules or religious obligations.

Rather, the behaviors we examine in this text are the direct RESULT of something else, that being the fact that the Christian IS a part of the Body of Christ, the Church, and the evidence of that membership is revealed in how we live our lives before God.

The root of faith in Jesus Christ, and obedience to His commands brings forth the fruit of holy living in the life of the believer.

Nevertheless, it is true that we, members of Christ's Body, beggars for His grace, need instruction in holiness because we have lived so much of our lives apart from it.

Each day that we draw close to Jesus, we are learning what it means to grow in holiness, to be new even as He is faithfully making us new.

“But as He who called you [is] holy, you also be holy in all [your] conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy’” (1 Pet. 1:15-16).

The fruit produced in the life of the believer in the grace of Christ by the renewing work of the Holy Spirit is a full person turned toward God, marked by His character - holiness.

We are being conformed to His image as we are called to put off the old person and to put on the new person that is created in God's image (Eph. 4:22-24).

VERSE 25

Therefore - So then, having said what was said, the logical conclusion is this...

Paul has spent much time discussing the Church: our unity, our diverse giftings, our mutual dependence upon one another, our shared function of building one another and the Church up in love, and our turning away from our former conduct.

The Ephesians, and we as well, are further exhorted **THEREFORE** to stop lying (along with the other sinful vices that marked our past selves.)

More specifically, putting it aside, away, casting it off.

Lying should no longer be named among the tools or devices we use to shape our relationships with others.

We are called to live authentic, honest, undivided, seamless lives as part of the Body and in the world. We are called to deny the tools of the world that are explained away as commonplace, such as lying.

Consider how many of our communications are marked by lying as a form of manipulation in some form, either to conceal the truth, buffer against unwanted intrusions into our lives, or manipulate others into doing our bidding.

It should not be so for Jesus' followers who are filled with the Holy Spirit. Notice that Paul uses Scripture to support the opposite of lying (speaking truth), as if it needs support!

To expand upon the text that Paul references, it reads:

“These [are] the things you shall do: Speak each man the truth to his neighbor; Give judgment in your gates for truth, justice, and peace; Let none of you think evil in your heart against your neighbor; And do not love a false oath. For all these [are things] that I hate,’ Says the LORD” (Zech. 9:16-17).

The problem is that we do justify lying and its companions. We say things like, “Everybody lies,” or, “It’s just a little white lie.”

The crazy thing is, though, when we consider the character of our God as revealed by Scripture, He cannot lie (Titus 1:2; Rom. 3:4).

So, if we are being transformed to look more and more like our heavenly Father, then these worldly attributes that we cling to will begin to fade. They will become more and more unnatural to us as we are shaped by His Spirit.

God's Word encourages us to live in authenticity and truth with others, rather than employing the devices of the devil, the father of lies (John 8:44).

VERSES 26-27

Furthermore, we read the command, "Be angry and do not sin..."

Paul here references Psalm 4:4. Paul was a man of the Book! I love how he faithfully used Scripture for instruction.

"Be angry, and do not sin. Meditate within your heart on your bed, and be still. Selah" (Ps. 4:4).

Part of being a human is experiencing emotion. We experience the same emotions as our Father in heaven. We experience anger.

The term we are examining can also carry with it the meaning "to be full of anger or to be furious."

God got angry. He still does. There are things that humanity does that grieve God's heart, and it would be unreasonable to assume that God has stopped feeling.

There are several accounts in Scripture that read similar to the following:

“But the children of Israel committed a trespass regarding the accursed things, for Achan the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed things; **so the anger of the LORD burned against the children of Israel**” (Josh. 7:1).

BUT, God cannot sin. He is righteous, and He deals with sin in righteousness. So we see again that we are called to look like our Dad even in dealing with anger.

Furthermore, Paul issues the command to deal with the cause of your anger (wrath), that thing that has provoked your anger, quickly.

“Do not let the sun go down on *the cause of your anger* (παροργισμῶ)” (Eph. 4:26).

By the way, this doesn't mean shooting our way out of every confrontation in an attempt to get it over with.

So, when we commit to resolving our anger, our wrath, peaceably in the Spirit of Christ, we must take steps to do so expeditiously and graciously.

To do otherwise is to invite the influence of the devil into our relationships and in our everyday interactions. To allow anger to fester in our minds and our souls gives occasion

for all sorts of wickedness that we will justify for our own benefit.

We must acknowledge that even as we are called to deal with anger and wrath righteously, we are supremely inconsistent when it comes to our ability to resolve conflict and anger righteously.

Furthermore, when we consider our own anger and our desire to be right, regardless of whether or not we truly are, and when we consider our desire to be recompensed for our mental/emotional anguish that we have been through, we must consider how God dealt with wrath in the final sense.

We want revenge, but God desires reconciliation.

While all creation hung under the penalty of God's righteous indignation, He did not demand repayment from our hands or profuse apologies. Rather, He Himself made the way to reconcile His enemies to Himself in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ received the full wrath of God in His Body so that we might be brought into a right standing with Him.

“...Having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him” (Rom. 5:9).

We must never forget this when we spin out in our own anger and demand payment be made. Are we willing to make provision for those who don't deserve it? The Father did, so let us consider the weight of such grace in our own lives.

It is because of His grace that we can be changed, we can be made new creations.

*VERSE 28: THE DRAMATICALLY CHANGED LIVES OF
THE SAINTS*

The Church is a holy congregation of believers in Jesus from all walks of life.

As we referenced last week, the Church is made up of former fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, homosexuals, sodomites, thieves, covets, drunkards, revilers, extortioners, and the like (1 Cor. 6:9)!

In our text, Paul deals with one particular lifestyle quite pointedly: the person who used to be a thief.

The command he issues is that the one who was a thief, having been made new in Jesus, is to “steal no longer,” but to work. Not only to work in a nominal or mediocre sense, but to labor with his hands and do GOOD work.

Why? To build a fortune? For personal satisfaction? To have something to do? No! To be a giver!

Isn't that amazing? The purpose for the new creation to be a worker of good isn't simply to make a living.

It has been said, “Don't live to work; work to live.” Paul says, “Work to give.” Wow!

Who do you see in this? Jesus! He was the ultimate giver to the ultimate extent.

“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich” (2 Cor. 8:9).

And this is a mark of Jesus followers - giving to those who have a need.

What a beautiful transformation: a thief to a giver. This is how Jesus changes people - dramatically and completely.

VERSE 29: NO CORRUPT WORD

What you say matters! Does it build others up? Is it good? Is it gracious? Does the hearer benefit from having heard it?

Or is it hurtful, unwholesome, and putrid. These are all shades of corrupt speech.

In this we take on the nature of Christ in a very real sense! Jesus' words, while difficult to understand sometimes, are edifying. His words create, build up, correct, direct, strengthen, encourage, and so much more. Jesus' words are the words of eternal life (John 6:88).

Let us therefore adopt His nature.

“And the tongue [is] a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell. For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. But no man can tame the tongue. [It is] an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our God and Father, and

with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. Does a spring send forth fresh [water] and bitter from the same opening? Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh” (James 3:6-12).

The answer to James’ question is “no” - true plants give forth the fruit that they bear naturally. True springs give forth the water that is in them.

So it is with our speech. What we say is the product of our heart.

“A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks” (Luke 6:45).

VERSE 30: DO NOT GRIEVE THE HOLY SPIRIT

“**λυπέω**: (derivative of λύπη ‘state of sadness,’ 25.273) to cause someone to be sad, sorrowful, or distressed—‘to make sad, to sadden.’... μὴ λυπεῖτε τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον τοῦ θεοῦ ‘**don’t make God’s Holy Spirit sad**’ Eph 4:30.”⁴¹

Don’t hurt the Holy Spirit’s heart.

The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity, co-equal with the Father and the Son in power, glory, and authority.

⁴¹Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 317). New York: United Bible Societies.

The Holy Spirit, God, lives in us. As discussed, God experiences emotion.

It hurts God to see us wounded and wounding others when we decide to live lives marked by lying, wrath, stealing, corrupt speaking, and the like.

It hurts God's heart to see the creation that He made in His image, redeemed by the Son, and re-made in His image by His own Spirit choosing to revel in sin.

Even so, He has been so gracious and patient with us - to His praise and to His glory.

In spite of all of our deficiencies and repeated failures, He doesn't cast us off; rather, we have been secured for the day of redemption by His own Spirit - He cannot deny Himself (2 Tim. 2:13).

And as such, we are continually being shaped to resemble Him more and more.

VERSE 31: CONTRAST WITH OPPOSITES

Contrast with opposites - this portion has really been about opposites.

For example, not lying, but prioritizing truth; not burning anger, but reconciliation; not stealing, but giving; not corrupt speech, but gracious speech; not hurting God's heart, but enduring by the Spirit.

So we come to our final portion of contrasts. Paul calls to mind those things that we are prone to be characterized by.

He says to put these things away, to cast them aside.

And since we have been looking so strongly at contrasts, it is a helpful exercise to consider the contrasts for these as well.

Bitterness - sweetness

Wrath - grace

Anger - Rejoicing

Clamor - Peace

Evil speaking - holy speaking

All malice - all holiness

VERSE 32

Adopt the Spirit of Christ - kindness to others, soft hearts, forgiving one another.

We will be wronged, and we will wrong others, intentionally or not. BUT, look to Christ our example who forgave us, who forgives us.

None of us are perfect. We all fail at these things time and time again, some more or less than others.

We are in dire need of forgiveness, and we receive Christ's forgiveness. We are in dire need of patience, and we receive Christ's patience. We are in dire need of grace. And we receive Christ's grace!

So then let us labor, work hard, to allow the attributes of the Lord Jesus to flow through us to others. It is His Spirit that lives in us and has sealed us. Let it be His Spirit that others encounter as we live out our lives for Jesus.

EPHESIANS 5 PART 1 | 5:1-8

We again see this term “therefore.” Remember, we are to call to mind all that has been set forth prior to this term as the logical progression leading to some action or result.

Paul has used this term “therefore” around 15 times or so in Ephesians.

From this we get the sense that Paul is progressive in his instruction to the Church.

He carefully builds upon the doctrinal foundation of Christ and the Church in his teaching, culminating in the very practical result lived out by the members of Christ’s Body, the saints.

What we see, too, is that the great number of times Paul uses the term “therefore” points to the fact that the result of the gospel is borne out in a multitude of actions, thoughts, and works by the saints, rather than just one catch-all defining characteristic.

Bad example: Christians don’t smoke cigarettes.

The dynamic result of the gospel in the lives of the saints is a life so completely re-formed that it is steeped in the righteousness of Christ in all aspects.

VERSE 1

Additionally, what we see is that Paul continues to recall this theme of looking like God, bearing the image of our Maker.

He exhorts the Ephesians to “be imitators of God as dear children” (Eph. 5:1).

We have discussed before that as we walk with the Lord, we are transformed into His image. This is a foundational truth that we must allow ourselves to be grasped by, even as we confess we do not understand the gravity of this doctrine in full.

As Paul writes, “And as we have borne the image of the [man] of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly [Man]” (1 Cor. 15:49).

We bear God’s image as we are re-made by Him - we bear His righteousness.

We DO look like our heavenly Father. Just as a child resembles their earthly parents, we are to resemble our heavenly Father in righteousness. He has made this so by the blood of Jesus.

“For He made Him who knew no sin [to be] sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21).

This is far more than looking like something we are not. We are prone to fits of unrighteousness and feeling unrighteous. We feel like frauds and posers!

Sometimes when we consider “imitation” we may think of things like “knock-off” or “not genuine.” But the context for us is not in regards to goods but in regards to family.

Imitate God the Father as a child to a parent.

We all know how children try to act like mom and dad by playing dress up, practicing the behaviors of mom and dad (good and bad), etc.

That’s how our kids learn to live, to be adults.

Certainly, there is much instruction that goes into raising children. Don’t we see that too in our relationship with God the Father?

He is instructing us by His Word, but we share His DNA by the Spirit, and we are learning what it means to bear His image and to be clothed in His righteousness as we imitate His mannerisms, behaviors, and His very heart.

We are GROWING UP in Him, and He is a perfect Father where so often we are not.

Paul continues to paint the picture for us of what this looks like practically in our daily lives as we follow Jesus by giving us actual examples of how our conduct is the result of being a child of God.

One of those ways is how we “walk.”

VERSE 2: WALK IN LOVE

What does that mean though to walk in love?

We intuitively say, “Well, yeah, Jesus’ people are loving because Jesus’ is loving.” Yes! Amen!

But there is more going on here. Why did Paul decide to use this phrase, “Walk in love,” rather than “Be loving?”

Paul does write that quite plainly in some of his other letters:

“Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law” (Rom. 13:8).

“But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another” (1 Thess. 4:9).

But to walk in love, that’s something else. That’s a meaningful, purposeful action, moving our feet and legs, with intention, direction, and purpose.

So often the life of a disciple is described as a race, right? Or, a marathon. Or, a walk.

Why? Because we are going somewhere! We are on a holy journey with the Lord Jesus individually and as part of His holy Church.

As a matter of fact, Peter refers to believers as Pilgrims and travelers or sojourners (1 Pet. 2:11).

How we walk is to be just like our Father. After all, He is the One who taught us how to stand on our feet and put one foot in front of the other.

Since we are His children, whom He loves very much, so then we too are characterized by love for others.

While God demonstrates His love toward us in many ways, this is most clearly demonstrated in the work of Jesus, who walked to Calvary for our sakes, who demonstrated His love to the utmost by giving His own life for us.

“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8).

It is this sacrifice that brings us close to God, that gives us access to His righteousness, that empowers us to also walk in love in our own lives.

Love is THE defining mark of the disciple in the eyes of the world. It’s how we are known to others as Jesus followers. Yet there seems to be a vast lack of love among God’s people as we champion everything else except love.

We try to displace the marks of the disciples with other things that we judge to be more fruitful, efficient, measurable, socially acceptable, etc.

But let us remember what Jesus taught:

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-35).

How are we to love others? As Jesus loved His own disciples. “How was that?” one might ask, and that is quite a conversation, but I have one verse in mind that really distills Jesus’ love that we are to imitate.

“Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, **having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end**” (John 13:1, 34-35).

The love we are called to embrace and enact in our lives, focused on others, is true love, not the corporatized, commercial love that is marketed to the masses, based solely on subjectivity, relativism, hyper-emotionalism, and manipulative thought, but true, committed, sacrificial love. A love that changes people. A love grounded in Christ. A love to the end.

“Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God. But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love. God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love--not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins. Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other” (1 John 4:7-11, NLT).

VERSE 3

Even as Paul exhorts us to love as Christ loves us, he also commands a departure from sin.

Notice the careful juxtaposition of the sweet-smelling aroma of Christ’s sacrifice pitted against the natural tendency of humanity - vices, sin, and evil.

Jesus followers are to live in such a way that sexual sins, ALL uncleanness, OR covetousness are not named among them as saints. These broad titles cover nearly ALL methods of sin.

Paul's language prohibits the Church from living like the world. This shouldn't be a cause for self-righteousness or condescension, as we understand the darkness of our hearts and where we all came from or our propensity for sin.

Rather, this should be a cause for reflection and humility in our lives and grace toward those outside.

VERSE 4

Furthermore, Paul continues to give explicit instructions on what is unacceptable in the life of the saints.

I wonder if this is perhaps due to our tendency to gravitate toward technicalities.

When Paul says, "Don't let fornication, all uncleanness, or covetousness be named among you because you are holy ones" (Eph. 5:3), there are certainly people who would push back against that and say, "Yeah but what does uncleanness mean? From my perspective I can do X,Y, and Z because they are fine for me. I can say what I want, live how I want, etc."

BUT, the child, imitating the Father, will bear certain marks of the Father as a natural result of being changed into His image.

Very plainly, God's kids shun intentional obscenity, foolish talking, and dirty jokes.

We might say of all of these -- what's the big deal? What's the point of grace, then, if I have to follow all of these rules?

That is missing the point! Paul isn't saying, "Follow these rules, and then God will be pleased with you." He's saying, "This is the result of being God's kids," a mindfulness and closeness with God that results in holy living in all areas of our lives.

Rather than letting the filth that once marked our speech fall unguarded from our big, fat, sloppy mouths, we send forth thanks to God from lips that have been made holy.

That is worth far more than the momentary gratification we get from getting a chuckle out of an unbeliever, or worse - trying to relate to somebody in a way that denies the fact that we are called to holiness.

I love how the NLT puts it: "Obscene stories, foolish talk, and coarse jokes—these are not for you. Instead, let there be thankfulness to God" (Eph. 5:4).

VERSE 5

Paul reminds the Church that they know better while calling back those things that he has already mentioned.

It's not possible to continue, unabashedly opposed to God's holiness, His ways, His Word, His heart, His Son, and the gospel, and claim to be a part of the Kingdom.

We can't live apart from Christ, denying his power in every real action we take, and also expect to be welcomed into

the Kingdom without any repentance, real belief, or transformation.

“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life” (Gal. 6:7-8).

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness” (Rom. 1:18).

VERSE 6

Paul makes it clear that it is because of these actions, this pervasive sin, that God’s wrath is necessary.

He also tells us that there are those who try to justify these behaviors by empty speech and perpetuate the deception, the lie, that we can live however we like with no eternal consequences.

In this we see that “There is nothing new under the sun” (Eccles. 1:9).

People continue to deceive good-hearted, sincere believers through very cleverly crafted arguments meant to lessen the severity of sin and the seriousness of holiness.

Sometimes one compelling argument for why we ought to be able to live in debauchery outweighs 1000 plain words in Scripture that exhort us to flee from such nonsense.

“It would be wrong to translate *foolish words* as “stupid words” or “meaningless words.” In order to be deceitful, such words must be clever but wrong, and therefore in some languages *foolish words* may be appropriately translated as “lying words” Most languages have plenty of words for *deceive*, but one of the common phrases is “cause someone to believe a lie.”⁴²

VERSE 7-8

Very clearly the Scripture tells us, “Don’t do it, don’t be partakers with those who excuse sin as meaningless or who scoff at holiness.”

And even as Paul spoke in verse five, “this you know,” we ourselves know well enough where we came from. We were once darkness - that was our former state, part of the darkness, of the very same substance as the darkness.

We weren’t just a victim of the darkness but an ally and part of the vile family - children of disobedience, ignoring God, opposing Christ.

John Calvin writes on the subject: “*Darkness* is the name here given to the whole nature of man before regeneration; for, where the brightness of God does not shine, there is nothing but fearful darkness.”⁴³

⁴²Bratcher, R. G., & Nida, E. A. (1993). *A handbook on Paul’s letter to the Ephesians* (p. 128). New York: United Bible Societies.

⁴³Calvin, J., & Pringle, W. (2010). *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians* (p. 309). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

But now we are light! This is nothing short of miraculous!

Remember, it was God who spoke light out of the darkness in the very beginning (Gen. 1:2-3), and it is that same God who makes us light out of darkness.

So then...walk as children of light.

Since we are children of God, children of light, this is in our nature. It is the result of being brought into His Kingdom.

“This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5).

This is our substance now, light, holiness, bearing the likeness of Christ.

“I have come [as] a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness” (John 12:46).

We have been called lamps in dark places, children of light in a dark world. So then let us walk in the light of Christ, and let us reflect that light clearly and brightly.

EPHESIANS 5 PART 2 | 5:8-14

Continuing to develop the very real and tangible results of being a part of the Body of Christ, the Church.

We were once children of disobedience, subject to the just wrath of God, but having believed the gospel, having come to faith in Christ, we are translated from darkness to light, as Peter affirms:

“But you [are] a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Pet. 2:9).

We are awarded full membership into the Body of Christ, granted access to the Father, and set apart as holy for His will and good pleasure.

We see that Paul uses contrasts to illustrate the change that occurs in the life of the believer as we grow into the likeness of our Lord, as we grow in holiness.

The contrasts that Paul presents the Ephesians in chapter 5 are: not fornication, uncleanness, covetousness, foul language, coarse jesting, or foolish talk, but rather giving of thanks, love, and a pursuit of holiness that Jesus Christ Himself has set us upon.

VERSES 8-10

To use a far more grand contrast, Paul writes to the Ephesians, “You were once darkness but now you are light in the Lord” (Eph. 5:8).

Our very substance has been changed from darkness to light.

As we pointed out last week, the same God who created light out of darkness in the very beginning (Gen. 1:2-4) is the One who makes us light by His Word.

Paul’s exhortation to these believers at Ephesus is to walk the walk in a very serious and committed sense. Since we have been made light, the result ought to be abundantly clear in our conduct.

Paul’s contrast between light and dark is so striking!

God has made us to be something completely opposite of what we once were. And if we take a moment to consider the vast company of saints that God has redeemed in Jesus, whom He has moved from darkness to light, we can attest to this truth!

Paul’s own life was a testament to this fact: from murderer to Apostle. Dark to light.

God’s saving power didn’t call us out of the world only to remake us in the image of the world like some kind of divine camouflage to keep others from finding out that we’ve been changed.

Rather, God has changed us to be bright, shining lamps of righteousness and truth, measured and molded by the full counsel of Scripture.

And, it is true that we all are FINDING OUT what is acceptable to the Lord along our journey of individual and collective sanctification with the Lord Jesus Christ.

We must embrace this truth! There are things that we cling to as baby Christians, just sparked to life, that we find over time by the gentleness of the Holy Spirit and the surgical nature of God's Word, that we are to let go of because they are not acceptable to the Lord.

As our lamps' flames burn brighter, we come to know more clearly the heart of Jesus, and even now we can look back at those examples in our own lives that bear witness to this truth.

There are behaviors, words, speech, even deeply held social beliefs that the Lord Jesus is carving out of us as we grow in holiness and are conformed more and more into His likeness.

We truly are finding out what is acceptable to the Lord.

What is so amazing is that as we doggedly cling to our old darkness, Jesus is so patient with us and so gracious, attitudes that we also learn to adopt and present to others over time.

But let us ask the question as we consider that God has set us ablaze for His divine will and pleasure - where has He set us, and for what purpose?

VERSES 11-13

In the world, a place characterized by spiritual darkness.

This is of the utmost importance as we consider the purpose of the Church.

Remember, Paul's general purpose in Ephesians is presenting the foundational doctrine of the Church.

Consider that it is the Lord's good pleasure to build and sustain his Church in the world presently and for the past two millennia, rather than snatching the Church into eternity anytime in the past. The Church endures for a purpose, not because Jesus forgot we are here.

This is important for many reasons but mainly because it demonstrates the Lord's longsuffering and patience towards those who are currently apart from Him, those who are in darkness.

The Church exists in the darkness to give light to the darkness. It is not to build an eternal Kingdom here on earth, but to serve as ambassadors for Christ in a dark place, to reflect His light, as we are light in Him.

“You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all [who are] in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matt. 5:14-16).

And as we are light in Christ, acknowledging that He has made us to be part of His substance, we turn away from the

darkness, understanding that we are, in fact, purposed by God for holiness, for brightness.

Furthermore, what we see is that the result of being made of the same substance as Christ (light) is that light impacts the world around us.

There is a real, tangible, noticeable result of God's children, of light living and moving in our world, our communities. The result is illumination.

As a matter of fact, Paul tells us that the nature of our holy light is such that it illuminates those unfruitful works of darkness to expose them for what they are: wickedness, sin, opposition to God.

Now, we must be careful at this point. On the point of exposing sin, some Christians are just salivating, waiting for their chance to rage against everybody else and market themselves as Jesus' champion in the worst sense, while ignoring the full character and person of Jesus.

Remember these words: "Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, 'I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life'" (John 8:12).

Jesus issues this statement of divinity, claiming to be the light of the world. Recall that in Matthew 5, Jesus teaches, "You are the light of the world" (v. 14). So we are to be of the same substance and purpose of Jesus Christ.

Now, let us look at the context of this statement that Jesus makes in John chapter 8, “I am the light of the world” (v. 12).

Jesus’ words are spoken early in the morning, perhaps in the early morning dawn, as a woman has been caught in the very act of adultery. She is most likely pulled from the bed of her partner in crime, who is not identified.

This woman’s sin has been brought to light in the worst possible way by the scribes and Pharisees, God-fearing, religious people who believed it was their God-given mandate to regulate everybody’s moral failings.

How did Jesus respond? Accusation? Vitriol? Condemnation?

According to the letter of the law, she **DESERVES** legal condemnation but is met with mercy, and Jesus even challenges all present to self-examination as well.

So poignant are Jesus’ words, so powerful His compassion, mercy, and grace, that the uppity religious champions of God (scribes and Pharisees) abandon their vindictive campaign to kill this woman.

In fact, the purpose of Jesus is not to come to the world so that He may condemn it.

So, too, He has not set us ablaze to carry His light so that we may roast others and condemn the world from our lofty theological positions with “facts and logic.”

Hear now the gospel:

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God” (John 3:16-21).

So then, as we represent our Lord Jesus Christ, let us allow His light to shine brightly from our lamps. Let Him be lifted up, and let us know that it is never OUR light that we are shining forth.

BUT, as we move in our society, the natural result of living lives separated unto God, marked by holiness, light, and the Spirit, is that those unfruitful works of darkness WILL be exposed in order to show men the reality of their condition.

This makes the message not about mere works of light or darkness, but about the true Light of Jesus Christ, who has come to save the world through His life, death, and resurrection.

“His life brought light to everyone. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it” (John 1:4-5, NLT).

Even so, the light of Christ shines in the darkness, exposing the unfruitful works of darkness, makes plainly known whether things are aligned with the heavenly Kingdom and holiness or the earthly kingdom and darkness.

The NLT does a great job presenting this thought in plain terms:

“But their evil intentions will be exposed when the light shines on them, for the light makes everything visible. This is why it is said, ‘Awake, O sleeper, rise up from the dead, and Christ will give you light’” (Eph. 5:13-14, NLT).

So then there is no need for us to adopt the poisonous position of “sin sniffers,” worrying about everybody else's sin while failing to reflect the full nature of Christ. In doing this, we leach gratification from the humiliation of others and thereby confirm our own self-righteousness, much like the Pharisees with the woman caught in adultery.

Rather, we are to allow the cleansing, holy light of Christ to expose those things of darkness, imploring those we come into contact with to WAKE UP!

We see in our text that “Paul quoted what was probably a worship chorus from the early church to illustrate this truth.”⁴⁴

VERSE 14

What a rich chorus too! This wonderful line that the early church perhaps sang together sets to words the idea that

⁴⁴Guzik, D. (2013). *Ephesians* (Eph 5:13–14). Santa Barbara, CA: David Guzik.

those who are spiritually asleep in the present age are spiritually dead as well!

BUT, it is possible to come to! To snap out of it! To enter into the Kingdom of light! To share in Christ's resurrection!

"...Christ, by his ministers, who preach the everlasting gospel, is continually calling upon sinners to this effect: *Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead.* The same thing in the main is designed by these different expressions; and they serve to remind us of the great stupidity and the wretched security of sinners, how insensible they are of their danger, and how unapt they naturally are to spiritual motions, sensations, and actions. When God calls upon them to awake, and to arise, his meaning is that they would break off their sins by repentance, and enter on a course of holy obedience, and he encourages them to [say] and do their utmost that way, by that gracious promise, *And Christ shall give thee light; or Christ shall enlighten thee, or shall shine upon thee.* 'He shall bring thee into a state of knowledge, holiness, and comfort, assisting thee with his grace, and refreshing thy mind with joy and peace here and rewarding thee with eternal glory at length.'"⁴⁵

The promise is that Christ provides the light. This is not intrinsic to our person - it belongs to the Lord. And we are beneficiaries of His grace, His compassion, His mercy, as we fall at His feet, adulterers and adulteresses as we are, legally condemned, and yet we experience His grace and mercy as passed down to us.

⁴⁵Henry, M. (1994). *Matthew Henry's commentary on the whole Bible: complete and unabridged in one volume* (p. 2316). Peabody: Hendrickson

“Then Jesus stood up again and said to the woman, ‘Where are your accusers? Didn't even one of them condemn you?’ ‘No, Lord,’ she said. And Jesus said, ‘Neither do I. Go and sin no more.’ Jesus spoke to the people once more and said, ‘I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won't have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life’” (John 8:10-12, NLT).

And so we pray, “Lord give us your light. Give us grace to faithfully bear it before others. We are lost without it.”

EPHESIANS 5 PART 3 | 5:15-21

Sometimes we feel like the era we live in is the worst it's ever been. We feel like things have deteriorated to a point of no return. We look around at our society that is divided, wounded, confused, and our hearts cry out, "Come quickly, Lord Jesus!"

But take heart, this feeling has been common over the generations! And, what we find in God's Word is that there is a strong history of and call to endurance among the saints.

The Church has been living in divided, wounded, confused times since the beginning.

The first-century Church lived in what Paul called "evil days."

So, what do we do? Do we give up? Do we rebel? Do we politic until we get our way? Do we align ourselves with worldly powers and principalities to ease our circumstances? Do we seek to claim worldly power because, well, we know best how to wield it?

Challenging questions. What is certain is that we are all called to be servants and witnesses in whatever era, whatever station, we find ourselves.

By God's sovereign design, we find ourselves exactly where He has determined that each of us should be.

As we find peace and purpose in God's sovereignty, there are some very real things we can do in obedience to God's Word, empowered by the Holy Spirit.

My partial proposal to you is this: Walk, redeem, understand, sing.

Paul wrote this letter around the year 60 A.D., approximately four years after a tearful goodbye with the Ephesian elders at Miletus (Acts 20).

Remember, it was Paul who warned the Ephesian elders, "...I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears" (Acts 20:29-31).

Paul's objective in writing to the Ephesians years after their farewell was "to set forth the ground, the cause, the aim of the church. He speaks to the Ephesians as a type or sample of the church universal."⁴⁶ He writes to them about the Church's foundation, its course. He tells them how to walk as they are called to holiness.

Ephesus was not considered a small city, but rather "the first and greatest metropolis of Asia."

It was also home to the Temple of Diana. Christianity was not the dominant faith in the land.

⁴⁶Alford, Henry. *Alford's Greek Testament: An Exegetical and Critical Commentary*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010.

We wouldn't say that the Ephesians lived in a perfect society. They had their own unique challenges, even among themselves! We can find comfort in this since we ourselves may be challenged by the society we live in.

So, how did the Ephesian Christians carry on in their less than ideal society? How did they maintain their faithfulness to Christ in the midst of a pagan culture, perhaps a culture that the members of the Ephesian church had been raised in since infancy? And, what bearing does that have on our lives in the present?

VERSE 15

Walk! This is a command, a call for movement, for progress. Keep going!

This exhortation is so important that here in our text it is the third time Paul has mentioned it in 15 verses.

In verse 2, Paul instructs the believers to walk in love like Jesus. In verse 8, he writes that they should "Walk as children of light" (Eph. 5:8).

In our text, Paul adds more detail as to how we are to walk: walk circumspectly! Or, in common parlance, pay attention!

Walk with your head on a swivel, with your eyes open, be watchful, walk carefully, intentionally, with discernment.

Keep your eyes open and see what is going on around you. Do so with wisdom and not foolishness.

To do this, we must measure what we see against God's Word. We must look to His wisdom, since ours often falls short of God's perfect wisdom.

Keep your eyes open, and don't walk backward! (*Illustration: kids and the stairs*).

If we don't keep our eyes open, if we bury our heads in the sand, if we walk backwards up the stairs and don't see things with a clear eye and a clear understanding, then we are prone to stumbling.

Some obstacle that is yet unseen will come along and rock our world.

What have we bumped into this past year that has challenged us? Did we see it coming?

That's why we walk circumspectly, looking around ensuring that we understand our surroundings relative to the gospel and our eternal position in Christ.

Be watchful! Watch out!

“Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong” (1 Cor. 16:13).

Paul encourages Timothy to be watchful in 2 Timothy 4:5.

Peter writes, “But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers” (1 Pet. 4:7).

Jesus himself tells his disciples in Mark 13:33 to “watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is.”

The Bible tells us over and over again that we must be watchful. Please know that being watchful isn't being fearful or anxious.

Being watchful means keeping our eyes open and exercising discernment as we continue to walk by faith.

We could even say that being watchful is being hopeful, trusting that our Lord's promises are true, that He shall keep us, and we shall see Him glorified even as we journey in this dark place.

VERSE 16

Paul adds to the condition of how we are walking out our faith by saying that we are to be redeeming the time!

This means, "to buy up for oneself, making the most of every opportunity, turning each moment to the best advantage since none can be recalled if missed."⁴⁷

Now, this isn't saying, "Carpe diem" or "YOLO" in the sense that we have more time for golf, hacky sack, or ultimate frisbee.

We are called by God's Word to buy up the time we encounter as we walk carefully in the gospel. Why? Because it's evil!

Wait...I don't want to buy evil time. Can I return it if I don't like it?

⁴⁷Vines, W. E., M. A. Entry for 'Redeem, Redemption'. Vine's Expository Dictionary of NT Words.

Understand, this is what Christ did for us! He redeemed us, purchased us, when we were evil. He is redeeming evil souls now! He made us into something new, holy, set apart for His glory.

That's what we are to do with our time, any time that we have.

I've heard so often, "I just don't have enough time," or even prayers that God would gift us with more time.

I pray, "Oh, but Lord, help us to faithfully redeem what you have given us!!! Every precious moment, Lord."

Redeem the time! The days are evil! Keep in mind Paul doesn't say redeem the time because the days are awesome!

NO - the days are evil. And yet we are called to demonstrate the character of Christ and take that time and set it apart as something holy.

VERSE 17

As we walk circumspectly, as we are discerning, as we are redeeming each precious moment, we are encouraged to understand the will of the Lord.

Is it such a great mystery?

There is much conversation among the saints about God's permissive and perfect will and how those two intersect or don't. There is much questioning as we come upon a new year, "What is God's will in my life?"

From our Spirit-inspired text we can know and understand that at least part of God's will is for you to walk in love, walk in light, walk circumspectly, and to redeem the time.

BUT WAIT, there's more - This really fun verse, verse 18.

VERSE 18

Depending on what your personal conviction is, you may be squirming in your seat or ready to applaud.

“Oh no, Anthony's telling us not to drink.” Or, “Oh yes, Anthony's telling them not to drink.”

This isn't actually a conversation about Christian liberties, personal conviction, and whether or not we should or shouldn't drink alcohol. I'm sure you've had those discussions ad nauseum.

Paul's instruction here is quite interestingly placed in this portion of the text as he strongly exhorts the Ephesians to walk carefully, to be wise, to redeem the time, to understand the Lord's will.

We must ask how this exhortation relates to the whole of the text. First off, Paul's instruction is very clear: do not be drunk with wine.

Why? Because, therein is dissipation or excess, prodigality, wastefulness.

What does it mean for something to dissipate? It just sort of evaporates, it dissolves, it wastes and fritters away.

These ruinous characteristics did not mark Christ's life and ministry, so then these are not characteristics that should mark the lives of the redeemed ones.

Rather, Christ's life and ministry are marked by faithfulness, wisdom, and redemption.

We cannot walk circumspectly, redeem the time, and understand the will of the Lord while also wasting our lives away at the same time, concurrently, as it were. (Although we do try, and sadly there are times when we do live divided, compartmentalized, disingenuous lives).

I believe Paul is very intentional in his placement of instruction against drunkenness in this passage.

Here's why:

He has already remarked that the days they live in are evil. He has already told the Church to open their eyes, to pay attention.

It's no secret that when times get tough, people turn to many things to try to ease their anxiety, stress, and burdens! As a matter of fact, people commonly turn to what they knew before!

Early Christians dealt with this pressing temptation within the Church, even from people presenting themselves as teachers.

Peter speaks to this condition and the nagging pull of our old lives:

“While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage. For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known [it], to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: ‘A dog returns to his own vomit,’ and, ‘a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire’” (2 Pet. 2:19-22).

And, in our text Paul warns the reader that during perilous, evil days - maybe even especially in perilous, evil days - we should be wary of drunkenness.

When work gets hard, when finances get tight, when family life is rough and fraught with conflict, when we lose loved ones, when society is ashambles, people withdraw from fellowship, we withdraw from the Word, we stop walking with the Lord and with other believers, and we turn to what we knew before - perhaps alcohol or some other thing to “ease the pain.”

“Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions?
Who has complaints? Who has wounds without cause?
Who has redness of eyes? Those who linger long at the wine,
Those who go in search of mixed wine. Do not look on the wine when it is red,
When it sparkles in the cup,
[When] it swirls around smoothly;
At the last it bites like a serpent,
And stings like a viper. Your eyes will see strange

things, And your heart will utter perverse things” (Prov. 23:29-33).

Conversations have been had with pastors all across the church with families in crisis that go like this:

“We are having a real hard time...”

“Well, how is your personal study going?”

“It’s not.”

“You haven’t been at church lately, is everything okay?”

“I’m so busy! I don’t know what to do.”

And that wounded soul, searching for relief, turns to anything but healing.

We demonstrate several tendencies to be guarded against in these moments:

1. We stop walking.
2. We are unfaithful in redeeming the time.
3. We withdraw from God and His people.

Rather than pressing into Jesus in our time of need, we look for other medicines to numb the pain.

We feel like freeing up more “me” time, maybe a night out, will help. It seldom does, and we end up unfulfilled and wasted away.

Paul says rather than wasting away, be filled with the Holy Spirit. Press into our Lord Jesus.

Do you see how all of this works together?

This carefully placed instruction on drunken wastefulness isn't some hanging clause that Paul threw in there to take shots at the fellas who like to have a drink every now and then, but because what we do with our lives matters.

Not in the sense that we are saved by it, but because having been saved, we are conformed into the image of Christ by the Holy Spirit.

Is what we are doing, the fullness of our lives, Kingdom work? Or is it "me time," focused on me and my needs? I need to get in the right headspace. I need a night off. I need a hand. I need to relax. I, I, I...

In continuing this exhortation Paul shifts our focus to others!

VERSE 19: SING!

What is this all about?

This is about the saints' communion with one another as we collectively and individually shun dissipation, wastefulness, and selfishness and we press into our fellowship with one another.

We speak holy words of encouragement to one another - psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.

We sing together, to one another, and in our hearts to the Lord.

Oh, what a beautiful thing to have a song in our hearts even though the days are evil.

This sing-song, joyful attitude found in the hearts of the saints attests to the sovereignty and certainty of our Lord Jesus Christ. We can have hope and joy and a song in our hearts because He is near to us by His Spirit and by His Word.

VERSE 20

We continue by giving thanks, even in evil days. So then the picture we are painting is one of supreme joy and hope in Jesus.

We began with the instructions to keep our eyes open, check things out, be discerning, then redeeming the time even though the days are evil. And in all of that we are grateful worshippers!

We sing, we praise, we give thanks always for all things in Jesus' name!

What a wonderful picture of the Church!

We aren't terrified. We aren't downcast. We aren't sullen. We aren't fatalists. Rather, we resemble Jesus: we are to be wise, discerning, hopeful, faithful, joyful, prayerful.

VERSE 21

Submitting to one another - we are in this together.

I'm not the boss, and neither are you. Jesus Christ is our Lord, and He has charged that we should submit, or defer, to one another in all of this.

Submitting to one another is important and plain and something we each get a great deal of practice doing as we gather as the Church. And in so doing, we learn more and more about the heart of Jesus and the importance of this community we are a part of.

“We are surrounded with millions of foes without, and infected with a legion of enemies within...we are commanded to shine as lights in the world, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation...we are traveling to a long eternity, and need all imaginable helps to show, and encourage us in our way...Let us, I say, reflect on all this, and then how shall each of us cry out, ‘Brethren, what a necessary thing it is to meet together.’”⁴⁸

And as we walk together, we can encourage one another along the way. We can pray for one another. We can praise our Lord together. We can shine as a light to the world, knowing that even though the days are evil we have been redeemed, and by God's grace we can be about our Father's business, redeeming the time.

⁴⁸Taken from George Whitfield's sermon, “The Necessity and Benefits of Religious Society.”

EPHESIANS 5 PART 4 | 5:22-33

Lately in our study, Paul has been diligently demonstrating to the Church the importance of holiness in the life of the believer - that we should no longer walk in darkness but light, that we should reflect the person and work of Jesus in our lives since we are His.

He has exhorted the Church to walk carefully, giving attention to holiness even in less than ideal situations, remarking that the days are evil.

Paul has been addressing the very practical result of being a Jesus follower since chapter 4, where he writes:

“I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called” (Eph. 4:1).

Remember that this letter is laying out the doctrine of the Church, which is the very union of Christ and the redeemed.

The result of that union is borne out in the lives of the saints.

We ourselves are the stones that God has set together to build up the Church, which is referred to as the Body and Bride of Christ.

This morning we begin to move into some of the specific areas of our lives that Paul says are marked by holiness as we follow Jesus.

It is no surprise, then, that Paul addresses marriage.

But as we will see, this is far more than just an academic, theoretical look at how to improve one's marriage. Tather, inspired by the Holy Spirit, Paul sets forth the very purpose of marriage and the very important roles that wives and husbands play as we minister to our spouses in holiness and with an eternal perspective.

The result of living in communion with Christ, filled by the Spirit, acting in obedience to His Word, is that we WILL do these things.

VERSES 22-24

This passage is quite controversial in some circles. It is controversial because of the way we present it.

We sometimes present this in a way in which women, wives, are categorized as second class citizens in the Kingdom, and we men, husbands, in our pride, are the rulers over them.

That is not so. Let us examine closely: wives, submit yourselves to **YOUR OWN HUSBANDS AS UNTO THE LORD.**

Depending on where you place the emphasis, we can draw out different applications.

But I want to refocus us on the salve that heals all wounds. As unto the Lord.

The sum of all of our service and submission, no matter what realm it is in, is to be unto the Lord, for Jesus' sake.

Let us remember Paul's exhortation only a verse earlier to the Church in general: "...submitting to one another in the fear of God" (Eph. 5:21).

In our text, Paul draws a strong parallel between wives and the Church, going so far as to say that a wife's relationship to her husband represents the relationship between the Church and Christ.

What we begin to see is that Paul is using these marriage relationships to paint a picture of Christ and the Church - how He relates to us, how we relate to Him, and how our marital relationship represents a holy parable to all creation of God's heart towards this divine institution, the Church.

So, removing heavy-handed oppressive husbands from the picture, all things being equal, the role of a Jesus-serving wife is to place herself freely and firmly under the headship of their husband as a picture of how the Church submits herself under the headship and authority of Jesus Christ.

This has gotten a lot of bad press for many reasons, not least of which is pride and a deep misunderstanding regarding the roles of husbands and wives relative to Jesus and His Bride the Church.

Wives are called to submit themselves, rather than being guilted, forced, or bullied into submission. They are called to take up their holy role as a living parable of the Church.

And what a parable that is! Holiness, beauty, fidelity, compassion, endurance, truth, and many other attributes mark the Church and, truth be told, mark those holy women who

take God's Word seriously, even when it makes them uncomfortable.

Beware the flesh, ladies! Beware pride! Beware misrepresenting Christ's Church, loved one.

But here's the thing, men. Even as wives are commanded to submit to their husbands as the Church does unto Jesus, you ain't Jesus!

“...his authority over the church is the result of his having saved *the church, his body*. This is, of course, a shorthand way of saying “he saved those who compose the church,” since the church, as an entity, does not exist as a group of unsaved people. Christ's authority derives from his love for the church and his self-sacrifice on its behalf...This aspect of the relationship of Christ to the church has no counterpart in the relationship of the husband to the wife; the analogy between the two relationships is not exact.”⁴⁹

The men that we see enforcing a brutal form of authoritarianism in their homes all in the name of Jesus have some repenting to do!

That was never how Jesus acted toward His loved ones, with threats and bullying.

A dangerous, theologically dubious concept has crept into many Christian homes that categorizes husbands as the “high priest of the home.”

⁴⁹Bratcher, R. G., & Nida, E. A. (1993). *A handbook on Paul's letter to the Ephesians* (p. 140). New York: United Bible Societies.

This is a blatant over-reach by husbands who hope to grab that title. The reason why this is considered overreach should be obvious, but let us be clear of how the Scriptures approach that term “high priest.”

There is only one man qualified and called to be the High Priest over the Church, over our homes, over all creation, and His name is Jesus the Christ. (See Hebrews for more detail).

“But Christ came [as] High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption” (Heb. 9:11-12).

“For [there is] one God and one Mediator between God and men, [the] Man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5).

No man should be so arrogant, presumptuous, or obfuscating to think that he can seize the role of Jesus in the lives of other believers, family members included.

Women and men both have access to the Father through one High Priest alone, Jesus Christ. Let no man stand in the way.

We are commanded as husbands to live like Jesus, not haughtily or in a domineering manner at the top of a pyramid, but as the loving servant who gave Himself for us.

VERSES 25-28

So, we find that in this grand parable, husbands are to represent the person and work of Jesus toward the Church as we live with, serve, and love our wives from a position of meekness.

This truth is hard for husbands to obey, because we want to maintain a measure of control and authority in our lives.

Incidentally, if you have to say that you're in charge, you're not.

We want to be the king of our castle! It's MY home! My house, my rules!

This domineering attitude is violently opposed to Christ's nature, who "made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant" (Phil. 2:7). He declared plainly, "I am among you as the one who serves" (Luke 22:27).

We men say, "Well, IF my wife only honored me, respected me, submitted to me, IF SHE fulfilled her end of the bargain, THEN I would love her."

We make the relationships in our homes transactional and conditional. If you do this for me, then I will do this for you.

Our relationships become an exchange of goods and services.

It is that sentiment that displays our selfishness, yet this way of thinking and behaving is generally accepted as normal and justifiable in society.

On the contrary, God's Word says, Husbands, love your wives as Christ loves the Church.

In that relationship between Christ and the Church, and in our individual relationships with Jesus, He is always the initiator, and He always has been!

When we were yet enemies with Him, His love reached out to us.

He loved us while we scorned His name, while we thought we were too smart for Him. He loved us while we disrespected His holiness. He loved us when we did not submit to Him or His will. He loved us first!

If the scenario was reversed and the relationship between Christ and the Church actually reflected our own homes, we would be lost as a Church.

If Christ only loved us when we were on our best behavior and in perfect submission to Him, if His affection and care for the Church were contingent on our behavior, we would be done for, cut off a long time ago.

Conversely, what we find is that SINCE Jesus loves the Church so much and gave himself for us, THEN we respond in kind with love. This ought to be how our homes work.

Husbands are to take the servant's place and love their wives, especially when they don't deserve it, because that's the heart of Jesus. Be the initiator!

Now, in our endeavor to be shaped into Christ's likeness, to love our wives as Christ loves the Church, we must examine what that looks like.

I have heard every manner of sin and rudeness covered up by the glib retort, "I'm just speaking the truth in love," when nothing could be further from the truth.

When our words and actions are gruff or offensive to our spouses, we often use this phrase, or perhaps we say, "The truth hurts."

Let it not be so. Let us adopt the gentle nature of Christ, who "will not quarrel nor cry out...who won't break a bruised reed, and won't snuff out a smoking ember" (Isa. 42).

He is the one who "will gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those who are with young" (Isa. 40).

Peter writes that we husbands ought to dwell with our wives "with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life" (1 Peter 3:7).

Sometimes when teaching through this passage, our focus becomes misplaced somehow. Women become offended and say, "I am NOT the weaker vessel."

Peter's point here is not to point out that men have greater upper body strength than women. He is exhorting us to honor our wives, not in a condescending or arrogant way as

if they are beneath us, but in a gentle, purposeful way, as if we are caring for a precious treasure.

We should treat them gently as Christ treats us. We should treat them like a revered heirloom or fine china, something beautiful, designed and crafted to be elegant.

Our wives are not cast iron skillet, no matter how they may present themselves.

They are like fine china. If you drop her, if you handle her roughly, spiritually speaking, she will break, she will be damaged.

As Christ loves the Church we are to honor our wives - be understanding, treat them gently.

Gentleness is part of Christ's nature, so it is also found in His disciples. You will recall that when Christ sent out his Disciples to preach, he instructed them to "be wise as serpents and harmless as doves" (Matt. 10:16).

This gentleness should be an enduring characteristic in our discipleship and a benefit to our families

VERSES 29-32

Here we see directly and specifically how the Lord relates to the Church. He doesn't hate it, but nourishes and cherishes it as part of His own Body.

Bear this in mind, husbands, when we get a sharp tongue, a sarcastic word, a growl and a grumble, when we desire to assert our own rights and privileges over and above our

wives', all tinged with selfishness and the desire to be the boss.

Are we nourishing and cherishing our wives like Jesus does the Church?

Now Paul brings the whole of the matter together, and it is here we find that Paul isn't talking strictly about marital relationships. This more than a marriage improvement seminar.

He has skillfully presented the practical living out of our faith with the doctrine of Christ's Bride by addressing the whole Church, including himself:

“For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh” (Eph. 5:30-31).

It is here that we get the most complete understanding of how the Church and Jesus Christ relate to one another.

There is much discussion on the purpose of marriage.

Many have set forth that God created marriage in Genesis chapter 2 so that men and women would populate the earth and raise godly children.

Some have set forth that marriage is a vehicle for morally acceptable sexual gratification.

You and I know by now that men and women will populate the earth regardless of what holy institution God has created for His own designs.

We certainly know that marriage is no prerequisite in the eyes of the world to procreate or for sexual gratification.

Biblical marriage is more than just a means to an end.

As Paul says, “This is a great mystery” (Eph. 5:32), and we all say, “Amen.” Marriage was designed and instituted by God the Father in order to show mankind the relationship between Jesus and His Bride, the Church.

And when we consider it that way, then we must reevaluate how our marriages look.

Our marriages are purposely designed to communicate God’s heart to the world around us.

Marriage is supposed to be marked by faithfulness, endurance, longsuffering, shared hardship, grace, compassion, and love.

Of course we can name a million more Scriptural characteristics of marriage that are all representative of Jesus’ relationship with the Church.

So then, is it any wonder why we look forward as a Church to “the marriage supper of the lamb” (Rev. 19:9)?

Jesus pines for His Bride, the Church, and we long for His embrace too!

This is the greatest love story ever told. The romance between Jesus Christ and His Bride, the Church.

About this, Pastor Sandy Adams of Calvary Chapel Stone Mountain wrote:

“Marriage is a sacred snapshot...Most wives treasure their wedding photographs. If their house caught on fire their wedding album would be the keepsake with the top priority! They would want to save that collection. And the same is true with God. He too values His wedding pictures. The biblical roles of male and female are God’s wedding photos...We’re actors in a divine drama. God has a role for women to play – and a role for men to play. By each gender’s faithfulness we spell out heavy, eternal, spiritual truths. But these roles can only be understood and appreciated from God’s vantage point. You’ve got to get above human logic. Christians need to realize God has a purpose for the sexes, and it’s embodied in the roles He’s assigned us...When a husband loves his wife, or a man stands up to lead His church, he illustrates Christ’s care for His own. When a wife follows her husband’s leadership, or a sister in the church falls in line behind the pastor and elders, she teaches the world our attitude toward Christ.”⁵⁰

Our marriages are so much more than a legal arrangement between two people.

⁵⁰Adams, S. (n.d.). How We Role. Retrieved from <https://www.calvarychapeldeepsouth.com/howwerole/>.

VERSE 33

Nevertheless: this is Paul's way of saying that even though all of this is a picture of Jesus and we get to the "aha" moment, we still have very real roles to play in our marriages.

For husbands, that means loving our wives unconditionally, madly, completely.

For wives, this means learning how to respect their husbands and demonstrating that respect and submission just as we do as the Church.

Think about that. How does the Church submit to Christ, who loves us so much? Those who are in love with Jesus, we don't hem and haw and buck against the Lordship of Jesus.

We are grateful that we are His, and we are nearly overwhelmed by His love towards us.

We have much to learn, loved ones, in how we live this out faithfully as we are called to.

But keep in mind that any time you see a marriage going sideways, nearly always one or both of these roles has been forsaken for something else.

And keep in mind that anytime you see an aberration of marriage presented as "normal," or "okay," I want you to think about what that would mean in God's plan to teach the world about marriage and His heart.

So then, what we do matters, not in the sense of a legalistic adherence to policy, but because as we live our lives

marked by Jesus we are in fact communicating eternal truths about the Kingdom and about our Lord to those around us.

Let us do so, then, faithfully, humbly, lovingly.

EPHESIANS 6 PART 1 | 6:1-9

The significance of the call to holiness cannot be overstated. Similar passages mark the entirety of Scripture. Paul even lays out the same imperatives found here in Colossians 3:18-25.

We must ensure that we understand the Bible as more than simply a moral rule book governing our behavior.

Alistair Begg has said, “that when we come to these moral imperatives, it is vital that we recognize that they are built upon the doctrinal indicatives; that what is actually *true* provides the impetus, provides the framework, for the activity to which the writer calls us.”⁵¹

The continued result of being a part of Christ’s flesh and bone is the practical living out of our faith, found in our changed lives.

VERSES 1-3: CHILDREN LIVING WITH PARENTS

The Apostle Paul speaks directly to children here.

This informs our understanding of the composition of the early church, a family affair, and also shows us God’s heart towards His children.

⁵¹Begg, Alistair. “Divine Righteousness Applied - Truth for Life.” <https://www.truthforlife.org/resources/sermon/divine-righteousness-applied/>.

This is also a reminder to us that the roles our families play in society are far more than beacons of moral virtue.

By any measurable, outward standard, Mormon families demonstrate what we would call fine, upstanding family values, and that is certainly not because they are doctrinally correct in their understanding of Scripture.

But, as with marriage, the purpose of the family is to demonstrate to an unbelieving world and a world where families are fraught with conflict what God's Kingdom looks like.

All of us, no matter our age, are also God's children, part of His family, and God has designed these family institutions to communicate His nature and character to all humanity.

What we find, then, and what will be confirmed for us, is what we have been driving at all along: the collective group of Christians, the Church, being composed of individuals, is called to exemplify the heart of God in our every endeavor.

We are to demonstrate a unity with Christ that comes through in high definition by how we live.

Children are not excluded from the Kingdom, nor do they have to grow into it as a pair of oversized pajamas. They are part and parcel of God's Kingdom.

As a matter of fact, while adults often play the role of obstructionist toward children in the Kingdom, excluding them from our "adult" worship services (there are lots of good reasons why this is done), Jesus welcomed children openly.

“Then they brought little children to Him, that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked those who brought [them]. But when Jesus saw [it], He was greatly displeased and said to them, ‘Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.’ And He took them up in His arms, laid [His] hands on them, and blessed them” (Mark 10:13-16).

Children are precious to Jesus. We ourselves are called to adopt their nature in our acceptance of the Kingdom.

I hope you will also consider the truth that Jesus didn’t teach the children He blessed that they must accept the Kingdom as adults nor even as His own disciples. There’s a lesson in that for us.

And even as the Lord’s heart is for children, He desires that children should learn obedience, and the first place that children have the opportunity to learn obedience is in the home.

This of course has eternal implications for our children. If we do not teach them obedience in their youth, if we do not teach them to obey their earthly parents, then how should we expect them to adopt the characteristic of obedience in their own spiritual lives?

Just look at the witness of Scripture and history. Obedience is one of those things that humans chafe against!

Obedience doesn't come naturally. Rebellion and self seeking come naturally. Obedience comes through correction and instruction.

“We don't need to teach our children how to disobey because they have each inherited an inclination to sin from Adam—but obedience must be taught.”⁵²

That's why Paul is very clear about this imperative issued to children.

Taking this to the spiritual plane, the author of Hebrews lays out the purpose of fatherly instruction to obedience:

“Have you forgotten the encouraging words God spoke to you as his children? He said, ‘My child, don't make light of the LORD's discipline, and don't give up when he corrects you. For the LORD disciplines those he loves, and he punishes each one he accepts as his child.’ As you endure this divine discipline, remember that God is treating you as his own children. Who ever heard of a child who is never disciplined by its father? If God doesn't discipline you as he does all of his children, it means that you are illegitimate and are not really his children at all. Since we respected our earthly fathers who disciplined us, shouldn't we submit even more to the discipline of the Father of our spirits, and live forever? For our earthly fathers disciplined us for a few years, doing the best they knew how. But God's discipline is always good for us, so that we might share in his holiness. No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening--it's painful! But afterward there will be a peaceful harvest of

⁵²Guzik, D. (2013). *Ephesians* (Eph 6:1–3). Santa Barbara, CA: David Guzik.

right living for those who are trained in this way” (Heb. 12:5-11, NLT).

Here’s the point: we parents teach our children earthly obedience through correction and discipline in order to prepare them for eternal obedience AND in order to prepare our children for the heavenly correction that comes to God’s children.

This has the added benefit of teaching our children the important truth that they are not the Lord of all creation as they set their hearts to honor their father and mother.

This particular command is special to God’s heart - it is the first commandment of the decalogue that also has a promise attached to it. God has incentivized it, if you will.

“Obedience is the evidence of that *honour* which children owe to their parents, and is therefore more earnestly enforced. It is likewise more difficult; for the human mind recoils from the idea of subjection, and with difficulty allows itself to be placed under the control of another. Experience shews how rare this virtue is; for do we find one among a thousand that is obedient to his parents?... the obedience of children is enforced by the authority of God. Hence it follows, that parents are to be obeyed, so far only as is consistent with piety to God, which comes first in order...it would be foolish to suppose that the

performance of this duty could lead away from God himself.”⁵³

What does this teach us about Jesus?

Jesus himself made it plain that His own work and teaching was all at the direction of and in obedience to the will of the Father.

“Then Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner’” (John 5:19).

VERSE 4: FATHERS TO CHILDREN

This verse is specifically written to fathers!

Remember that gentleness is part of Christ’s nature, so it is also found in His disciples.

You will recall that when Christ sent out his disciples to preach, he instructed them to be “wise as serpents and harmless as doves” (Matt. 10:16).

This should be an enduring characteristic in our discipleship and a benefit to our families.

For those of us who have children, this gentleness, harmlessness, is a biblical imperative that extends to us as well.

⁵³Calvin, J., & Pringle, W. (2010). *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians* (p. 327). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

We may reject this thought initially, thinking, “Well, I was raised roughly,” or, “I had to learn the hard way,” or, “I never had a dad,” or any number of possible realities that we have alternately experienced in our youth.

But, how we were raised is irrelevant when it comes to obedience to Biblical commands. What kind of home we came from or what our current marital situation looks like offers valuable context as to WHY we approach things a certain way, BUT we MUST be conformed to the image of Christ as a servant in His household, taking our parenting and relationship tips from Him!

I have learned so much about God’s heart for us as His children by being a father myself.

On two occasions, Paul instructs dads: do not provoke your children either to wrath or discouragement, but instead to raise up your children in the training (nurture) and admonition (exhortation) of the Lord (Col. 3:19, Eph. 6:4).

It is plain: dads, do not provoke your children, but walk alongside them, encourage them in Jesus, and look to your heavenly Father as your example.

He lovingly and clearly corrects us when necessary, and he offers us grace in our failure. He loves us too much to allow us to continue to live in the squalor of our failure. He has called us to holiness, to adopt His nature, and He is teaching us what that means in our own lives as a loving Father.

You yourselves know that the firm hand of God is also a gentle hand. It is the same hand that offers correction, rebuke, discipline, and abundant love, grace, and compassion.

As a matter of fact, those gifts of discipline and correction are born out of love; the Lord disciplines those whom He loves, His children.

Paul then moves from the realm of the family to the realm of service, bearing in mind that the two are not completely distinct from each other.

VERSES 5-8: BONDSERVANTS IN THEIR BONDAGE

We commonly approach this portion of Scripture and apply it equivalently to our personal lives and our daily jobs.

While the responsibility to serve others sincerely as unto the Lord applies to all, the context here is quite different.

One who was a bondservant in ancient times was owned by another. Their own liberty was controlled by another. They were bound to their masters/owners legally as property.

I bring this up, because we often like to soften the term behind bondservant, that being the same term for slave.

Our American context has stained that word so much that it is unpalatable for us to teach on the topic, and so we miss out on the complete depth of instruction here because we are afraid to peak from beneath the covers.

But this condition, being owned by another, was quite common in the ancient world, the world of the first century church. That is why Paul had to address it specifically.

“Slavery was widespread in the ancient Near East, although the economy was not dependent upon it. By Roman times Slavery was so extensive that in the early Christian period one out of every two people was a slave.”⁵⁴

We find several interesting implications from these facts, not the last of which is that the grace of God extends to people in their bondage, their very literal slavery.

The gospel is not only for those who live ideal, untarnished, economically stable lives.

In God’s economy the slave is able to find greater freedom in Christ than any free person who has denied Jesus.

Furthermore, I would suggest to you that slaves perhaps received a deeper understanding of the nature of Christ in their bondage than any free person might have.

Here’s why: Jesus Himself became a slave for our sakes.

“Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal’s death on a cross” (Phil. 2:6-8, NLT).

“Who is more important, the one who sits at the table or the one who serves? The one who sits at the table, of course.

⁵⁴Elwell, W. A., & Beitzel, B. J. (1988). Slave, Slavery. In *Baker encyclopedia of the Bible* (Vol. 2, p. 1971). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.

But not here! For I am among you as one who serves”
(Luke 22:27, NLT).

He made himself a slave - our flesh nature revolts against the thought!

And yet we are all called to learn this lesson, to have the same attitude of Christ, learning what it means to be a servant, a slave.

Consider how many times Paul describes himself as a bondservant, a slave of Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:1; Gal. 1:10; Tit. 1:1). James, Peter and Jude all declare themselves as bondservants too!

Servitude offends our American sensibilities, and yet we are each of us called to it, and in that state we are called to learn the nature of Christ in obedience, reverence, sincerity, and goodwill, all as unto the Lord.

The life of the bondservant was not to be in any way manipulative or deceptive in nature but sincere and hopeful as they looked forward to the promised end of their faith - eternity with Jesus.

VERSE 9: MASTERS, SERVE THE SERVANTS. DO THE SAME!

Exude Christ in your actions. This is another call away from the heavy-handed way of man that is rough, quarrelsome, and domineering.

Masters were also to be bondservants to our Lord Jesus Christ.

“Were you called [while] a slave? Do not be concerned about it; but if you can be made free, rather use [it]. For he who is called in the Lord [while] a slave is the Lord's freedman. Likewise he who is called [while] free is Christ's slave” (1 Cor. 7:21-22).

This is a thought that deserves some personal reflection, because in this doctrine we are confronted with the notion that the truth of Christ sets one free AND YET we are called to be slaves of Christ. This is a theological paradox of sorts. It is true that the realest freedom one can know is found bound to the yoke of Christ.

Perhaps this idea is best reconciled in the statement, “‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,’ and ‘your neighbor as yourself’” (Luke 10:27).

What we see in Paul’s instruction on marriage, family, relationships, and even servitude is the call to right conduct by those who are Jesus followers.

So then the end of the whole matter that Paul has been driving at is this: we are not defined by our relationships, but our relationships are defined by who we belong to - Jesus Christ.

Consider that none of the relationships we are a part of now will endure as long as our relationship with Jesus Christ if we are secure in His hands.

This is a frightening prospect for some, especially those who have wrapped their identity up into the relationships

they have as mothers, fathers, friends, children, confidant, employee, manager, leader, lord over others, etc.

But, we are all equal in Christ, and He is to be the most substantial portion of our identity.

“Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him. In this new life, it doesn't matter if you are a Jew or a Gentile, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbaric, uncivilized, slave, or free. Christ is all that matters, and he lives in all of us. Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience” (Col. 3:10-12, NLT).

So then, the roles we fill are to be identified with Christ who is all and in all. Amen.

EPHESIANS 6 PART 2 | 6:13-18

Paul has been pressing home the idea to the Ephesian church that there is a duty that follows all of the doctrine he has set forth in previous chapters. Because of the truth of the gospel, we are propelled forward in our work for Christ's Kingdom as blessed members of His Body.

By the grace of God, the result of the gospel is borne out in our lives in a very real, observable, knowable way.

Remember our central verse during this study: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; [it is] the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:8-10).

And so we have been examining over the past several weeks what it means to “walk in good works which God prepared beforehand” (Eph. 2:10).

We examined specific spheres of life set forth by the Apostle for consideration that ought to be especially impacted by our renewed lives by the grace of God which we carry with us.

We found that all of these areas of human existence are to be marked by holiness and covered in the grace of Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, Paul leaves the Ephesian church with a grand exhortation to put on the whole armor of God and to stand

against, to fight against, the spiritual armies of wickedness and against the strategies of even the devil himself!

We took away from that teaching, the truth that even though our enemy has a plan to bring us all down, to cause us to fall, that it is God's plan, His will, that we who believe and are called by His name, we should stand!

Take courage! This exhortation is found in other places as well. This isn't too tall an order for us to live up to.

"Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (James 4:7).

This morning we take up an examination of what this means to "take up the whole armor of God."

Perhaps you've heard this passage preached or referenced many times.

I pray that it has not become "old hat" to us but that we are able to approach this Scripture with open ears and teachable spirits, ready to hear God's heart for His saints.

VERSE 13

Let us begin with a brief examination of grammar.

Have you ever considered what "the armor of God" communicates to us? We are reminded over and over again by beloved saints that we are to do this thing, to take up the whole armor of God, to be a soldier in God's army, to resist the devil, to wage the good fight, etc.... But what is this thing called the armor of God?

This armor we are called to take upon ourselves is crafted by, possessed by, and supplied to us by God - it is God's armor. He owns it, and He issues it to those who are His.

As we review the WHOLE armor, each element, we will see that in fact each element is designed by and owned by our God, and in His grace He has supplied it to us so that we may wage the good fight, so that we may resist, standing in His might rather than armor of our own devising.

In the early days of the Iraq War, many soldiers placed sandbags in the bottom of their trucks, hoping that would offer some measure of protection. Or, they would weld pieces of steel and scrap metal to the sides of unarmored trucks to offer a little more protection.

While I'm sure there are anecdotal stories where these things came in handy, it is safe to say that level of protection was not optimal.

As a first-hand participant, I can attest that form of protection was prone to failure. The design flaws and thin material offered much in the way of a psychological rabbit's foot, a good luck charm, but would not stand the test of battle.

Similarly, any armor we have crafted in our own strength will not stand up to the battle. We must be armored, kitted up, in that holy armor designed and crafted by the same God who authored all of creation so that His beloved creation might survive the battle.

And as an exercise in remembering, take count in your mind of the saints you know along the way who, forsaking

God's armor and relying on their own, have fallen. May God bring them back to Himself.

This armor we are exhorted to take up and to put on is quite simple and summed up nicely by Henry Alford:

"...since our foes are in power too mighty for us,—and in dwelling, around and above us in a long and weary conflict; being fully equipped and having bravely fought that you may not, after having done your duty well in battle, fall off, but stand your ground to the end."⁵⁵

This is serious business. There's a battle raging for the souls of people, and our enemy is vicious.

"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world" (1 Pet. 5:8-9).

Sidenote: I think it is interesting that Paul chose to illustrate spiritual resistance by referencing soldiers and warfare. As far as we know, he wasn't a soldier but by this time in his life had plenty of interactions with Roman soldiers, which the Bible doesn't characterize for us as positive experiences. So, it's interesting that he doesn't totally bash the profession of arms but rather sees something valuable to be drawn from it in his teaching.

⁵⁵Alford, H. (1976). *Alford's Greek Testament: an exegetical and critical commentary* (Vol. 3, p. 146). Grand Rapids, MI: Guardian Press.

VERSES 14-17

STAND therefore - hold the line, don't back down, don't make a hasty retreat, don't turn away, don't quit your post.

“I will guard everything within the limits of my post and quit my post only when properly relieved.”

Our relief comes when Christ comes to take us home. Until then, we are soldiers in what has historically and theologically been called “the Church Militant.”

That term refers to the Body of saints remaining on earth as part of Christ's advancing Kingdom, as opposed to the Church Triumphant, that collective Body of saints who are now with the Lord Jesus in heaven.

You have been taught this though using other terms: “I'm in the Lord's Army.”

“The power of the army of the Lord does not lie in connection with any one of his soldiers, in the man himself—the Lord is their strength. They may differ in many respects, but this is true of every single warrior in the host of the Lord, that the Lord is his strength. He has no strength in the flesh, he cannot find anything there which can assist him; all his springs are in his God, and he draws all his supplies for power in spiritual conflicts, from God and from God alone.”⁵⁶

⁵⁶Spurgeon, C. H. (1867). A Prayer for the Church Militant. In *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons* (Vol. 13, p. 481). London: Passmore & Alabaster.

The role of the Church Militant, our role, as taught previously, is not standing against flesh and blood (people), “but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places” (Eph.6:12, NLT).

Collectively and individually, we are called to remain standing and arrayed in the armor of our God, having not compromised our position or our standing for personal comfort or for reckless, half-hearted treaties with our enemy meant to assuage the sensibilities of the unbeliever.

The first element Paul sets forth is truth. We are to gird our waists roundabout with truth.

The central part of our being is to be wrapped in truth.

This is big, especially since we live in a post-truth era. We live in an era of truthiness, alternative facts, relative, and culturally definable truth, rather than straight up objective, knowable truth.

But I want to encourage you - truth is knowable! Truth is certain, and it is essential to bearing God’s armor.

Do not be deceived, loved one, by the ancient lie of the enemy, “Has God truly said?” It has been repackaged for our era as, “is that what the Bible really means?” As uttered from the mouth of Jesus’ executioner, Pontius Pilate, “What is truth” (John 18:38)?

The same old lies have been repackaged, rebranded, and resold over the ages, but the truth of God stands forever.

Remember, Jesus Christ Himself addressed the certainty of the truth He declared: “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me’” (John 14:6).

Know truth; be clothed with it as you draw close to Jesus.

Next, we see that we are to put on the breastplate of righteousness.

This is the armor that guards our vital organs, our hearts.

Remember, though, this is God’s armor, not our own, so then we must not dare supplant Christ’s righteousness with our own.

Our own self-righteousness offers very little protection.

It may look nice and shiny, but the thinness will show when the arrows start flying. Many have been humbled, many have been struck in the heart, relying on their own righteousness rather than Christ who is righteousness for us (1 Cor. 1:30).

Next, we are to put on our feet the readiness given to us by the gospel of peace.

“Preparedness to do and suffer all that God wills; readiness for march.”⁵⁷

⁵⁷Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. (1997). *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (Vol. 2, p. 357). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

Good boots are maybe the most important piece of equipment a foot soldier has for those long marches.

I think you will find it interesting too that the soldiers' readiness or preparedness is bound up in the gospel of...PEACE.

That is quite a contrast as we are considering the tools of warfare, that we stand in peace by the gospel, the good message, God reconciling sinful man to himself through Jesus.

If we want to go anywhere, it starts by standing in the gospel!

Along with all of those elements of godliness, we are to take up the shield of faith, because we are a target and faith stands as the barrier between surviving the fight and being struck down.

Moreover, it is faith that allows the believer to extinguish those fiery accusations, assaults, and hurts that we will endure on this earth.

Without the shield of faith, given to us by God, those fiery darts are prone to burn the whole place down!

But by faith, knowing truth, trusting in Christ's righteousness, knowing the good message, we are preserved, shielded.

Ultimately, this faith shield isn't wielded solely by our own effort - what a poor showing that would be!

God Himself IS our shield: “The word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I [am] your shield, your exceedingly great reward” (Gen. 15:1).

“But You, O LORD, [are] a shield for me, My glory and the One who lifts up my head” (Ps. 3:3).

“Every word of God [is] pure; He [is] a shield to those who put their trust in Him” (Prov. 30:5).

He is ever faithful to us, ever shielding us, ever fighting for us.

Furthermore, we are to take the helmet of salvation, or, more literally, we are to receive the helmet of salvation, which is a wonderful way to explain salvation on God’s terms.

We are recipients of this salvation, and He has crafted an armor that will preserve us as we receive it from His hand.

The final piece of equipment that Paul commands to be received by the soldier in the Church Militant is the sword of the Spirit.

That is the Sword provided by the Spirit, which is God's Word.

While all of this armor is primarily defensive, we are not simply to endure a swift beatdown our entire lives, but we are equipped to parry and attack, to advance the Kingdom not through violence as some propose, but by God’s Word!

“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare [are] not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:3-5).

“Here *the word of God* is to be understood as God’s message given the believer to be proclaimed; this is the offensive weapon which will defeat the enemy.”⁵⁸

And that message, what is it!? The gospel! Reconciliation, hope, and life in Christ.

VERSE 18

The disposition of the saints is that of a company of holy ones dressed in full armor, waging the good fight in constant prayer.

As we persevere, as we endure, as we watch, we also pray.

We are in communication with our commander-in-chief, the Lord Jesus Christ.

We can’t go radio silent and still discern how Jesus would have us move on the battlefield or communicate to Him where we are or what we are lacking and what we need supplied.

⁵⁸Bratcher, R. G., & Nida, E. A. (1993). *A handbook on Paul’s letter to the Ephesians* (p. 164). New York: United Bible Societies.

He knows, and yet He desires that we come to Him in prayer at all times and for all the saints, not simply our own localized needs.

Our prayers matter, our prayer lives matter in a way that we cannot fully comprehend. Often the way we pray betrays how little we regard prayer, but upon the great battlefield for souls the prayers of the saints for the saints are of immeasurable worth.

Returning then to Spurgeon's thoughts on the Church Militant and the need for prayer, "We ought to pray constantly for the people of God, they always need it; it is always our duty to remember their necessities. It is always our privilege to pray for one another, prayer is always useful to the church, and therefore we should delight to exercise it. The fire upon the altar of intercession should never go out, neither by night nor by day."⁵⁹

As a final exercise in perspective, I want to consider the man of war one more time. You and I are called to a holy resistance, a holy fight against wickedness in the heavenly places. We are provided with every piece of armor that we need to enable us to stand, and yet what is this armor modeled after?

We often view the Lord Jesus as a man wearing a robe and flip-flops, ever patient, ever gentle. He is that! But He is also the one who fought for us, who fights for us, who directs our every offensive and defensive maneuver.

⁵⁹Spurgeon, C. H. (1867). A Prayer for the Church Militant. In *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons* (Vol. 13, p. 482). London: Passmore & Alabaster.

This was recorded for us millennia ago in Joshua.

Joshua is tasked by God to take the walled city of Jericho with Israel's armies, but as Joshua approached this well-defended town, he had an interaction that changed his perspective on who was in charge of the battle.

“And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, a Man stood opposite him with His sword drawn in His hand. And Joshua went to Him and said to Him, ‘[Are] You for us or for our adversaries?’ So He said, ‘No, but [as] Commander of the army of the LORD I have now come.’ And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped, and said to Him, ‘What does my Lord say to His servant?’ Then the Commander of the LORD's army said to Joshua, ‘Take your sandal off your foot, for the place where you stand [is] holy.’ And Joshua did so” (Josh. 5:13-15).

Do we feel weak and unsure if this armor will hold up? Sometimes.

Do we feel over-confident, like we've got this whole battle wrapped up? Sometimes.

Do we feel like maybe we are the commander? Sometimes.

Do we feel like the whole battle hinges on our performance, success or failure? Often.

But take heart! Take courage! Our Lord is no novice to the battle; He is the commander of the army of the Lord.

He stood with His sword drawn first, advancing His Kingdom by His Word for His glory, and He continues to advance today. Amen.

EPHESIANS 6 PART 3 | 6:18-24

We come to the end of Paul's epistle to the church at Ephesus. This has been a letter that is rich with the doctrine of the Church, laying out for us the composition, nature, character, purpose, and head of the Church.

VERSE 18

As we conclude our study in Ephesians, we are picking up by dovetailing into Paul's final instructions regarding the condition of members of the Church dressed in the full armor of God, persevering in all prayer for all the saints.

We call this the general disposition of the saints in prayer for one another. This is our duty, our calling, to be people of prayer in watchfulness.

Truth be told, we find this to be challenging at times.

We know the exhortation, "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17), and yet many of us find that our prayer lives are not what we would like them to be in terms of authenticity, commitment, or consistency.

May the Lord Jesus give us the conviction and willingness to obey as we seek to persevere in prayer for all the saints.

There is not a magic bullet to persevering in prayer other than doing the thing!

Certainly people have contrived routines, memorized prayers, and written books on the subject, but the heart of

the matter is obedience to God's Word and waging that fight against our own flesh that rebuffs the thought of spending dedicated time in prayer.

For further study on the centrality of prayer, I would direct the disciple to Luke 11. After that, I would direct the hungry student to the Psalms.

VERSES 19-20

Here we see the disposition of the saints in prayer for specific needs rather than the more general "all the saints, all the time" request.

Paul makes a specific request to this church for how he would like them to pray for him given his circumstances. This is something that we are quite used to. We are used to asking people how to pray for them. I would even venture to suggest that we are more used to praying specifically for the needs of one another, health, jobs, family, etc., than we are used to praying those big prayers for all the saints in all supplications.

While Paul certainly had many needs that required much prayer, he often asks for prayers that he may further the gospel.

This is so important! Consider that! Through the vast slew of needs that Paul certainly experienced, he counted first and foremost above them all his need to make known the gospel.

"Devote yourselves to prayer with an alert mind and a thankful heart. Pray for us, too, that God will give us many

opportunities to speak about his mysterious plan concerning Christ. That is why I am here in chains. Pray that I will proclaim this message as clearly as I should” (Col. 4:2-4, NLT).

“Finally, dear brothers and sisters, we ask you to pray for us. Pray that the Lord's message will spread rapidly and be honored wherever it goes, just as when it came to you” (2 Thess. 3:1, NLT).

Don't we feel this way too!?

Don't we desire that we would be bolder about the gospel than we normally are with others, that God would empower us with the ability to reveal the gospel in such a way that removes the mystery and draws people to Christ?

Many believers feel exactly this way, just like Paul, desiring the boldness and the clarity of speech to proclaim this blessed message of hope and reconciliation to lost and hurting people.

We must never forget that in our faith, the importance of declaring God's Word to others is of paramount importance.

So much of Christ's own ministry was spent teaching and preaching!

“Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people” (Matt. 9:35).

The very early church was marked by the same emphasis, even in their circumstances in which they found the government and the current religious establishment to be hostile towards their message.

“When they had called for the apostles and beaten [them], they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus [as] the Christ” (Acts 5:40-42).

Paul’s own conviction on this point of obedience in speaking forth the good message is well documented:

“How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things’” (Rom. 10:14-15).

The imperative to say something is quite plain, and yet we, like Paul, need the prayers of the saints so that we might fulfill our duty within the Kingdom and speak forth the gospel message in all situations.

Consider that even in the midst of his first Roman imprisonment, Paul was gospel-focused, Kingdom-minded, desiring that his captors would come to know Jesus. How glorious!

I pray that we could say the same! Lord, help us to see past our circumstances and to seize each opportunity to declare your good message to others.

VERSES 21-22: THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING CONNECTED

Paul makes allowance for the church desiring to know what is going on in his life!

Did you know that people, dear saints, want to know what's going on in your life!?

Far from the curmudgeonly attitude of “mind your business,” Paul purposefully sends somebody to let everybody know how he is doing.

Paul even makes special provision to send Tychicus to the Ephesians to report on how everything is going, referring to him as his “beloved brother.”

This is a beautiful example of the family nature of the Church, the willingness to share in hardship, to encourage one another, and to minister to others in their hardship.

It also shows us a lovely concern for the Church at large and how even though they were geographically distant and almost certainly a sizable group of believers, Paul cared that they knew of his life, and he wanted to know about their lives too!

The intimate, loving relationship that Paul had with the elders from Ephesus and the care that Paul had for this church is recorded for us in Acts 20.

It was to these men that Paul declared, “For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27).

Notice, too, how Paul characterizes his beloved brother Tychicus - faithful.

The necessity and rarity of this characteristic cannot be understated.

“It is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful” (1 Cor. 4:2, NIV).

Tychicus is here representative of those blessed helpers that we come across in our lives and in ministry. Those people who we ask much of, who minister to us in our hardship, who care for the Body with faithfulness and no concern for praise, renown, or earthly reward.

What Tychicus brings to the Body in his faithfulness is comfort. He is a comforter just as the Holy Spirit is. This shouldn't surprise us, since we know that the Holy Spirit indwells the saints and gives us His attributes.

Please understand that this was potentially quite an emotional, stressful affair.

The implication of Paul's writing is that the Ephesians needed to be comforted, that they were quite distressed by Paul's situation.

The last time they had seen Paul was on the island of Miletus, where Paul had spoken many hard things to them.

He told them that wolves would come in among their church and that men from their own number would rise up speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after themselves.

Their meeting at Miletus was capped off by a tearful farewell: “Then they all wept freely, and fell on Paul's neck and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the words which he spoke, that they would see his face no more” (Acts 20:37-38).

BUT the ministry that Tychicus was called upon to carry out was one of comfort for those dearly loved saints at Ephesus.

When we interact with other believers, we are to be comforters, encouragers, too, even in the midst of distressing times and heartbreaking situations. This much is plain to us.

The world beats up on God's people regularly. What a joy that we can take part in restoring, comforting, and embracing God's people in distressing times.

VERSE 23

How does Paul conclude his letter to this beloved church family of his? By calling to mind the peace, love, and faith that come from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Even in the midst of his imprisonment, Paul's letter is not a call to violence, to bust him out, to riot in the streets, but a reminder for the believers that their call to arms, being dressed in the armor of God, is marked by a supernatural

peace that doesn't originate with them but comes from the heavenly plane.

We as believers are marked by peace, love, and faith.

These are the attributes by which we are known, holy attributes that we are given, not contrived by a work of the flesh but gifted to us by God.

Along with peace, love, and faith goes that unique characteristic of our belief: grace.

That unearned, unearnable, undeserved favor of God, which He has poured out on the saints because He loves us and desires that we should be His forever.

I've said this a thousand times: "End how you begin, with grace." That's how Paul operates.

In the very first chapter of this letter, Paul writes:

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

We must see this as more than simply empty verbiage that Paul uses to get his required word count!

Paul, having experienced the grace of God so significantly, understands the importance of this doctrine. He does not write of it lightly.

There is a reason that Paul opens his letters by calling to remembrance the grace of God and ends his letters in the same way.

Grace is that nearly unfathomable property of God that both wins us to His Kingdom, carries us through our lives, and secures us to the end.

This is the idea that John sets forth in his gospel:

“And of His [Christ’s] fullness we have all received, and grace for grace” (John 1:16).

About this sometimes enigmatic saying one text writes, “that the Christian life consists of one expression of God’s grace after another.”⁶⁰

It is grace that saves us ,loved one. Never forget that.

It is common for believers who once knew and bathed in God’s grace to drift toward some semblance of formality, ritualism, legalism, anything really, because we don’t and can’t control grace the way we can the others.

That’s why this call back to grace is so important, so pervasive in the Scriptures.

Remember: it is His grace that causes us to love Jesus in sincerity of heart.

Again, we return to our central verse from Paul’s letter to the Ephesians and an ever-needful reminder to those of us

⁶⁰Newman, B. M., & Nida, E. A. (1993). *A handbook on the Gospel of John* (p. 25). New York: United Bible Societies.

who tend to lose sight of that inexhaustible grace that God has poured on His saints:

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; [it is] the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:8-10).

This message, this reminder of grace, is certainly moving for the believer. We cling to this blessed grace. But for those who are outside of the Kingdom, let this message be on our lips. Let this message be declared boldly straight to that muted heart: “God favors you, unbeliever.” He desires to know you, and He desires that you should know Him. Our plea to the unbeliever, as we hold tight to this grace in sincerity, is, “be grasped by that same grace.” Be saved by God’s gift. Amen.

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