

Andrew Corbett's
COMMENTARY
On Paul's
Epistle to the
EPHESIANS

by
Dr. Andrew Corbett

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Preface

I believe that the Ephesian church was the most influential church in the first century. What Paul has to say to the Ephesians is perhaps some of the most profound insights into the rights, the reign, and the responsibility of the church ever presented. Peter the apostle says of Paul's writings-

¹⁵And remember, the Lord is waiting so that people have time to be saved. This is just as our beloved brother Paul wrote to you with the wisdom God gave him—¹⁶speaking of these things in all of his letters. Some of his comments are hard to understand, and those who are ignorant and unstable have twisted his letters around to mean something quite different from what he meant, just as they do the other parts of Scripture—and the result is disaster for them.

2Peter 3:15

Indeed much of Ephesians is hard to understand to the uninitiated. Paul describes what he is writing about as a *mystery*. Since he is writing about it to explain the mystery, it is obviously not the kind of mystery that *cannot* be understood. In fact, if we can grasp what Paul is saying in this epistle under the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we will be deeply blessed in our walk with the Lord and our

understanding of who has made us and called us to be. You see in this epistle it is revealed that the Church is the most potent force on the face of the earth. What the Romans couldn't crucify, the Barbarians couldn't massacre, the Stalinists couldn't outlaw, and the Taliban can't silence, is the Church.

This commentary on Ephesians was a part of my Doctoral Programme with Cambridge Graduate School. It was supplementary research to my major doctoral research into the history and ministry of the apostle which took me over eight years to research and write. This commentary is a "creative" commentary, which means that it is entirely original. There are no footnotes within this commentary and very little reference to other scholars. There are no lengthy explanations of Greek words, except where I am perhaps justifying a needed correction in the translation that it is based on.

While there are many good English translations available today, I personally regard the *New Living Translation* as the most readable. My major research project for my undergraduate studies, prior to commencing my Doctoral degree, was *An Examination of the History and Translation of the English Bible*. This is now available in the small book format under the title *Which Translation?* In that book I discuss the translation history of the Bible and how we eventually received it into English. I discuss the science involved in Biblical translation. *Which Translation?* concludes with an overview of nearly every major English translation of the Bible that I am aware of. Based on this research I am very confident that the *New Living Translation* of the Bible is an extremely

trustworthy version of the Bible. That is why this commentary is based solely upon the NLT (*New Living Translation*).

But since it is a relatively new translation, there is actually little extra study material associated with it. I thought some time back that I would like to write a commentary on the entire New Testament. I have already written *A New Testament Survey* which overviews every New Testament book and provides a Bible study guide for each book. But this commentary is more than a study guide. It is an examination of each verse within Ephesians attempting to draw out the original meaning and how it affects us today.

It is written in a format that is designed to be understandable to the average Christian who loves their Bible but doesn't always fully understand it. But most of all it is written with a desperation in my own heart to truly help you, the Church, to understand that you are everything the Holy Spirit says you are in this epistle.

Background

Paul was nearing the end of his life when he wrote this epistle. From the account in Acts, we can match what Paul refers to as “*his chains*” as being found in Acts 28. This was when he was under house arrest in Rome, awaiting his day in Caesar’s court. Unable to visit, Paul decided to write. Since scholars have discovered ancient Manuscripts dating back to the first century that are identical to *Paul’s epistle to the Ephesians* with the words “*in Ephesus*” omitted, there is a strong case made by many scholars that this epistle was probably a circular epistle sent to several churches in which the particular church recipients would have been inserted by the messenger.

AUTHORSHIP

This epistle is identified as being written by Paul the apostle. There is no credible argument against this plain identification. The earliest records from church

history confirm that they believed that Paul was the author of this epistle.



The Seven Churches of Asia Minor, showing the relationship of Ephesus to the other six.

Introduction to Ephesians

The epistles of Paul to the Ephesians and the Colossians are complimentary. They both carry the theme of the *fullness of Christ*. But Ephesians does this by focussing on the Body of Christ, while Colossians does this by focussing on the Head of the Body. Neither of these epistles are negative, unlike Paul's epistles to the Corinthians, or Galatian churches. They were written to encourage, not rebuke. They are constructive rather than corrective. Since they were written around the same time, it's not surprising that Paul deals with the similar themes in them. In this commentary we will explore the profound richness of the revelation that Paul had received from God about the Church. He thought it imperative that every believer understood what God had actually done for them and their new found place of privilege in Christ. This commentary will assist you to discover some of those privileges that you as a Christian are entitled to. I do not debate the meaning of original words, or

attempt to explore some of the technical difficulties with this commentary. Instead I have tried to keep in mind the recurring theme of the epistle itself: *the revelation of the glorious position of the Church.*



(Rembrandt's painting of Paul the apostle)

Outline Of Paul's Epistle To The Ephesians

1. THE THEOLOGY OF THE CHURCH

A. THE GLORY OF THE BELIEVER IN THE CHURCH (Ephesians 1)

- (i) The believer is privileged (Ephesians 1:3-14)
 - (a) The believer is now an heir to the riches of God through Christ (Ephesians 1:3-6)
 - (b) The believer has been redeemed by the inexhaustible riches of Christ (Ephesians 1:7-10)
 - (c) The believer is predestined and sealed by the Holy Spirit to receive an inheritance of glorious riches from God (Ephesians 1:11-14)

- (ii) The glorious Christ has provided glorious riches as our inheritance (Ephesians 1:15-23)
 - (a) Thanks for the growth of the church (Ephesians 1:15-16)

- (b) Prayer for revelation that the believers may understand the implications of their inheritance for now (Ephesians 1:17-19)
- (c) Christ, our benefactor has been supremely exalted (Ephesians 1:20-23)

B. THE IMPLICATIONS OF SALVATION (Ephesians 2)

- (i) Salvation is an undeserved gift (Ephesians 2:1-10)
 - (a) Mankind is dead, disobedient, and deserving of wrath (Ephesians 2:1-5)
 - (b) But God has lavished His grace upon mankind (Ephesians 2:5-9)
 - (c) Salvation is just beginning of what God has for us (Ephesians 2:6-7, 10)
- (ii) God has made united Jew and Gentile into one new people (Ephesians 2:11-22)
 - (a) Christ has brought outsiders (Gentiles) into the Commonwealth (Ephesians 2:11-13)
 - (b) Christ has reconciled both Jew and Gentile together, and with God (Ephesians 2:14-18)
 - (d) Christ is building His people into a glorious temple (Ephesians 2:19-22)

C. GOD'S PLANS FOR THE CHURCH WERE A MYSTERY (Ephesians 3)

- (i) God's mysterious purpose for the Church has been revealed (Ephesians 3:1-7)
 - (a) God's grace has revealed His mystery to the Church (Ephesians 3:1-3)
 - (b) The Scriptures reveal the mystery of Christ and His Church (Ephesians 3:4-5)

- (c) The mystery involves Christ bringing Jew and Gentile into becoming the Church (Ephesians 3:6-7)
- (ii) The implications of the mystery (Ephesians 3:8-13)
 - (a) This mystery is now revealed and proclaimed (Ephesians 3:8-9)
 - (b) The Church is the mystery of God, confounding principalities and powers (Ephesians 3:10-11)
 - (c) The mystery reveals that believers can boldly access God (Ephesians 3:12-13)
- (iii) The mystery reveals the glory of Christ in the Church (Ephesians 3:14-21)
 - (a) Understanding the mystery gives the believer inner strength (Ephesians 3:14-17)
 - (b) Understanding the mystery reveals God's incredible love (Ephesians 3:18-19)
 - (c) Understanding the mystery reveals God's abundant source of supply to the believer (Ephesians 3:20-21)

D. THE MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH (Ephesians 4:1-16)

- (i) Ministry within the Church (Ephesians 4:1-10)
 - (a) The call for unity (Ephesians 4:1-6)
 - (b) Christ has gifted the Church since His ascension (Ephesians 4:7-10)
- (ii) The diversity of ministry within the Church (Ephesians 4:11-16)
 - (a) The ascension ministries (Ephesians 4:11)
 - (b) The goal of the ascension ministries (Ephesians 4:12-13)

- (c) The benefit of the ascension ministries to the Church (Ephesians 4:14-16)

2. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS OF BEING IN THE CHURCH

E. REPRESENTING CHRIST IN OURSELVES, OUR FAMILY, THE CHURCH AND THE WORLD (Ephesians 4:17 - 6:9)

- (i) The Church's ministry in the world (Ephesians 4:17-32)
 - (a) Live differently to the world (Ephesians 4:17-19)
 - (b) Live like a new person (Ephesians 4:20-24)
 - (c) Don't sin in word, thought or deed (Ephesians 4:25-32)

- (ii) Living in the light of God (Ephesians 5:1-14)
 - (a) Follow the example of the Light (Ephesians 5:1-2)
 - (b) The consequences of not living in the light (Ephesians 5:3-6)
 - (c) Though once full of darkness, believers are now full of light (Ephesians 5:7-9)
 - (d) The light of Christ within a believer exposes darkness (Ephesians 5:10-14)

- (iii) Living in the Spirit (Ephesians 5:15-20)
 - (a) Live wisely (Ephesians 5:15-17)
 - (b) Don't become drunk (Ephesians 5:18)
 - (c) Be filled with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18-19)
 - (d) Be thankful (Ephesians 5:20)

- (iv) The influence of Christ in the home (Ephesians 5:21-6:4)
 - (a) Wives, submit to your husbands (Ephesians 5:21-24)
 - (b) Husbands, love your wives (Ephesians 5:25-30)
 - (c) The Church is like marriage (Ephesians 5:31-33)
 - (d) Christ's effect upon parents and their children (Ephesians 6:1-4)

- (v) The influence of Christ in the work place (Ephesians 6:5-9)
 - (a) Work for your employer as you would for Christ (Ephesians 6:5-8)
 - (b) Treat employees right (Ephesians 6:9)

3. THE CHURCH'S BATTLE STRATEGY

F. THE POWER OF THE CHURCH'S PRAYERS

- (i) Be clothed with the armour of God (Ephesians 6:10-18)
 - (a) Our real fight is spiritual (Ephesians 6:10-12)
 - (b) Why we need God's armour (Ephesians 6:13)
 - (c) Descriptions of the armour (Ephesians 6:14-17)

- (ii) Pray (Ephesians 6:18-20)
 - (a) Pray persistently (Ephesians 6:18)
 - (b) Pray for clarity (Ephesians 6:19)
 - (c) Pray for bold fearlessness (Ephesians 6:20)
 - (d) Conclusion (Ephesians 6:21-22)
 - (e) Benediction (Ephesians 6:23-24)

EPHESIANS

Chapter 1

1. THE THEOLOGY OF THE CHURCH

This letter is from Paul, chosen by God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus. It is written to God's holy people in Ephesus, who are faithful followers of Christ Jesus. ² May grace and peace be yours, sent to you from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.

Ephesians 1:1-2



A view of the partially-reconstructed theatre at Ephesus.

A. THE GLORY OF THE BELIEVER IN THE CHURCH (Ephesians 1)

Ephesians 1:1

Paul's introduction to the Ephesians affirms his apostolic authority. He reiterates the right of an apostle to speak into a local church three other times in this epistle: 2:20; 3:5; and 4:11. This was a church that Paul was very intimate with. He was the resident apostle there for nearly two and half years (Acts 19:8-10). During his ministry in Ephesus, the Lord did *extraordinary* (NIV), and *unusual* (NLT) miracles (Acts 19:11-12). In this way, Paul's claim of apostleship was not disputed by his recipients, since it had been validated by the Lord during his time there. It also meant that when Paul affectionately describes his recipients as *holy* and *faithful* he was not vainly patronising them, since he knew them, and they knew him. Even if this epistle was originally a circular epistle to all the churches in the region, it is most likely that Paul was similarly known and respected, and familiar with all the regional churches.

Ephesians 1:2

The account in Acts suggests that the Ephesian church was frequently harassed by the broader (secular) community. Paul's prophetic words in Acts 20, during his third visit to them, warned the elders not be lured into abusing the flock of God. Thus, Paul's blessing of *grace and peace* isn't a mere polite salutation. They really would have needed grace and peace.

(I) THE BELIEVER IS PRIVILEGED (EPHESIANS 1:3-14)

(a) The believer is now an heir to the riches of God through Christ (Ephesians 1:3-6)

Ephesians 1:3

³*How we praise God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we belong to Christ.*

Ephesians 1:3

This is perhaps one of the key verses in this epistle. Some of the key words that Paul uses to show the Ephesians the glory of the Church include *inheritance*, *grace* and *glorious*. These words are used frequently in Ephesians, and can be summed up by the word *blessing* which only occurs in this verse. To belong to Christ, is to be a member of the Church. To be a member of the Church of Jesus Christ qualifies a person to receive *every spiritual blessing* available. It's as if Paul is trying to impress his readers with a revelation of what a glorious position every member of the Church now has. Paul's own response to this glorious revelation was to praise God.

Ephesians 1:4

⁴*Long ago, even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes.*

Ephesians 1:4

Much of Paul's revelation about the Church is built upon the revelation that God had had an original plan or design. Paul uses the words *predestined* (1:5, 11), *purpose* (1:9, 11; 2:15; 3:11; 6:22), and, *plan* (1:11). It certainly emphasizes that

if God can have a plan from the beginning of creation, which He can interweave into the affairs of human history to bring about the fulfilment of His plan for salvation, He can certainly be trusted to bring about whatever future plans He has also decreed for the Church.

This verse also clearly emphasizes God's grace. Since He chose us, salvation is dependent upon God. It is His doing. We are reminded of what Christ taught in John 15:16-

You didn't choose me. I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask for, using my name.

John 15:16

Paul refers to *grace* over ten times throughout this epistle. The NLT aptly renders the Greek word *charis* as "special favour". In modern usage, the word *grace* is used to describe someone with poise and dignity, as well as to describe acts of kindness. The NLT's rendering carries something of the original meaning into modern language.

Ephesians 1:5

⁵His unchanging plan has always been to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. And this gave him great pleasure.

Paul always links the adoption of the believer by God with His original plan. Under Roman laws, the adopted son shared equally in the inheritance with the natural born children.

For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son, so that his Son would be the firstborn, with many brothers and sisters.

Romans 8:29

Some translations commence this verse with the words “*in love...*” (eg. NIV, NKJV, KJV, NCV, which either mention God’s love at the very end of verse 4, or the start of verse 5). God’s plan to save and adopt the redeemed was not something He did reluctantly. He did it because of His incredible love for humanity. The only way it could be done was through the sacrificial, atoning, death of Jesus Christ. The thought of redeeming people from darkness and death brought God great pleasure. Thus Jesus could endure the cross for the joy set before Him.

We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, on whom our faith depends from start to finish. He was willing to die a shameful death on the cross because of the joy he knew would be his afterward. Now he is seated in the place of highest honor beside God's throne in heaven.

Hebrews 12:2

Ephesians 1:6

So we praise God for the wonderful kindness he has poured out on us because we belong to his dearly loved Son. ⁸He has showered his kindness on us, along with all wisdom and understanding.

Ephesians 1:6

Everything that exists - exists to praise God.

*Let everything that lives sing praises to the LORD!
Praise the LORD!*

Psalms 150:6

But there seems to be a greater responsibility upon higher creation (angels and more particularly, mankind), to praise God-

He replied, "If they kept quiet, the stones along the road would burst into cheers!"

Luke 19:40

This verse shows that genuine praise can only really come from someone who knows God, and is thus redeemed. There is therefore a much greater responsibility upon believers to praise God than there is upon unregenerated mankind.

(b) The believer has been redeemed by the inexhaustible riches of Christ (Eph. 1:7-10)

Ephesians 1:7

⁷He is so rich in kindness that he purchased our freedom through the blood of his Son, and our sins are forgiven.

Jesus Himself said that He was giving His life as a “ransom” to redeem mankind (Mat. 20:28, note also 1Tim. 2:6). This is also a “grace verse” since it emphasizes that salvation is entirely the work of God. He initiated salvation by sending His Son to die on the cross, shedding His blood to cleanse us from sin, and purchasing us for Himself (redemption). Under The Older Covenant, redemption was possible, if the right price was paid (Lev. 25:47-54). The result of us accepting Christ’s work on the cross is our forgiveness. Again, under the Older Covenant, forgiveness was available only upon the shedding of animal’s blood (Heb. 9:22). These animal sacrifices were typical of Christ’s death on the cross (Heb. 9:13-14). But one of the main points of this epistle is that we are not just forgiven. If we were simply forgiven, it would mean that we would not be damned to Hell for eternity. Yet, much of this epistle reveals that the believer is much more than just forgiven, which none of us deserves, we are adopted as God’s sons and daughters and made joint heirs with Christ.

Ephesians 1:8

⁸He has showered his kindness on us, along with all wisdom and understanding.

The full facets of grace are more involved than can be readily perceived naturally. To appreciate God's grace we need not only a revelation of this grace, but also wisdom and understanding from God.

Ephesians 1:9

⁹God's secret plan has now been revealed to us; it is a plan centered on Christ, designed long ago according to his good pleasure.

God's secret plan, or *mystery*, which Paul refers to often in this epistle, is shown to have three essential elements: (i) God's eternal destiny to save mankind, (ii) God's demonstration of His grace, and (iii) God's plan to have a redeemed people. In this way we see that everything centred on Christ. Some scholars suggest that Christ's work of redemption was a type of "plan B", where the Mosaic Law was a type of "plan A". But this verse, and much of this epistle, emphasizes that Christ's death on the cross was always God's *original* plan.

Ephesians 1:10

¹⁰And this is his plan: At the right time he will bring everything together under the authority of Christ—everything in heaven and on earth.

God's plan of salvation and redemption did not end with Christ's work on the cross. Redemption will be culminated when everything is brought under Christ's authority. Paul doesn't seem to elaborate on this revelation in this epistle. But we know from other aspects of this revelation throughout the New Testament that salvation overlaps three eras. Salvation involves an aspect of the past era in that Christ died on the cross around 2,000 years ago. Salvation involves an aspect of the present era in that by faith people can receive salvation today. Salvation involves an aspect of the future era in that everything will come under the rule of Christ.

²²For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. ²³And even we Christians, although we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, also groan to be released from pain and suffering. We, too, wait anxiously for that day when God will give us our full rights as his children, including the new bodies he has promised us.

Romans 8:22-23

(c) The believer is predestined and sealed by the Holy Spirit to receive an inheritance of glorious riches from God (Ephesians 1:11-14)

Ephesians 1:11

¹¹Furthermore, because of Christ, we have received an inheritance from God, for he chose us from the beginning, and all things happen just as he decided long ago.

Some people have diminished the believer's inheritance by teaching that it is simply our right to have a heavenly home. But Paul says that *we have received* it. Since you're

reading this we can assume two things: i) I am not writing this from heaven, and (ii) you're not reading this in heaven. Yet Paul says we have already received our inheritance, it is therefore more than entrance into heaven. He lists several aspects to our inheritance in the remainder of the epistle. Naturally, an inheritance is only activated upon the death of the one bequeathing an estate. In Hebrews 9:16 (*Now when someone dies and leaves a will, no one gets anything until it is proved that the person who wrote the will is dead.*) it says that the inheritance is given upon the death of the one who wrote the will, or "testament". The issue here is that the One who has made the Testament, has died. This presents a problem for those who acknowledge that it is God who has formed a covenant (testament) with mankind; yet deny that Christ is God.

Ephesians 1:12

¹²God's purpose was that we who were the first to trust in Christ should praise our glorious God.

Again Paul says that the appropriate response for those who have been redeemed, divinely adopted, and bequeathed an unimaginable inheritance, is to praise God – despite their circumstances! There is also an implication here that those who have been Christians for some time, should set the example of a lifestyle of praise to those recently won to Christ.

Ephesians 1:13

¹³*And now you also have heard the truth, the Good News that God saves you. And when you believed in Christ, he identified you as his own by giving you the Holy Spirit, whom he promised long ago.*

The first aspect to the believer's inheritance is the filling of the Holy Spirit. God spoke through the prophets in the Old Testament about the day that He would pour His Spirit upon all flesh.

²⁸*Then after I have poured out my rains again, I will pour out my Spirit upon all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your old men will dream dreams. Your young men will see visions. ²⁹In those days, I will pour out my Spirit even on servants, men and women alike.*

Joel 2:28-29

³*For I will give you abundant water to quench your thirst and to moisten your parched fields. And I will pour out my Spirit and my blessings on your children.*

Isaiah 44:3

²⁹*And I will never again turn my back on them, for I will pour out my Spirit upon them, says the Sovereign LORD."*

Ezekiel 44:29

This was one of the foundational issues for Paul when he originally arrived in Ephesus. After establishing that the believers had real faith in Christ and then baptizing them in the name of Jesus, he immediately prayed for them to receive the Holy Spirit.

¹*While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul traveled through the interior provinces. Finally, he came to Ephesus, where he found several believers. ²"Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" he asked them. "No," they replied, "we don't know what you mean. We haven't even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." ³Then what baptism did you experience?" he asked. And they replied, "The baptism of John." ⁴Paul said, "John's baptism was to demonstrate a*

desire to turn from sin and turn to God. John himself told the people to believe in Jesus, the one John said would come later."

⁵As soon as they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶Then when Paul laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in other tongues and prophesied. ⁷There were about twelve men in all.

Acts 19:1-7

There was no mistaking that the original Ephesian believers had received the promised baptism in the Holy Spirit, for they all spoke in tongues and prophesied, just as those present on the Day of Pentecost had done (recorded in Acts 2:4), and those present at the House of Cornelius had done (as recorded in Acts 10). This promised gift from God was available to all believers, Peter told the Jerusalem crowd in Acts 2:39, not just those in the first century. The apostles clearly saw that the filling of with the Holy Spirit was a glorious installment of our inheritance.

Ephesians 1:14

¹⁴The Spirit is God's guarantee that he will give us everything he promised and that he has purchased us to be his own people. This is just one more reason for us to praise our glorious God.

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit is just the down payment, or instalment of all that God has for us as our inheritance. But the Holy Spirit is not the total bequest of all that our inheritance entails. God has promised us more. Because of this we should praise God even more.

(ii) THE GLORIOUS CHRIST HAS PROVIDED GLORIOUS RICHES AS OUR INHERITANCE (EPHESIANS 1:15-23)

(a) Thanks for the growth of the church (Ephesians 1:15-16)

¹⁵Ever since I first heard of your strong faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for Christians everywhere, ¹⁶I have never stopped thanking God for you. I pray for you constantly,

Paul acknowledges that the Ephesian church's predominant characteristic was love for others. Over time, as they became more sophisticated and tolerable, their love waned. Thus, the Lord's rebuke to them in Revelation 2:4 was that they had lost their first love.

⁴But I have this complaint against you. You don't love me or each other as you did at first!

Revelation 2:4

Any church that is famous for its love is a church worth thanking God for! Paul's constant praying for them, while revealed in the proceeding verses, no doubt also included praying that their love may continue.

(b) Prayer for revelation that the believers may understand the implications of their inheritance for now (Ephesians 1:17-19)

Ephesians 1:17

¹⁷asking God, the glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to give you spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you might grow in your knowledge of God.

Much of what Paul is expounding in this epistle, he claims to have received by revelation. It is therefore not surprising for Paul to pray that the Ephesians also might receive direct revelation into the things he is writing to them about. By receiving revelation from God the believer is able to make strides in their relationship with God. In this way, Christianity is not a static religious affiliation; it is a dynamic relationship with a God who Paul describes as the glorious Father. But Paul's prayer is not just for revelation, it is also for wisdom and understanding that the believer may know what to do with the revelation that God the Father shows them.

Ephesians 1:18

¹⁸I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can understand the wonderful future he has promised to those he called. I want you to realize what a rich and glorious inheritance he has given to his people.

Paul specifically states what the nature of the revelation is that he's praying for the Ephesians. He also describes the nature of revelation itself. To receive revelation from God is like having your heart flooded with light. Some people refer to these experiences as "Ah ha!" moments, or "*epiphanies*". Revelation causes a person to understand something they were previously ignorant of. Paul earnestly wants believers to understand the future that God has called them to, and to grasp the fantastic inheritance he has for us.

Ephesians 1:19

¹⁹I pray that you will begin to understand the incredible greatness of his power for us who believe him.

The revelation includes grasping how much divine power we have at our disposal. This is the power to work miracles and perform signs and wonders for the sake of Christ. Indeed, when Paul was present in Ephesus he demonstrated this. To walk in this power commences with a revelation of its availability to the believer, which would then generate the faith for it to flow.

c) Christ, our benefactor has been supremely exalted (Ephesians 1:20-23)

Ephesians 1:20

This is the same mighty power ²⁰that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God's right hand in the heavenly realms.

The same power that raised Christ from the dead is available to the believer now. This verse describes the extent of the power of God available to the believer, since it raised Christ from the dead and exalted Him to the highest place of honour in the universe. And this verse also serves to inform us not just about the power available to believers, but also about the person of Christ. The One who is bequeathing an abundant inheritance to us, is the One who we now realise is the wealthiest Person in the universe in every sense of the word. The expression "at God's right hand" is statement that reinforces Christ's equality with the Father. Hebrews 1:13 says that God has never invited anyone to be seated at His

right hand, except His Son, who Hebrews 1:13 says that Christ was not a mere angel (as some cults teach).

Ephesians 1:21

²¹Now he is far above any ruler or authority or power or leader or anything else in this world or in the world to come.

To reinforce the ultimate glory of Christ, Paul states that there is no higher authority anywhere in the universe than Christ.

Ephesians 1:22

²²And God has put all things under the authority of Christ, and he gave him this authority for the benefit of the church.

Unlike some self-serving secular dictators, like those reigning during the time of Paul's writing, Christ doesn't use His power to benefit Himself. He uses His unequalled authority and power for the benefit of the church. Paul wants the believers to understand that they have access to someone more powerful than the Emperor, who must have seemed like an awesome authority figure at the time.

Ephesians 1:23

²³And the church is his body; it is filled by Christ, who fills everything everywhere with his presence.

Paul now introduces another revelation: *the church is Christ's body*. The Biblically literate believer may take this

simple statement for granted, but it was a radical revelation when first penned. Paul had earlier written to the Corinthians that the church was like a body, and that believers were part of Christ's body (1 Cor. 12:27). To the Romans he had also stated that the church was Christ's body (Romans 12:5), but since then he received a greater revelation about the church as *the* body of Christ, to which he elaborates to the Ephesians.

Ephesians

Chapter 2

B. THE IMPLICATIONS OF SALVATION (Ephesians 2)

The first chapter of Ephesians reveals that salvation qualifies the believer for a glorious inheritance, which has spiritual implications for present living. The second chapter of Ephesians teaches the implications for how believers are to treat each other. In most of the Western world we take equality among all people for granted. But during the time of Paul writing to the Ephesians there were some very passionate racial biases between Jews and Gentiles. In this chapter, Paul shows that salvation has nothing to do with a person's racial background. It is an act of God's grace. For those who have been shown and received God's grace, they now have citizenship in a community that is supra-racial (above mere racial distinction).

(i) SALVATION IS AN UNDESERVED GIFT (EPHESIANS 2:1-10)

(a) Mankind is dead, disobedient, and deserving of wrath (Ephesians 2:1-5)

Ephesians 2:1

¹Once you were dead, doomed forever because of your many sins.

It doesn't matter what your nationality is, without Christ you are spiritually dead and doomed to be damned forever. But this isn't the result of God's unfair condemnation, it the just result of *our* sins. And not just occasional sins, but our *many* sins.

Ephesians 2:2

²You used to live just like the rest of the world, full of sin, obeying Satan, the mighty prince of the power of the air. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God.

Paul introduces the contest that wages for the souls of mankind. When you don't live for God, you are living for Satan. Jesus was also as black and white when He said-

Anyone who isn't helping me opposes me, and anyone who isn't working with me is actually working against me.

Mark 11:23

The notion that there are two opposing spiritual forces in the world is a theme Paul alludes to throughout this epistle. Some Eastern religions teach that these opposing forces are

equal. But Paul has stressed in the opening chapter that Christ is vastly supreme to the forces of Satan. The only way to overcome the power of Satan is to firstly surrender to Christ. There is no middle ground. Yet many overlook the subtle work of Satan and are ignorant of his schemes. This subtleness is affirmed by Paul's use of the words *Satan, the mighty prince of the power of the air*.

Ephesians 2:3

³All of us used to live that way, following the passions and desires of our evil nature. We were born with an evil nature, and we were under God's anger just like everyone else.

This statement reinforces that Christians are recipients of God's grace. Paul emphasizes that our new found righteousness has little to do with us, or any inherent goodness we may have developed. Christians are not any better than anyone else, it is just that believers recognise their depravity and the need for God's grace. We should not kid ourselves about any notion of God's special favour towards us: *we were under God's anger just like everyone else*.

Ephesians 2:4-5

*⁴But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so very much,
⁵that even while we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God's special favor that you have been saved!)*

God's mercy is announced after His justice. The Good News is only *good* news when the implications of the *bad* news are understood: *God must and will punish those who have*

openly rebelled against Him to serve Satan by sinning. God's sense of justice is not to be thought of as a diminishing of His love toward us. Romans 5:8 tells us that even when we were sinners God demonstrated His incredible love toward us by sending His only Son to die for us. Ephesians 2:5 reinforces this statement. Believers should never forget the extent of God's love toward them, nor should the reason for God's love be forgotten. The fact of the matter is that God had no reason other than pure love. Some people may fool themselves into thinking that they deserve God's love, but incredibly, God loves those who serve Satan by sinning, and are therefore *dead* in their sins.

This verse states what a lot of believers don't realise, and Paul wants them to. When Christ died for our sin, He saved us from eternal death (by dying in our place). But when God raised Christ from the dead back to life, He guaranteed that not only will we not be punished with eternal death and damnation, but we would also receive resurrected life. God didn't have to do this, it was His special favour- His grace that has saved us *from* death, *to* life.

**(b) But God has lavished His grace upon mankind
(Ephesians 2:5-9)**

Ephesians 2:6

⁶For he raised us from the dead along with Christ, and we are seated with him in the heavenly realms—all because we are one with Christ Jesus.

Our resurrected life starts the moment we give our lives over to Christ and become one with Him. So certain is the

New Testament of our resurrected state, it talks in terms of our future state actually existing now. This statement also reveals to us what God has in store for His heirs. The thought that God can take the undeserving and promote them to a place of honour runs through the Bible. Hannah, the mother of Samuel acknowledged that-

*⁸He lifts the poor from the dust—
yes, from a pile of ashes!
He treats them like princes,
placing them in seats of honor.
1Samuel 2:8*

The prophet Daniel foresaw the time when Christ would sit down on His throne to judge, and there would be other thrones along side His-

⁹I watched as thrones were put in place and the Ancient One sat down to judge. His clothing was as white as snow, his hair like whitest wool. He sat on a fiery throne with wheels of blazing fire,

Most scholars regard the reference to twenty-four thrones in Revelation 4:4 as representative of the saints saved under the Older and Newer Covenants (12 thrones from the Older Covenant plus 12 thrones from the Newer Covenant).

⁴Twenty-four thrones surrounded him, and twenty-four elders sat on them. They were all clothed in white and had gold crowns on their heads

Revelation 4:4

Paul had written to the Corinthians that they would one day be sitting upon thrones and judging the universe alongside Christ (1Cor. 6:2-3). Revelation 20:4 paints the same picture:

⁴Then I saw thrones, and the people sitting on them had been given the authority to judge. And I saw the souls of

those who had been beheaded for their testimony about Jesus, for proclaiming the word of God. And I saw the souls of those who had not worshiped the beast or his statue, nor accepted his mark on their forehead or their hands. They came to life again, and they reigned with Christ for a thousand years.

In writing to the Ephesians, Paul talks as if this enthronement of the believer has already happened. Paul's point is that the believer should not feel as if they are subject to this world. Because of God's grace, the believer has received a privileged position to exercise God's rule on earth now.

Ephesians 2:7

⁷And so God can always point to us as examples of the incredible wealth of his favor and kindness toward us, as shown in all he has done for us through Christ Jesus.

Since Paul is largely dealing with unfolding the revelation of the believer's inheritance, it's not surprising that he uses words like "incredible wealth" to describe what God has made available to the believer. The Greek used here by Paul is the word *ploutos*, which is used to describe *an abundance of money, riches, or wealth*. This is how Paul regards God's grace, as more valuable than the most valuable wealth.

Ephesians 2:8

⁸God saved you by his special favor when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God.

This is the nature of God's grace. It is God's grace that has saved us. It is God's grace that has caused us to believe. It is God's grace that has changed our lives and qualified us for our inheritance. And like an unqualified inheritance, it is a *free* gift.

Ephesians 2:9

⁹Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.

We can't earn salvation. We can't pay God back. None of us can claim that we have done anything to earn God's favour, or that God should really be grateful to us for what we've done for Him since He saved us.

(c) Salvation is just beginning of what God has for us (Ephesians 2:6-7, 10)

¹⁰For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so that we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

Salvation is not the end of the journey; it's a new start. We are not saved to sit; we are saved to serve. This verse explains the relationship between salvation and works. Salvation is not achieved nor maintained by works, but it does produce works.

"Works are the fruit not the root salvation."

The thought of God planning long ago, what He wanted us to do is sometimes not appreciated by believers. While our

God is highly relational God, He is also an active, creative, God. Some Christians have swallowed an ancient Greek epicurean philosophy (note Acts 17:18) of valuing social interaction as the highest purpose of mankind. These Christians cite that we were created as *human beings* not *human doings* to justify their lack of willingness to *do* anything for God. Besides, they argue, God doesn't need me to do anything for Him because that would make Him less than God. While its true that we are called *human beings* the first thing God did with mankind was to commission them to *do something* with the earth (Gen. 1:28). Because we are active for God does not mean that we cannot be intimate with God. In the same a parent can be working hard for their family's welfare and it in no way diminishes their ability to have a loving relationship with their children. Ephesians 2:10 reminds us that God still has something for each one of us to do.

(ii) GOD HAS MADE UNITED JEW AND GENTILE INTO ONE NEW PEOPLE (EPHESIANS 2:11-22)

(a) Christ has brought outsiders (Gentiles) into the Commonwealth (Eph. 2:11-13)

Ephesians 2:11

¹¹Don't forget that you Gentiles used to be outsiders by birth. You were called "the uncircumcised ones" by the Jews, who were proud of their circumcision, even though it affected only their bodies and not their hearts.

Paul now introduces a consequence of salvation that was a revelation to the early church: Gentiles and Jews are now spiritually equal since both groups are equally needing God's grace. Paul informs the Gentiles that there is no need for them to feel inferior due to their lack of a Jewish heritage or background. Jews labelled Gentiles with the derogatory term "uncircumcised" which really equated to "dirty", "unclean", or "outsider".

Circumcision may have been of some physical value, but its true significance was spiritually symbolic (note Gen. 17:11). It represented the removal of flesh that hampered sensitivity. The cry of the Old Testament prophet was for Israel to get the point of circumcision. Jeremiah pleaded with Israel to circumcise their hearts, not just their flesh (Jer. 4:4). The first Christians were Jewish and therefore circumcised. They assumed that God required all Gentiles to become like Jewish Christians (refer to Acts 11:1-4, and 15:1). But as the revelation of grace unfolded, the early church came to realise that circumcision was actually fulfilled in the New Testament's work of grace *in the heart* of the believer.

²⁸For you are not a true Jew just because you were born of Jewish parents or because you have gone through the Jewish ceremony of circumcision. ²⁹No, a true Jew is one whose heart is right with God. And true circumcision is not a cutting of the body but a change of heart produced by God's Spirit. Whoever has that kind of change seeks praise from God, not from people.

Romans 2:28-29

That's why Paul could say that circumcision only really affected the bodies of Jews, and not their hearts. When a person, Jew or Gentile, gives their life over to Christ, they

experience a circumcision of their heart, and thus enjoy a delightful sensitivity to God.

Ephesians 2:12

¹²In those days you were living apart from Christ. You were excluded from God's people, Israel, and you did not know the promises God had made to them. You lived in this world without God and without hope.

Before the New Covenant was established, there was only one way to enter a redemptive relationship with God. This was through the Old Covenant that God had mediated with Moses. There was a provision for Gentiles to convert to Judaism made under the Law (note Gen. 17:12-14). Indeed Israel had been charged with being a light to the world (refer to Isaiah 42:6). By New Testament times, it was known that some Gentiles had accepted the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, without embracing all the rigours of the Law. These kinds of Gentiles were referred to as “God fearers” (note Acts 10:2; 13:26, 50; 17:4). But this verse addresses those Gentiles who were neither proselytes or God-fearers. So not only were they living apart from Christ, they were living apart from the privilege of being a member of the Commonwealth of Israel (the NIV uses the old term “Commonwealth” to describe the collective of the tribes of Israel). They were ignorant of the promises that God had made available to all members of the Commonwealth of Israel. These promises included peace, prosperity, wealth, health, security, protection, provision, and power (refer to Deuteronomy 28:2-13). Yet these Ephesians

had lived unaware of an abundant God who longed to bring these blessings, meaning, and purpose into their lives.

To live without knowing God, is to live without hope since all expectation ceases at the grave. But the believer has an everlasting hope. Our lives do not cease at the grave. We live on. Hope in the Biblical sense is not mere wishful thinking.

Ephesians 2:13

¹³But now you belong to Christ Jesus. Though you once were far away from God, now you have been brought near to him because of the blood of Christ.

This verse dispels the belief that Gentile Christians are not as privileged as Jewish Christians. Because a Gentile believer belongs to Christ, they are no longer far away from God. When Christ shed His blood on the cross, He didn't just die for Jews. Some have taught that Christ died for Jews primarily, but when they rejected the Gospel, it was made available to Gentiles. But this is not the revelation that is being shared in this epistle. It was always God's plan to save Gentiles alongside Jews, by the same means: *the death of His Son on the cross.*

(b) Christ has reconciled both Jew and Gentile together, and with God (Ephesians 2:14-18)

Ephesians 2:14

¹⁴For Christ himself has made peace between us Jews and you Gentiles by making us all one people. He has broken down the wall of hostility that used to separate us.

Not only has God saved both Jews and Gentiles, He has made them into one new people. Neither Jewish nor Gentile Christians can claim any special favour from God because of their ancestry. Neither could either racial group claim to be in separate churches. There was no “Gentile” or “Jewish” Church in the economy of God. During the first century there was much hostility between Jews and Gentiles. But Paul’s revelation of the Church was that God had removed any distinction between Jew or Gentile. He had made the two groups into one. He had removed the wall of division and hostility between Jews and Gentiles.

Ephesians 2:15

¹⁵By his death he ended the whole system of Jewish law that excluded the Gentiles. His purpose was to make peace between Jews and Gentiles by creating in himself one new person from the two groups.

Christ has ended the Law. Despite this very clear verse, there are some who teach a “Dispensational” view that because the Jews had rejected the Gospel, God had instituted a time (or, *dispensation*) when He would allow Gentiles into the company of His people, but would one day stop this and

reinstitute the Mosaic Law. This view gained much popularity under the mass produced Commentary Bible by C.I. Scofield (*"The Schofield Reference Bible"*). Clearly this verse teaches that the Mosaic Law has served its purpose, and has now ended because it was only ever a shadow of the true redemption that Christ achieved. It is now not the observance of the Law that unites Jews and God-fearing Gentiles; it is the acceptance of God's grace in Christ by faith that now unites people from different racial, religious, or social backgrounds. Nationalism can be healthy. Generally today it is not. Feelings of national superiority have no legitimate place in the mind of the believer, or the teaching of the Church.

Ephesians 2:16

¹⁶Together as one body, Christ reconciled both groups to God by means of his death, and our hostility toward each other was put to death.

Perhaps there had been some tension between Jews and Gentiles in the Ephesian church. If there was, or could have been, Paul wanted to destroy any possible theological basis for it. The cross has cancelled all religiously racial distinctions. No longer can people justify their hostilities for others on the basis of ethnic and cultural ancestry.

Ephesians 2:17

¹⁷He has brought this Good News of peace to you Gentiles who were far away from him, and to us Jews who were near.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ's death on the cross brings peace to, and between, Jews and Gentiles. The typical Jewish concept of Gentiles was that they were "far away" from God.

Ephesians 2:18

¹⁸Now all of us, both Jews and Gentiles, may come to the Father through the same Holy Spirit because of what Christ has done for us.

This verse reveals the role of the Trinity in salvation: the *Father* has brought us near; this is executed by the *Holy Spirit*; and established by *Christ*. It emphasizes that both Jews and Gentiles may now approach God as their *Father*. God is no longer just the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob only. No longer is it right to think of God acquiescing to allow the Goyim (Gentiles) to enter His presence. Not only can Gentiles approach God, they can as children (heirs) to their loving Father.

(c) Christ is building His people into a glorious temple (Ephesians 2:19-22)

Ephesians 2:19

¹⁹So now you Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens along with all of God's holy people. You are members of God's family.

This is the second use of metaphors by Paul in describing what God has done in establishing a New Testament people. In the previous metaphor used in Ephesian 2:15, Paul had

described the church as *one new person*. In this verse he uses the metaphors of *citizenship* and *family*.

To be a citizen of Rome in the time of Paul carried with it privileges of Government protection (an attack against you by a foreign empire was an attack against the Roman Empire, note Paul's subtle use of this right in Acts 16:37-38), the right of legal appeal to Caesar (which Paul used in Acts 25:11), and the opportunity to have some influence in the way the Empire was run. This use of the word by Paul to describe the new state of Gentiles who have become believers, reinforces the immense privileges that Paul is trying to make readers aware of. No longer could anyone claim that if a Christian was a Jew they were more privileged than a Gentile Christian. Gentile Christians are equal citizens alongside those who have a heritage of being God's people, Israel.

Citizenship means privileges. Family means responsibility. Being in a family causes us to carry concern for each other. If there was some division between Jews and Gentiles, as there may have been, Paul's teaching here decisively corrects the religious justification for such biases and prejudices.

Ephesians 2:20

²⁰We are his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself.

A lengthy explanation of this verse can be found in my recent disquisition, "*An Examination of the Early Church's New Testament Leadership Structure and It's Application To The*

Modern Church” which is basically an examination of the history and ministry of an apostle. Not only has Christ laid the foundations for the Church on the original apostles and prophets, He has continued to build His Church on the ever enlarging foundation of modern apostles and prophets. As Paul is using the metaphor of a building, he attributes himself and other apostles and prophets as being the foundational support for the Church’s structure. Naturally, foundations determine the strength, character, and size of a building. No one should assume too quickly the ministry of an apostle or prophet. With such increased authority comes a proportional increase in responsibility and thus accountability. These ministries require deep humility. As foundations are often hidden underground, so these ministries are often hidden, underground, or behind the scenes.

Ephesians 2:21

²¹We who believe are carefully joined together, becoming a holy temple for the Lord.

It is not just a building that God is constructing with the Church. It is a *holy temple*. It is what the prophet Ezekiel apocalyptically foresaw in chapters 40-48. He describes a holy temple that was twice the size of the original temple. In this way the glory of the New Covenant temple (the Church) far exceeds the glory of the former Old Covenant temple. The prophet Haggai declared that the glory of the latter temple (the Church) would be far greater than the glory of Solomon’s temple (Haggai 2:9). Even the tabernacle of Moses was simply a foreshadow of the New Covenant Holy Temple that God is

now building. Dispensationalists teach that the original temple in Jerusalem will one day be reconstructed, and sacrifices will once again be offered, as God restores His covenant with Israel. But as we've seen so far in this epistle, Dispensationalism is contrary to the plain teaching of the New Testament. The "last days" Holy Temple is not made of bricks and mortar, but people redeemed by the sacrificial blood of the Lamb. I deal with this issue though more fully in my book- *The Most Embarrassing Verse In The Bible* (an examination of Matthew 24).

Ephesians 2:22

²²Through him you Gentiles are also joined together as part of this dwelling where God lives by his Spirit.

In case there was still some doubt, Paul stresses yet again that Gentiles are an equal part of the construction of this last days' Holy Temple. This temple is not just some cute metaphor. It is a spiritual reality. Every description of the Church throughout the New Testament is biotic. In this instance the Holy Temple is "alive" since God lives in it by His Spirit.

Ephesians

chapter 3

C. GOD'S PLANS FOR THE CHURCH WERE A MYSTERY (Ephesians 3)

- (i) God's mysterious purpose for the Church has
been revealed (Ephesians 3:1-7)**
 - (a) God's grace has revealed His mystery to the
Church (Ephesians 3:1-3)**

Ephesians 3:1

*¹I, Paul, am a prisoner of Christ Jesus because of my
preaching to you Gentiles.*

It is believed that Paul was writing this epistle while imprisoned in Rome awaiting trial. The weight of what he has said so far is increased by the fact that it has come at great personal cost to him. To believe what he believes, and thus preaches, has been tested under the duress of

imprisonment. While some preach for personal gain, Paul states his preaching has caused him to pay a price. This is no mere cheap Gospel. This is no charlatan with questionable motives trying to manipulate his audience for his own purposes. This is a preacher who has put his life on the line to preach the Gospel. He now wants believers to understand the grand implications of the Gospel they have accepted. Therefore listen carefully to what you have just read, but now listen to the primary thrust of what I am trying to say to you, is the implication of this verse.

Paul emphasizes that his preaching was to Gentiles. They would have known that the reason Paul was imprisoned was due to Jewish opposition to him and his message. There was even a trace of chagrin in the minds of Judaizers (Jewish Christians who clung to the belief that all Christians must simultaneously keep the Jewish/Mosaic Law as well as accept Christ as Lord). The account in Acts, and Galatians implies this.

Ephesians 3:2

²As you already know, God has given me this special ministry of announcing his favor to you Gentiles.

“Favour” is the old word *grace*. To become recipients of God’s favour brought His blessing. God looked on Abel with favour and blessed him because of his sacrificial blessing. The writer of Hebrews says that Abel still speaks very loudly about how God blesses a person. The Old Testament is filled with the possibility of people enjoying the *favour of God*. One example of this is Leviticus 26:9-12.

⁹I will look favorably upon you and multiply your people and fulfill my covenant with you. ¹⁰You will have such a surplus of crops that you will need to get rid of the leftovers from the previous year to make room for each new harvest. ¹¹I will live among you, and I will not despise you. ¹²I will walk among you; I will be your God, and you will be my people.

The favour of God could result in financial and material prosperity, large families, good health, and a long fruitful life. But the Old Testament implies that this favour and resultant blessing of God was only available to Hebrews. Paul now states this favour of God was equally available to Gentiles. He reminds his readers that this was the original message he preached to them.

Ephesians 3:3

³As I briefly mentioned earlier in this letter, God himself revealed his secret plan to me.

That God could extend His favour to Gentiles was hidden from those living under the Older Covenant. During Paul's day many Jews (even Jewish Christians) were living under an Old Covenant paradigm. Christ was merely added as a supplement to the Old Covenant according to the perspective of these people. But Paul says that God had revealed His secret plan to him. He now wants to share this revealed secret with all believers.

(b) The Scriptures reveal the mystery of Christ and His Church (Ephesians 3:4-5)

Ephesians 3:4

⁴As you read what I have written, you will understand what I know about this plan regarding Christ.

While the Judaizers regarded Christ as a supplement to the Old Covenant, Paul had received a revelation of God's plan (which was previously hidden and therefore a mystery). This plan had nothing to do with Christ being a supplement to the Old Covenant. This had centred on Christ. This plan had at least two covenants involved: *the Older and the Newer*. The Older Covenant pointed to Christ, while the Newer Covenant looks back to Christ. Christ is the centre of God's plan.

Ephesians 3:5

⁵God did not reveal it to previous generations, but now he has revealed it by the Holy Spirit to his holy apostles and prophets.

This verse describes what modern theologians refer to as "progressive revelation". God did not reveal His plan and purpose suddenly. It was incrementally revealed over time. Peter says that the prophets of old longed to know what God's complete plan was (1Peter 1:10-11). Not until Christ came and completed the work of redemption on the cross did it soon become apparent what God's plan had been. But everyone did not readily grasp the revelation of salvation in Christ. As Paul has been alluding to, salvation is only really understood by

revelation. In this verse he stresses that Christ has given the founding apostles and prophets a fuller revelation of God's plan. And as an apostle, Paul is in this verse claiming to have an even fuller revelation, which he is sharing in this epistle.

(c) The mystery involves Christ bringing Jew and Gentile to becoming the Church (Ephesians 3:6-7)

Ephesians 3:6

⁶And this is the secret plan: The Gentiles have an equal share with the Jews in all the riches inherited by God's children. Both groups have believed the Good News, and both are part of the same body and enjoy together the promise of blessings through Christ Jesus.

This is the crux of the revelation that Paul has received about God's plan of salvation, and His plan for the Church. At the time this was a revolutionary declaration by Paul. As the first Church Council in Acts 15 bears out, not everyone in the Church accepted what Paul was sharing about the equality of Gentiles with Jews. Not only are Jews and Gentiles equal in the eyes of God, they both jointly share the same inheritance of blessings from God.

Ephesians 3:7

⁷By God's special favor and mighty power, I have been given the wonderful privilege of serving him by spreading this Good News.

For Gentiles seeking to receive salvation, the forgiveness of their sins and the hope of resurrection into eternal life, this announcement by Paul certainly is *good news*. This is what the word “Gospel” means. By God’s grace and power, Paul (and all other preachers) have the wonderful privilege of proclaiming this good news.

**(ii) The implications of the mystery
(Ephesians 3:8-13)**

**(a) This mystery is now revealed and proclaimed
(Ephesians 3:8-9)**

Ephesians 3:8

⁸Just think! Though I did nothing to deserve it, and though I am the least deserving Christian there is, I was chosen for this special joy of telling the Gentiles about the endless treasures available to them in Christ.

Not only did Paul declare God’s grace, he was an example of it. Again he makes reference to the spiritual wealth that comes from accepting Christ (“*endless treasures*”). He wants his readers to understand that salvation has implications not just for eternity: but for *now*. Much of the *now* implications relate to how believers relate together (in the Church and across traditionally hostile racial boundaries), and the authority of believers and their privileged position in the favour of God.

Ephesians 3:9

⁹I was chosen to explain to everyone this plan that God, the Creator of all things, had kept secret from the beginning.

While we are all called to witness and proclaim the Gospel, some are especially chosen. Some may be able to proclaim the Gospel while going about their ordinary work. Yet there are others who are called to commit their whole lives to the cause of promoting the Gospel of Jesus Christ through preaching. This was the case with Paul. He had a clear call to be a 'professional' preacher. It is also the necessary requirement of everyone else who would assume to be a professional preacher and minister of the Gospel. Without a strong, clear, call from God to preach, the winds of adversity will tear the sails of any other motivation.

In Australia it is estimated by Rowland Croucher of John Mark Ministries that up to 50% of professional ministers are "out of the ministry". The most common reason is stress. As a called and chosen professional preacher with nearly twenty years of preaching experience, there have been times too numerous when the winds of adversity have blown against the sails of my motivation. I feel my sails would have been torn to shreds if it wasn't for the fact that I have an unshakeable sense of the call of God on my life to preach. Should we be surprised, grieved, or alarmed that over 10,000 professional preachers have opted out of ministry? Only if they were called, chosen and appointed by God!

The God whom Paul is referring to is not one of the existing plethora of Gentile objects of worship and admiration. This God is: *the Creator of all things*. In all of

Paul's cross-cultural missionary endeavours he always laid the foundation for a theology of the true God. This begins exactly where the Bible itself begins, with God as Creator. In explaining the Gospel to the Romans Paul commences his epistle by stating that God is Creator, and everything else is *created*. This ran contrary to some Gentile pagan ideology, which taught that God was in everything (pantheism) and therefore had no personality. Today in western society there is a resurgence of pantheism in the form of various New Age teachings. Paul has also rejected the Greek mythological view of a hierarchy of gods, in which the Christian god was equivalent to the "supreme" Greek god, Zeus (refer to Acts 14:12). For the Christian there is only one God (Ephesians 4:6).

(b) The Church is the mystery of God, confounding principalities and powers (Ephesians 3:10-11)

Ephesians 3:10

¹⁰God's purpose was to show his wisdom in all its rich variety to all the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms. They will see this when Jews and Gentiles are joined together in his church.

There was such hostility and animosity between Jew and Gentile that it would have been an absolute miracle to bring the two groups together in a genuinely harmonious union. Paul states that this is precisely what God has done. Because it is such a clear and outstanding miracle it serves notice to all principalities and powers that God is able to do what He

says even though it seemed impossible. This adds weight to the further claims made by God and declared by the Old Testament prophets, apostles and New Testament prophets about the Church's eventual triumph over the forces of evil.

Ephesians 3:11

¹¹This was his plan from all eternity, and it has now been carried out through Christ Jesus our Lord.

To bring Gentiles into the family of God and make them joint heirs with Christ and those Jews who have accepted the Christ, was God's plan from the beginning. To suggest that God condescended to allow Gentiles into the Kingdom for a limited time because the Jewish people initially rejected the Gospel is flying in the face of this verse (see the comments on Ephesians 2:14-15). It was God's plan *from eternity* that salvation be achieved by Christ's finished work on the cross, and that all people (every nation) be invited into the Kingdom of God through the preaching of the Gospel.

(c) The mystery reveals that believers can boldly access God (Ephesians 3:12-13)

Ephesians 3:12

¹²Because of Christ and our faith in him, we can now come fearlessly into God's presence, assured of his glad welcome.

Perhaps the most startling privilege of all for the believer is to be given permission to enter God's presence at any time without the need for fear of God's rejection. While pagan

religions would go through elaborate ceremonies and rituals to appease God, and still not ever be sure if they had, Paul reveals to every believer that we can come fearlessly, boldly, confidently into God's very presence. What awaits the believer who dares to take up this too-good-to-be-true offer? *A glad welcome from God our Father!*

Ephesians 3:13

¹³So please don't despair because of what they are doing to me here. It is for you that I am suffering, so you should feel honored and encouraged.

Paul had already alluded to his imprisonment as an indicator of his commitment to the Gospel. In a similar way that salvation had been achieved by one Man laying down His life for others, the Gospel is often advanced according to a similar pattern. While there may be preachers who enjoy an entirely comfortable life in the Lord's service, the pattern established by Christ makes provision for personal sacrifice and cost in fulfilling a commission to preach (note Matthew 10:25). This is evidenced in the lives of the first apostles and prophets who generally experienced great pain and suffering to advance the Gospel. The fact that the Ephesians had received the Gospel as preached by Paul, which had in turn led to Paul's imprisonment, meant that at least one man had laid down his life so that others might live. For this reason the Ephesians could feel appreciative for the price Paul was paying on their behalf.

(iii) The mystery reveals the glory of Christ in the Church (Ephesians 3:14-21)

(a) Understanding the mystery gives the believer inner strength (Ephesians 3:14-17)

Ephesians 3:14-15

¹⁴When I think of the wisdom and scope of God's plan, I fall to my knees and pray to the Father, ¹⁵the Creator of everything in heaven and on earth.

Here was a man passionately gripped by the Gospel and all its implications! Just writing about the Gospel and its scope caused Paul to stop and pray. He can't go on writing anymore without first sharing a prayer with his readers.

Ephesians 3:16

¹⁶I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will give you mighty inner strength through his Holy Spirit.

The first part of the prayer by Paul for his readers was that they might know that our God is glorious, and unlimited in resources! Whatever need anyone has can be entirely met in God. Our God never runs out of resources. With God there is abundance- more than enough and enough for everyone. Some believers have the paradigm that if one person is blessed it is at the expense of another. But this is due to the world's conditioning about resources. Our God can make shoes last forty years through desert wanderings (Deut. 29:5). Our God can cause the flour to never run dry (1Kings 17:14-17). Our God can provide water in a dry place from a rock (Exodus 17:6). With God, nothing is impossible (Matthew 19:26).

The next thing Paul prays is that they might be strengthened accordingly by the Holy Spirit. True inner strength, which can only come from God, is the determining factor in a person's ability to go on. We would do well to take God up on His invitation to approach Him fearlessly and ask our Unlimited, Super-Abundant God if He would fill us with an inner strength from the Holy Spirit.

Ephesians 3:17

¹⁷And I pray that Christ will be more and more at home in your hearts as you trust in him. May your roots go down deep into the soil of God's marvelous love.

This aspect of Paul's prayer seems to suggest that our growth in Christ is related to the condition of our hearts. Are our hearts places where Christ can feel increasingly comfortable and at home? What makes for an uncomfortable heart dwelling for Christ? Whatever it is is contrasted by Paul's prayer that it would be remedied by a deeper dependence upon God's love. We could therefore surmise that the things that dwell in our hearts that don't reflect God's love, are things that are going to make it uncomfortable for Christ to dwell there. When hatred, unforgiveness, bitterness, envy, or spite are removed from our hearts, Christ is made to feel more at home there. Our goal is to have Christ dwelling obviously within us.

(b) Understanding the mystery reveals God's incredible love (Ephesians 3:18-19)

Ephesians 3:18

¹⁸And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love really is.

This appears to be the determining factor in how much we grow in the things of God. Not only does the mystery of what God has done involve Christ living in His people, being glorified in the Church, uniting Jew and Gentile together as one people, it integrally involves God's love toward us. No one has any idea how much God actually loves them. Philip Yancey cites the controversial American basketballer turned wrestler (or should that be "*rassler*") Dennis Rodman (and please pardon the language, but I am quoting it verbatim)-

"If there is a Supreme Being, he/she/it has a hell of a lot more to worry about than my stupid problems."

The Bible That Jesus Read, Philip Yancey, page 35

Rodman expresses what many people think about God. Those who have contemplated the vastness of the cosmos are sooner than later made aware of just how seemingly insignificant this tiny planet of blue and green carbon combinations is. How could the Creator of the Universe concern Himself with just one planet? And if He does care about the planet, how could He possibly care- even love- me? Despite the rationalising by Rodman and others why this could never be so, it is. Not only does God love us individually, it is a love that we cannot possibly fathom for its awesome goodness. What Paul is praying for believers is that

they should recognise how much wider, higher, longer, deeper, than they previously understood, God's love is.

Ephesians 3:19

¹⁹May you experience the love of Christ, though it is so great you will never fully understand it. Then you will be filled with the fullness of life and power that comes from God.

Not only does God want us to understand that His love for us is more than we had previously accepted and acknowledged, he wants to move from a head knowledge of it to an experience of it. Experience is the fulfilment of knowledge. When people today pick up the Yiddish expression “*yada, yada, yada*”, they are using the Hebrew word *know* (*yada*). But this word *know* is only fully understood when it is experienced and something is conceived as a result of it. Adam *knew* (*yada*) his wife, and she conceived (Gen. 4:1).

Our relationship with God is not just something that we experience purely at an intellectual level. Not until we experience the love of God and we are struck by its immensity can we really enter into the fullness of life and power that God makes available. Many people think that it is faith that unlocks the power of God, but it is faith working through love.

⁶For when we place our faith in Christ Jesus, it makes no difference to God whether we are circumcised or not circumcised. What is important is faith expressing itself in love.

Galatians 5:6

What God has done in the Church is an expression of His love toward all people. The best way we can reflect God to

the world is to reflect His love to them. The first epistle of John has much to say about practical expressions of God's love through us. Needless to say, a church community that represents Christ as harsh, retributive, rigid, unrelenting, and condemning, is bearing false witness to the world, and taking the Lord's Name in vain.

(c) Understanding the mystery reveals God's abundant source of supply to the believer (Ephesians 3:20-21)

Ephesians 3:20

²⁰Now glory be to God! By his mighty power at work within us, he is able to accomplish infinitely more than we would ever dare to ask or hope.

We are God's children. We are heirs to an unimaginable fortune. We are persistently doted over by an extremely passionate Father who protectively watches our every move, and listens for our every cry. We were once outsiders, foreigners, and orphans. But God has brought us in and showered His love on us like a benevolent multi-billionaire bringing in a street urchin to make the adopted heir to His fortune. Compared to what we now have available to us, we were previously beggars eking out a miserable existence. But now that we have been brought in, we are almost embarrassed to sit up at the dinner table of our Benefactor, little knowing that the dinner party is actually in our honour, and there are dozens of waiters, chefs, and maids to bring us any food we could possibly desire at a moments notice.

When we pray to our Heavenly Father, we are placing our dinner request. Most believers never ask for enough. Paul wants all believers to know that God is able to answer any request they could make of Him, no matter how big it is. God really is able to do far more than we could think or imagine!

Ephesians 3:21

²¹May he be given glory in the church and in Christ Jesus forever and ever through endless ages. Amen.

By taking God at His Word, living like we really do believe that Christ is Lord and Creator of the Universe, being at peace with those we were formally estranged from, and reflecting the all-encompassing love of God, we are able to give Christ glory in the Church. Being a Christian is not a solo venture. Being a Christian is being in a community of believers. The first Christians *devoted themselves to Church* (Acts 2:42). Christ is less glorified when His children do not display to principalities and powers the mysterious work of unity that His Spirit has achieved in the Church. Believers who opt out of the Christian community expressed through a local church because they harbour hurt over some issue, are robbing Christ of glory. Our love for Christ is manifest by our love for His Church. When we love God and love our brothers and sisters we are *giving* Christ glory in the Church.

EPHESIANS

Chapter 4

D. THE MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH (Ephesians 4:1-16)

(i) Ministry within the Church (Ephesians 4:1-10)

(a) The call for unity (Ephesians 4:1-6)

Having already called the miracle of the union between Jew and Gentile a display of God's power to all powers and principalities (3:10), Paul now urges all believers to live cooperatively together.

Ephesians 4:1

¹Therefore I, a prisoner for serving the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God.

Again Paul refers to his imprisonment. The motive appears to be similar. Initially he said he was a prisoner *of* the

Lord (3:1). Now he says he is a prisoner *because* of his service *for* the Lord. To be imprisoned for what you truly believe must be like a badge of honour. Paul later describes his imprisonment involving chains (6:20). He was suffering *for* Jesus. This revelation of the mystery of Christ and His Church had cost Paul his freedom. He wanted his readers to know that he was prepared to suffer for the cause of the Kingdom of Christ expressed through the Church. He considered his sufferings as his credentials for preaching the cross of Christ.

*¹⁷From now on, don't let anyone trouble me with these things.
For I bear on my body the scars that show I belong to
Jesus.*

Galatians 6:17

For Christ's sake, don't live a nominal compromised lukewarm Christian life! We are called to a live a life worthy of the One who has called us. You have not gatecrashed eternal life. You have been especially chosen and hand picked by God Himself: *He has called you*. The Chief Executive Officer of the Universe has hand chosen you to be a Senior Executive in His Corporation. Talk about "buy-in"! We don't work for a corporation: *we are the Corporation!* Everything we do affects *our* corporation.

Ephesians 4:2

²Be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love.

This is where the epistle gets practical. Paul has masterly laid the foundation of how God has saved us, blessed us, promoted us, united us, and lavished His love upon us. Now, we've got to do something about it!

All of Paul's writings follow this same pattern. Theology (or doctrine) is always dealt with first, then the implications of it.

There's no need to rush to Greek Language Dictionaries (Lexicons) to understand what the New Testament is saying here. We are to be humble, gentle, and patient with each other, because of our love for each other. The fact that Paul says we must be this way seems to imply that it doesn't always come naturally, which from personal experience I can validate. There are some who teach that a Christian can just go with their feelings since God puts His love in our hearts. But there are times when our feelings must come with us, rather than the other way around.

Ephesians 4:3

³Always keep yourselves united in the Holy Spirit, and bind yourselves together with peace.

The fact that the New Testament says here to *keep* the unity that the Holy Spirit has initiated, means that it takes effort to keep a church united. Some people have the opinion that all issues of contention within the church should be brought out in the open. But this verse implores peace rather than contention unveiling.

Ephesians 4:4

⁴We are all one body, we have the same Spirit, and we have all been called to the same glorious future.

Here is the basis for unity within the Church. Spiritually all believers are knitted together as part of the same body. All believers have the same Spirit who is changing us all into the image of Christ. And we are all headed in the same direction since we will all share the same glorious future.

Ephesians 4:5

⁵There is only one Lord, one faith, one baptism,

There is no suggestion made in the New Testament that the Church should be distinguished by denominations. The Church is spiritually united because we all serve one Lord. We may not agree over matters of faith (that is- doctrine: “what we *believe*”), or how we should baptise (sprinkle or immerse, infant or adult), but we are still actually united. On matters of faith (belief) the New Testament is dogmatic when it comes to the Lord and our salvation. While *liberal* theologians consider the New Testament of some value but not necessarily the absolute, irrefutable Word of God, they will never be able to completely agree on matters of belief. But then again, that won't be a problem for liberals since they actually view that as a strength of their hermeneutical system, where they “free” or “liberated” people to believe whatever they want.

Interestingly, the Reformation of the Church that occurred in the sixteenth century was primarily about doctrine. From that point the birth of denominationalism

took place over disagreements about church polity (governmental structures) and minor doctrinal matters. Several hundred years on, the Church has never been more united over matters of doctrine. As a boy I can remember the ridicule and scorn that Pentecostals endured from “mainliners”, and the contempt that Pentecostals returned to mainliners. All of this basically took place over the matter of charismatic gifts in the church and the manifestation of those gifts of the Holy Spirit. Today, the churches that sourced the ridicule and scorn are embracing the charismatic gifts and making room for their manifestation in their worship services. And, Pentecostals have adopted many of the seeker-sensitive practices of mainline churches and in some cases adopted rigid orders of service that more resemble mainline liturgies (one of the strongest criticisms that Pentecostals had levelled against mainline denominations).

The Church is not just united over doctrine, but also through the practice of baptism. It is the teaching of Scripture that water baptism is more meaningfully expressed through full immersion. It is also the teaching of the New Testament that water baptism is the sealing of the covenant between the believer and the Lord. Every instance in the New Testament of people being baptised is of repentant believers. This implies that they were older than infants. The New Testament also teaches that water baptism is not a work that earns salvation. It will save no one. The criteria for salvation is clearly faith manifested in repentance (rather than faith *and* repentance). But every believer is expected to be water baptised. While this used to be a very divisive issue in the church, there is growing common ground between traditionally opposing camps. For

example, the *Alpha!* teaching series, which originates out of Holy Trinity Brompton (Anglican), where infant sprinkling was formerly practiced, now teaches the practice of baptism by full immersion following repentance.

Ephesians 4:6

*and there is only one God and Father, who is over us all
and in us all and living through us all.*

This statement about *one* God is ironically a reinforcing doctrinal Scripture in support of the Trinity. Just as it was a mystery to the first century Christians about how two racial groups, Jews and Gentiles, could be made one, so it is also a mystery how the Father, Son and Holy Spirit constitute *one* God. This verse corrects the polytheistic heresy that Christians actually worship three gods. It also corrects the modalistic heresy that Jesus *is* the Father. While there is equality within the Trinity there is also *order*. Jesus stated that the Father had: given Him authority over all things (Jn. 3:35); entrusted all judgment to Him (John 5:22); and, sent Him (Jn. 12:49). He plainly said that the Father was greater than Himself (John 14:28), while He had also revealed earlier that He was equal to the Father (Jn. 5:18; 10:30, 33).

**(b) Christ has gifted the Church since His ascension
(Ephesians 4:7-10)**

Ephesians 4:7

⁷However, he has given each one of us a special gift according to the generosity of Christ.

When Christ ascended He distributed generous gifts to His people. When these gifts come together, they constitute a united and diverse Church. Every person in the Church has a gift to express for Christ within the Church. Gifts come in various forms. There are ministry-gifts, motivational-gifts, and manifestation-gifts. But there are also grace-gifts where God gives us the grace to things that need to be done which a person may not necessarily have the ministry (Eph. 4:11)/motivation (Rom. 12:6-8)/manifestation (1Cor. 12:8-10) to ordinarily deal with it. You may experience seasons in your own life where God graces you with a grace-gift to accomplish a task you may never be confronted with again.

Ephesians 4:8

*⁸That is why the Scriptures say,
"When he ascended to the heights,
he led a crowd of captives
and gave gifts to his people."*

Paul refers to Psalm 68:18. When Christ ascended He gave ministry gifts to various people within the Church that became an aspect of His own ministry while He was on earth. Some have suggested that this verse endorses a dispensational view regarding heaven and hell. Within this view is the

opinion that all the dead, righteous and wicked, were together in a pre-judgment enclosure called *Sheol*, where they were separated by a partition (which they believe is supported by the story of Lazarus and the rich man in Luke 16:19-31). But there is scant Biblical support for this teaching, and in fact more Scriptural evidence to support the doctrine of the righteous going to heaven, and the wicked to hell, even before the Cross.

Ephesians 4:9

⁹*Notice that it says "he ascended." This means that Christ first came down to the lowly world in which we live.*

The verse supports the doctrine of Christ's pre-existence. Some have taught that Christ was created or devised when He was born of Mary in Bethlehem. Others have taught that Christ *became* the Son of God at Bethlehem. But this verse and John 3:16 make it plain that Christ was already the Son of God ("*For God so loved the world that He sent His only -Son*"), and that He existed before He came to earth. Paul also compares what awaits us with what we know now. Compared to heaven, this is a *lowly* world.

Ephesians 4:10

¹⁰*The same one who came down is the one who ascended higher than all the heavens, so that his rule might fill the entire universe.*

This is a profound theological statement. The background to this verse is found in the first three chapters of Genesis. It is there that we discover that God gave the rulership of the earth to Adam, but he handed it over to Satan when he rebelled against God. Thus Satan could offer Christ the world without Jesus disputing his right to do so (Matthew 4:8-9). Yet Satan's rule did not extend to the highest heavens. It was from there that we presume he was evicted (implied in Revelation 12:4). This verse reveals that when Christ came to the earth He defeated Satan's rule over the earth, and now He rules both Heaven and earth (which the Bible considers as "the universe").

**(ii) The diversity of ministry within the Church
(Ephesians 4:11-16)**

(a) The ascension ministries (Ephesians 4:11)

I have dealt at length with what is commonly referred to as "*the ascension ministries*" in my recent dissertation about the history and ministry of the apostle. These ministry gifts are necessary for the Church to have the right foundations (2:20), and to be a complete and healthy body (1Cor.12).

Ephesians 4:11

¹¹He is the one who gave these gifts to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers.

Christ has entrusted His mission to people! To aid the Church in our mission, Christ has gifted His Church with certain ministries, that He considers perfectly adequate (and

necessary) to build His Church and advance His mission. The ministry of the apostle is pre-eminent in the Church. In every list of ministries within the Church, the apostle is always mentioned first. When Christ ministered on earth He made it a priority to train *apostles*. Apostles have a ministry of forging and strengthening foundations. Within the New Testament we observe that every instance of apostolic ministry was just that: forging and strengthening foundations. Some apostles did this by being based *in* one church (for example, James in Jerusalem, Acts 15), while others were mobile *from* a home base church (for example, Paul's home church was Antioch from where he was sent out). Apostles forged and strengthened foundations by focusing on just four areas: Direction; Discipline; Development; and, Doctrine.

The ministry of the New Testament Prophet is one of building the Church through prophetic declaration and insight (note the ministry of Agabus in Acts 11:28; 21:10-11). While the Old Testament Prophet brought judgment, the New Testament Prophet brings encouragement and strength (Acts 15:32; 1Cor. 14:31). Prophets are watchers (example, Ezekiel 3:17) they wait extraordinarily upon the Lord to "see" the things of the Lord. The metaphor of the watchman speaks of the Prophet being an intercessor (someone who prays earnestly on behalf of others, note the ministry of Abraham the prophet in Genesis 18). The ministry of the prophet is intrinsically linked to that of the apostle. Together they are ministers to the Church's very foundations.

The evangelist is a gatherer and a herald. They are gifted with an ability to gather lost people and proclaim the Gospel to them. There is only one evangelist named and discussed in

the New Testament (Philip), which is not to imply that there were not more, but it does suggest that much of the evangelistic load of the Church was shared by everyone not just the evangelists. From what we see of Philip, the evangelist is not so much a mobile ministry (as is often the case today). The evangelist heralds to the unsaved community the offer of God's loving salvation. This can often take years of relationship building to bear fruit, which may explain why New Testament evangelists were not as mobile as apostles and prophets.

While the apostle and prophet uniquely minister into the Church's foundations, the evangelist's sphere of ministry is at the entrance or doorway of the Church. The pastor, on the other hand, is located within the building of the Church. There is some debate as to whether this ministry is linked intrinsically with the ministry of the teacher, or whether they are to be regarded as two separately identifiable ministries. It is my opinion that the ministry gift of pastor intrinsically involves teaching. I would therefore regard these ascension ministry gifts to be viewed as four ministries rather than five. Arguments against this include the observation that some people seem to be gifted as teachers but also seem to lack the compassion and sensitivity of a pastor. Some observed to be gifted pastors also seem to lack an ability to teach. To this I would respond by saying that observations of this nature are: (i) highly subjective, (ii) often used to justify character flaws, (iii) a failure to view this particular ministry gift as developing over time into a more complete ministry balance. Pastors must be able to teach (it is one of the basic requirements listed in 1Timothy 3:1-6). Those who consider themselves

teachers should not justify any absence of compassion for people. Instead this possible deficiency needs to be developed.

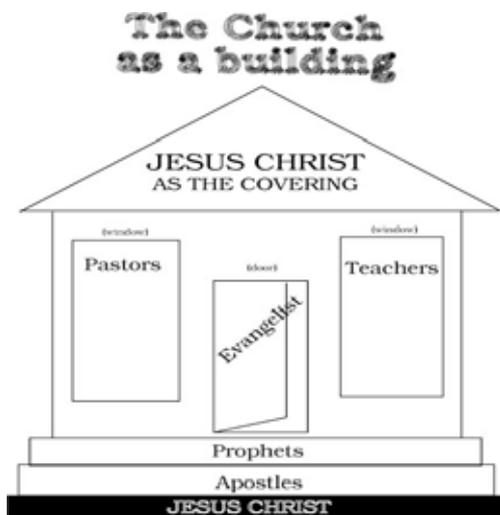
Together these ministry gifts are complementary. When collaborating, as they were in the early Church (again refer to my major disquisition on the subject), the Church is made strong and advances militantly. Every local church needs to be exposed to the variety of these ministry gifts. The following verses explain why.

(b) The goal of the ascension ministries (Ephesians 4:12-13)

Ephesians 4:12

¹²Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ,

Together these ministries have a common goal: the equipping of God's people for service in the Church, and the building up of the Church.



The diagram to the left illustrates Ephesians 4:11-12. With Christ as the Head and Covering of the Church, the Church is founded on the ministries of the apostle and prophet. The entrance ministry of the Church is evangelism. Once inside, the

ministry of the pastor-teacher builds the Church up on the inside. Thus the building is continually multiplying or expanding. It is multiplying from the human perspective (with more church congregations being planted) and expanding from the divine perspective (with the population of believers ever increasing) with Christ viewing His Church as a whole.

Ephesians 4:12 makes it clear that the ascension ministries are gifted by Christ as resourcing the whole Church to expand and grow stronger. With the apostle and prophet concentrating on direction, doctrine, development and discipline the Church is made stable and secure. The Church is able to grow because it is continually laying firm foundations. With the evangelist at the door of the Church bring new people into it, the Church grows because of the numeric growth and is strengthened the evangelist's ability to muster those inside the building to come over near the doorway and welcome new people into the Church. Once inside the Church the pastor-teacher concentrates on building up the believers and strengthening them in their understanding of God and His Word.

Ephesians 4:13

¹³until we come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature and full grown in the Lord, measuring up to the full stature of Christ.

Each of the ascension ministries bears an aspect of the ministry of Christ. Christ is the Chief Apostle (Heb. 3:1). To become like Christ is to become somewhat apostolic. Every Christian therefore needs to be influenced by an authentic

apostle. Christ is the Prophet (Deut. 18:15; Acts 3:22; Matt. 21:11). To be like Christlike is to be somewhat prophetic. Every Christian therefore needs the influence of a prophet on their lives. Christ is the Great Pastor-Teacher (Jn. 10). Every Christian therefore needs the ministry of a pastor-teacher on their lives to become Christlike.

These diverse ministries are actually unifying for the Church. The analogy of a human body is used here. The various features of a human body are quite different, but together their diversity makes up a whole person in unity. So it is with the Church. While all ministries are equal, not all ministries are in the same order. The order is always clear: *first* apostles, *then* prophets, *then* evangelists and pastor-teachers. When pride stops one ministry from submitting to another, the Body of Christ is depleted. Later in this epistle, Paul will deal with just how submission needs to work within the Church.

(c) The benefit of the ascension ministries to the Church (Ephesians 4:14-16)

Ephesians 4:14

¹⁴Then we will no longer be like children, forever changing our minds about what we believe because someone has told us something different or because someone has cleverly lied to us and made the lie sound like the truth.

When the Church is in order, that is: founded on apostles and prophets who have laid a foundation of right doctrine, right direction, right development, and right

discipline, there is solid stability in the members of the Church. These foundations are further outworked by the various complementary ministries of the evangelist who brings people through the right doorway (Jn 10:1-9), rather through a spurious door based on a spurious Gospel. The pastor-teacher tends to the ongoing ministry of the Church through the ministry of the Word of God and prayer.

The apparent ease at which it is possible to *not* have the Church in order is borne out in the history, and contemporary observation, of the Church. This is made so prevalent due to the subtle versions of attack it faces from the enemy. Rarely does the enemy attack with blatant error: rarely, but not never. Usually the enemy tries to attack the Church through subtle deception. Paul says that the enemy *cleverly* lies to us, and makes the lie sound like the truth. That's why we all need the safety of the Church community. The gift of discernment, mentioned in 1Corinthians 12:10, is a gift to strengthen the Church in this area. This gift distinguishes whether a person and their teaching is of God or not.

¹⁰He gives one person the power to perform miracles, and to another the ability to prophesy. He gives someone else the ability to know whether it is really the Spirit of God or another spirit that is speaking.

1Corinthians 12:10a

Today's Church is blessed with an abundance of Christian literature and material promoting sound doctrine. The early Church was not so blessed. They would have been far more dependent upon this gift than we are today. Nevertheless the potential for deception is still just as prevalent in the Church today, and is in fact even more organised and systematic than it ever has been.

Ephesians 4:15

¹⁵Instead, we will hold to the truth in love, becoming more and more in every way like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church.

This is our goal as the Church: to become like Christ. Paul has already shown how every believer needs the Church's ascension ministries to bring a balanced influence from the different ministry aspects of Christ. But much broader than that, we all need each other to become more Christlike. There can be no doubt that the most prominent characteristic of Christ is love. For the believer to strive for Christlikeness intimately involves a dynamic and loving relationship with a community of other believers. While the Church is on guard against heresy and deception, it is also on guard against hard heartedness and loveless faith.

Some translations render this verse as "*speaking the truth in love...*" This doesn't mean we should always initiate telling the truth to someone who may be hurt by what we say because we feel not telling them is not real love. In fact, sometimes the most loving thing a person can do, is hold the hurtful truth back from a person. There are of course other times when someone needs to be confronted with the hard truth because we do love them. The motivation must always be the welfare and betterment of the other person. The believer who has a bad attitude toward another person (without that person being aware of it) will only cause hurt and distress to that person if they went to them to tell them "the truth." While their plea for forgiveness may lighten their conscience, it will usually only distress the one confronted, in this instance.

The context of this text relates to the ministry that takes place within the Church. Therefore, for those called to one of these aspects of the Church's ministry there will arise the need to speak the truth which may confront people's sin, destructive lifestyles, or ignorance. This verse reminds those of us involved in this sphere that our goal is the welfare and betterment of other believers. Our goal is not guilt. There's enough of that felt by believers aware of their sin and living under condemnation from it yet ignorant of God's grace. Our goal is Christlikeness achieved by ministering truth and love.

Ephesians 4:16

¹⁶Under his direction, the whole body is fitted together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.

Here we see that the whole Church is needed to achieve Christlikeness. A believer living as an isolated Christian is living abnormally. Not only do we need to be living in a loving community of believers to be able to receive and express the love of Christ, we actually need the contribution of each other to be a whole and functioning church community. Christ actually fits believers together so that their strengths and weaknesses, gifts, talents, and ministries can combine to a unified body.

As we function together, we grow and the Church grows. When this is happening, the Church is described as healthy, growing, and full of love. This picture contrasts with the concept of the Church that arose from the Reformation of a

Church with one “minister” and many members. The New Testament picture of the Church is of many ministers and no idle members. When a church has a high degree of member-ministry, operating within the order that Paul has already taught about in the previous passage, there is individual and corporate growth.

2. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS OF BEING IN THE CHURCH

E. REPRESENTING CHRIST IN OURSELVES, OUR FAMILY, THE CHURCH AND THE WORLD (Ephesians 4:17 - 6:9)

(i) The Church's ministry in the world (Ephesians 4:17-32)

(a) Live differently to the world (Ephesians 4:17-19)

Ephesians 4:17

¹⁷With the Lord's authority let me say this: Live no longer as the ungodly do, for they are hopelessly confused.

Having dealt with the internal affairs of the Church, Paul now turns to the outward ministry of the Church. This is a grace verse. “*Live no longer...*” implies that the Christian journey is one of gradual change and growth. No one can be expected to live a mature Christian life immediately upon their commitment to Christ. There is the expectation however that change and growth *will* happen though. Some teach that

the enabler of any change toward Christlikeness is the Holy Spirit. While we can not live the Christian life without the Holy Spirit, there is a direct onus on every believer to *allow* God to have His way in our lives. If this were not the case, Paul would not tell believers to change the way they live. He even stresses that he is saying this in the authority of the Lord Himself.

There is also a contrast here between the life of the believer and those outside the Lord. The *New Living Translation* describes those outside of Christ as “*hopelessly confused*”. The main point of the contrast is in the way outsiders think. To think that there is no God, or that He endorses debased lifestyles is to be thoroughly confused. To live without God is truly *hopeless*.

Ephesians 4:18

¹⁸Their closed minds are full of darkness; they are far away from the life of God because they have shut their minds and hardened their hearts against him.

The unbeliever is again contrasted with the new life enjoyed by the believer. The unbeliever has a closed and dark mind, and a hard heart toward God. Therefore to enjoy the life of God the believer must have an *open* mind filled with light (the Word of God), and a *soft* heart filled with the love of God.

Ephesians 4:19

¹⁹They don't care anymore about right and wrong, and they have given themselves over to immoral ways. Their lives are filled with all kinds of impurity and greed.

To not care about right and wrong is a telltale sign of a heart hard to God. It also serves to act as a warning to us that we don't become indifferent to any compromise in our obedience to God. The specific areas of compromise mentioned here are impurity (varieties of sexual sin), and greed (discontentment). These are very subtle obstacles to our walk with God. The unregenerate person, someone who has never received a revelation from the Holy Spirit of their need for salvation and accepted Christ's offer of forgiveness, has little problem with compromising in the areas of sexual impurity or greed. Through violating their conscience with continual sin they eventually harden their hearts. Paul described this in First Timothy 4:2 as people having *seared their consciences as with a hot iron* (NIV) thus *deadening* their consciences (NLT).

(b) Live like a new person (Ephesians 4:20-24)

The New Testament's admonition to live a godly life is not a finger-pointing exercise that aims at using guilt to motivate people to live holy lives. Authentic holiness is not achieved by the enforcing and keeping of rules. New life in Christ begins on our inside: the way we think. It starts with right teaching from God's Word. Paul reminds the Ephesians that they had received such revelatory teaching as a part of their foundations in Christ.

Ephesians 4:20

²⁰But that isn't what you were taught when you learned about Christ.

Teaching is integral to growing as a Christian. It forms the primary catalyst for godly change in our lives. The kind of teaching that brings about this change is not a mere outlining of rules or laws for holy living. Anointed (God enabled), inspired (fresh from the Holy Spirit), Christ focused, teaching that explains, makes clear what the implications of a text are, and provides the appropriate forms of motivation for acceptance of change, is the kind of teaching that adequately describes New Testament teaching. Paul reminds the Ephesian believers that were taught about a Christ who was pure and holy and that He was the One they should emulate.

Ephesians 4:21

²¹Since you have heard all about him and have learned the truth that is in Jesus,

This is the central theme of all Christian teaching. Our teaching centres on Christ. He is the goal of our lives. His life is the blueprint for ours. His character is the common thread in every Christian personality type. His teachings are the framework for our conduct. The way He related to both God and others is the way we should relate to God and others. Any teaching that it is not rooted in the person, character, life, or teaching of Christ is counterfeit Christianity.

Ephesians 4:22

²²throw off your old evil nature and your former way of life, which is rotten through and through, full of lust and deception.

The fact that we can *throw off* our old way of living implies that Christian living demands our cooperation. While the Holy Spirit provides the strength to live godly lives, we must provide the *will*. Will, or determination, is the X factor in successful Christian living. When I did algebra at school (or should that be *when I attempted algebra at school?*) the teacher always wanted us to discover what “x” was. X was the missing number that determined the outcome of the whole equation.

In the same way, the X factor of successful Christian living is our will, or determination. I remember watching an old WW2 movie as a child called *The Dam Busters*. The British were days away from being overcome by a Nazi invasion. They had to act quickly. Someone decided that if they could blow up a German dam adjacent to a strategic military site they could stave off the Nazi invasion. But the problem was- *how do you blow up a dam?* If you drop a conventional bomb on the dam you simply create a big splash. Dropping the bomb exactly on the wall would require impossible pinpoint precision. Eventually one of the engineers came up with the childhood idea of “skimming” a bomb across the surface of the water so it strategically collided with the dam wall. The other engineers said it was a ludicrous idea. But with limited alternatives they attempted tests. Time was fast running out. If this mission failed Britain would be invaded and I would be writing this in German today.

One very determined pilot was barely successful in the trial bombing. On the basis of this scant ray of hope, they set out swiftly one night and crossed “the point of no return” where they would only have enough fuel to return to England if they carried out their mission and disposed of the extra weight of the bomb they were carrying. Approaching the dam the bomber pilot flew in just as he had practiced and dropped his bomb. Within seconds, his bomb skimmed along the surface of the water and destroyed the dam wall and halted the Nazi war machine from invading England. Sixty years later, which was just recently, they attempted a re-enactment of this mission. Every attempt to replicate what happened that night failed. Engineers later said that when they calculated the mathematics involved in achieving such a mission they consistently proved that what was achieved that night was actually impossible! The only explanation they could offer as to how the first bomber was able to achieve what he did during WW2 was: *It had to be done therefore he did it. During the re-enactment though, we didn't actually 'have to' do it.* What a fantastic illustration of what will and determination can achieve.

Do you think you can't change? You can. Your answer isn't anything fancier than being willing and determined. If you are weak willed and lacking in determination why not become determined to ask God for more will and determination to change?

Ephesians 4:23

²³Instead, there must be a spiritual renewal of your thoughts and attitudes.

What we allow into our minds determines the kind of person we are becoming. Left to our own devices we are more prone to allow depraved input into our minds. We have to decide that we are going to continually renew our thinking. This is facilitated through reading godly reading (the Bible, Christian literature), godly preaching in the atmosphere of our local Christian community, and supplementary teaching from other sources.

Its not just our thinking that must change. Our attitudes are also fundamentally depraved and self-centred, and as such we need to adopt Christ-like attitudes. In Philippians 2 Paul says that the attitude of Christ is basically *humility*. When we are overtly self-centred we are exhibiting an attitude of pride. When we sulk and act depressed we are covertly exhibiting pride. When we take offence at the criticisms of others we are reacting from an attitude of pride. As we progress to a more Christ-like attitude we become increasingly humble, meek, and gentle.

Ephesians 4:24

²⁴You must display a new nature because you are a new person, created in God's likeness—righteous, holy, and true.

God has given us new life but we actually need to choose to demonstrate that new life. Our new life bears out the restored image of God in our lives. Originally God created

mankind in His image. When man fell into sin, that image was marred. When Christ purchased our redemption on the Cross, God made restoration of the original image possible. God achieves this by placing His Spirit within us who works into our character *righteousness, holiness and truthfulness*.

**(c) Don't sin in word, thought or deed
(Ephesians 4:25-32)**

Ephesians 4:25

²⁵So put away all falsehood and "tell your neighbor the truth" because we belong to each other.

Our new life in Christ is visible to everyone. It is a profoundly powerful thing that we all have the opportunity to shape and express ourselves through the words we use. Jesus said that people *speak* whatever is in their hearts.

⁴You brood of snakes! How could evil men like you speak what is good and right? For whatever is in your heart determines what you say.

Therefore, the first way we can display that we have new life is in the way we *speak*. The most fundamental aspect to reforming the way we speak is to only ever speak the truth. We reflect God when we speak the truth. It is even more imperative to be honest and truthful with those who are brothers and sisters in Christ. We represent God in the way we speak and even more so when speaking with each other. Putting away falsehood affects the believer to the very core. We speak the truth because something so fundamentally

truthful has overhauled our old lying nature and made us intrinsically truthful. For a Christian to lie, deceive, mislead, or be dishonest is to go deliberately against our new nature.

Ephesians 4:26

²⁶And "don't sin by letting anger gain control over you." Don't let the sun go down while you are still angry

The other fundamental change that takes place in the redeemed is a deep, lasting, inner peace that calms the believer to the very deepest depths of their core. A person who gets angry is not the same as an angry person. An angry person has learned that the best way for them to control their circumstances and those around them is through getting angry. Rather than being flexible and peaceful, like Christ, the angry person is rigid and tense and generally unpleasant to be around. The Bible says that an angry person is not just endangering their own soul, but also the souls of those who associate with them.

²⁴Keep away from angry, short-tempered people, ²⁵or you will learn to be like them and endanger your soul.

Proverbs 22:24-25

Because the Bible says that we shouldn't *let* anger control us, it implies that we have a choice as to whether we allow ourselves to *be* an angry person or not.

⁴Don't sin by letting anger gain control over you. Think about it overnight and remain silent.

Psalm 4:4

Ephesians 4:27

²⁷for anger gives a mighty foothold to the Devil

Paul makes an alarming statement about the consequences of anger. To get angry is lose control of yourself. To lose control of yourself, in this regard, is to become so vulnerable that we fall prey to the wiles of the devil. Anger so aptly reflects all that the devil desires for us to feel. When we are angry, we find it hard to love, hard to be patient, hard to be considerate, and hard to hear what God is saying to us.

While the context is anger, this verse also reveals that the Devil *can* get a foothold in the believer's life. While there is some debate about whether a Christian can be influenced by demonic forces, this verse is plain in revealing that the Christian is susceptible to the Devil himself when they allow themselves to be overcome with anger. The argument that light and darkness can not dwell together (2Cor. 6:14) therefore a Christian with the light of God can not be infiltrated with the darkness of the devil is an argument not really well thought out. Later in this epistle, Paul instructs the readers to live in the light, which implies that Christians *can* live in darkness. Surely, when a Christian lives a lifestyle of anger they are giving the devil a mighty foothold in their life.

Ephesians 4:28

²⁸If you are a thief, stop stealing. Begin using your hands for honest work, and then give generously to others in need.

What a turn around grace can bring to a person's life! When living outside of the Kingdom of God, someone may be a thief. When coming to Christ, this type of person's life changes. The one who used to be a thief, is now using his hands to do honest work. Rather than taking from people, this regenerated person now *gives* to people.

Even if you were not a thief, the injunction that Paul is giving to thieves is profitable advice for everyone. We should all work hard and honestly, and be very generous towards others. For those believers who feel that it's not for Christians to aspire to being wealthy since it is an expression of covetousness or greed, this verse actually encourages Christians to earn enough to support their family honestly, and then to be generous with others. This is a positive licence for Christians to be prosperous and pursue wealth creation so that they can be a blessing to others. A poor Christian who only wants to have enough money to support themselves and their family without ever helping others with their finances, is actually being selfish.

Ephesians 4:29

²⁹Don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them.

Again the believer is implored to guard the way they talk. Believers should not swear by using obscene language. For those of us who speak English, it is inappropriate for the believer to use "four letter words". Every language of the world has inappropriate language. Rather than the Christian

focusing on what *not* to say, the apostle shows us that we should focus on saying *good and helpful* things that will be uplifting, encouraging, and pleasant. Foul and abusive speech usually originates out of an angry heart. By eliminating anger, the believer is set free from speaking abusively toward others.

This verse also reinforces how important our words are. The type of words that we employ not only tell others what type of person we are, but they actually shape the type of person we become. Speaking helpful, uplifting and encouraging words to others actually shapes us into a helpful, uplifting, and encouraging person.

Ephesians 4:30

³⁰And do not bring sorrow to God's Holy Spirit by the way you live. Remember, he is the one who has identified you as his own, guaranteeing that you will be saved on the day of redemption.

Living in the Spirit is not automatic for the believer. It is a choice and the apostle commands us to make that choice. When we were saved, we were chosen to represent the Holy Spirit to the world. We became His trophy of grace. We are put on display to the world by the Holy Spirit. We should therefore make the right choice to live as truly representing Him. We do this because He has identified us as His, and by His infilling, He has guaranteed our salvation on the day of redemption.

Ephesians 4:31

³¹Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of malicious behavior.

Paul now sums up all that he has just stated. These headline statements can be summarised as right attitude (no bitterness), right spirit (no anger or rage), right speech (no harsh words or slander), and right behaviour (no malicious conduct).

Ephesians 4:32

³²Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.

In true New Testament style, the injunction to change our lives is not totally founded on the negative aspects of what we should *not* do, but is replaced by what we *should* do. Our attitude should be kindness. Our spirit should be tenderhearted and forgiving. We live this way and treat others this way because this is how God is, and this is the way He treats us.

EPHESIANS

Chapter 5

(ii) Living in the light of God (Ephesians 5:1-14)

(a) Follow the example of the Light (Ephesians 5:1-2)

Ephesians 5:1

¹Follow God's example in everything you do, because you are his dear children.

Pinciples are easier to apply than rules. Here Paul gives us a wonderful principle for Christian conduct: *live as God would*. We should do this because we are His children. If my young children behave poorly in public, it reflects on me as a father, and on us as a family. When believers behave badly it reflects poorly on our heavenly Father.

Ephesians 5:2

²Live a life filled with love for others, following the example of Christ, who loved you and gave himself as a sacrifice to take away your sins. And God was pleased, because that sacrifice was like sweet perfume to him.

Being a member of God's family carries grand privileges, which the apostle has already discussed in the earlier chapters of Ephesians. In the latter part of this epistle Paul now discusses the obligations and responsibilities of being a member of God's people. As with the preceding verse, he states principles for godly living and how these principles are based on our relationship with God.

The first principle for Christian living is love for others. Regarding the other person as worthy of our respect and our attention is how we show love for others. Overlooking offences and wrongs done to us by others is love in action. Sometimes we hear completely irreligious people talk about doing the "Christian" thing. The "Christian" thing is: loving others. To behave like a Christian is to love others unconditionally. All too often Christians are known for their militant intolerance toward abortionists, divorcees, drug addicts, and other Christians with differing doctrinal positions. This is wrong. Christian love is tolerant, forgiving, graceful, and meek. Intolerantly militant are two words that should never be used together to describe the Christian.

The basis for Christian love is the love that Christ has for us. The death of Christ on the cross was the highest expression of love that the universe has ever hosted and experienced. Paul uses strong language here to motivate the believer toward godly living. Christ was our *sacrifice*. He was a

sweet smelling perfume, or aroma, to God by what He did on the Cross. This draws on the Old Testament language of the sacrificial and ceremonial system where animals were offered to atone for sin and incense was burnt as a fragrant offering to be mingled with the aroma of the burnt offerings. The resultant aroma of roasting meat and incense pervaded the ancient Tabernacle of Moses and became associated with the presence of God (which manifested in the Tabernacle of Moses). It was symbolic (or rather a “type”) of how our worship mingles with the presence of God. Thus, the greatest act of worship ever expressed was Christ surrendering His life on the Cross as our atonement for our sins.

**(b) The consequences of not living in the light
(Ephesians 5:3-6)**

Ephesians 5:3

³Let there be no sexual immorality, impurity, or greed among you. Such sins have no place among God's people.

While the first two verses of this chapter give principles for Christian living, Paul now states plainly how Christians should conduct themselves. While he is plain in his directions, the underlying principle behind these statements is to live the light of God. Sexual immorality (adultery, promiscuity, fornication) can be summed up as all forms of sexual activity outside of the boundaries of marriage. God is not against sex- He invented it. But a sexual relationship is the expression of physical intimacy and love between two people that demands the highest form of commitment:

marriage. The original word for sexual immorality is *porneia*, from where we get the word *pornography*.



Archaeologists unearthed this plaque to Diana (Artemis) in the city of Ephesus. Diana, or Artemis, was the object of sexual adoration and worshipers of Diana practiced a variety of lewd acts of fornication. Paul urged the Ephesian believers not to be caught up in such immorality as was prevalent in Ephesus.

Impurity, or uncleanness, is usually always associated with sexual things in the New Testament. Where someone is caught up in a lifestyle of sexual promiscuity to the point that they are in spiritual bondage, the New Testament often describes them having *an unclean* spirit. Impurity not only encompasses sexual things though, it has to do with what is at the core of our beings. Are our motives pure, clean and honourable? Jesus said that we are not defiled (made unclean) by what we eat but by what we allow into our hearts (Matthew 15:11, 18).

Greed is coveting what is not rightfully ours while being unthankful and discontent with what we already have. Christians should not be greedy. We should be the most thankful and content people in the universe. Yet so many Christians in the modern era are lured into a lifestyle of greed by the world's well-oiled marketing machinery to live a lifestyle of always wanting more and never being satisfied with what they already have. The temptation to incur debt in order to have more is often fuelled by greed. With so much skewed

teaching about prosperity which attempts to justify the Western lifestyle of materialistic covetousness, this verse is a timely reminder that greed is a sin on the same scale as sexual immorality!

Paul employs a sub-principle to support why Christians should not have anything to do with sexual sin and greed: *they have no place among God's people*. God's people must stand out from the world by living differently. This is even more reason why God's people must not behave this way with each other.

Ephesians 5:4

⁴Obscene stories, foolish talk, and coarse jokes—these are not for you. Instead, let there be thankfulness to God.

The list of specific instances of wrong conduct continues. Again it illustrates the power of the tongue. The way we talk can identify us as either a child of God, or a child of darkness. Christians don't entertain dirty jokes, or lewd stories. Instead we use our words to be thankful, not disgusting.

Ephesians 5:5

⁵You can be sure that no immoral, impure, or greedy person will inherit the Kingdom of Christ and of God. For a greedy person is really an idolater who worships the things of this world.

Paul sums up the last few verses with the warning that anyone who practices such things will not inherit the

Kingdom of Christ and God. Those who are corrupt in what they do (the immoral), corrupt in what they say (the impure), or corrupt in what they already have and want (the greedy) will not hold onto their salvation. Paul reveals to the believer that we shouldn't be fooled by greed since it is actually idolatry, and readers of Scripture would be aware that idolatry disqualifies someone from having a relationship with God.

Ephesians 5:6

‘Don't be fooled by those who try to excuse these sins, for the terrible anger of God comes upon all those who disobey him.

The fact that one Christian has a huge influence upon another Christian can not be underestimated. Although we are saved by grace, God's grace is not a licence to sin. Every believer needs to understand what we are saved from, and why we actually need God's grace. God's grace is free but it is not cheap. Our sin has offended God greatly. We should not think that because He sent His Son to die on the cross for our sins that sin was easy to remedy for God. It came at a great cost to God. For those who despise God's grace by willingly sinning there awaits the anger of God, since they are saying by virtue that they don't care what it cost God to save them. Christians should especially understand the gravity and seriousness of sin, and appreciate that every sin has a consequence.

(c) Though once full of darkness, believers are now full of light (Ephesians 5:7-9)

Ephesians 5:7

⁷Don't participate in the things these people do.

Christians must stand out like lights in the darkness. No one should be surprised to learn that someone they associate with is a Christian. The Christian's conduct alone will contrast so greatly with the lifestyle of those in the world, that it will be obvious to everyone. While we are in the world, we are not of the world. We associate with the world, but we don't do the things that the world does. We don't have to participate in those aspects of our respective cultures that are what the Bible calls *darkness*. In many cultures of the world, drinking alcohol is a cultural trait, but the Bible says not to get drunk (which is actually assured if you don't drink at all).

Ephesians 5:8

⁸For though your hearts were once full of darkness, now you are full of light from the Lord, and your behavior should show it!

The metaphors of light and darkness illustrate the difference that Christ makes to a life. It also removes all doubt about the spiritual condition of those outside of Christ; no matter how righteous they appear. Sometimes we can be lulled into thinking that someone who seems to be well behaved would make a good Christian. Perhaps we think that this kind of "nice" would find the transition to Christianity

easy since they are almost living as a Christian now. But often the opposite is actually the case because they tend to rely upon their own righteousness and fail to see their sin for what it really is: *a deeply offensive act of rebellion against a holy and righteous Creator who loves us deeply*. Every Christian must realise that they have been saved out of darkness and brought into light. This realisation should give every Christian a deep detestation for the very thing that caused our Lord to suffer and die on the cross: *our sin*. Therefore we should no longer live a lifestyle of sin. Our new behaviour is not the product of self-effort, but the fruit a deep inner change that has taken place as result of something happening in the very core of our being.

Ephesians 5:9

⁹For this light within you produces only what is good and right and true.

As we walk in fellowship with Christ and allow His light within us to shine out of us by the way we live, it will most naturally cause us to do what is good, right and true. No one can claim that they are angry, spiteful, or bitter and truly reflecting the light and life of Christ. No one can live immorally and claim that they are doing Christ a service by doing so.

(d) The light of Christ within a believer exposes darkness (Ephesians 5:10-14)

Ephesians 5:10

¹⁰Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord.

This is one of the shortest verses in the epistle to the Ephesians, but it is not a “little” verse. It is perhaps one of the most profound principles contained in the whole epistle. I once spent several months preaching on just this one verse of Scripture. It contains within it a call to discover what the precise purposes of God are for our lives, since the general ways to please God have been clearly articulated in this epistle alone, let alone the whole of Scripture.

Our destiny is discovered, found out, and learned. For each of us there awaits a path that God has called us each to walk down. My path is different to your path. For me to find out what pleases the Lord involves me discovering my destiny, not inventing it. I believe that God resources us to fulfil our destinies by giving us spiritual, motivational, and ministry gifts to do so. I believe that a person can live their life at the lowest common denominator if they fail to stretch themselves beyond the comfortable and live out their destiny.

For me, my destiny involves producing resources to help others to reach their destinies. God has gifted me with an ability to preach, teach, and lead through writing, coaching and doing presentations. At the moment I have a small team of people working with me to produce teaching videos and multi-media resources to reach beyond the boundaries of our own locality to a global audience that is continually growing.

In the past few weeks we have had invitations and requests for resources not just from around Australia, but Africa, India and USA. We have set up an internet ministry (<http://www.andrewcorbett.com>, www.legana.org, and www.findingtruthmatters.org) that has thousands of free Bible studies, articles and media files (audio and video) that help people to understand God's Word and develop a Christian worldview. We have several books ranging from theological, practical ministry, Church History, to Motivational Living that being prepared for publication all designed to help others to discover and fulfil their destinies.

We should all try to find out what pleases the Lord.

Ephesians 5:11

¹¹Take no part in the worthless deeds of evil and darkness; instead, rebuke and expose them.

Christians shouldn't be weak and join in with those who practice evil by succumbing to the peer or group pressure. Not only shouldn't Christians join in with those who practice evil and live in darkness, they should expose them. This isn't to suggest that Christians should act like some undercover moral-police, where they actively seek out those practicing vileness and then publicly condemn them. Rather, when the believer is carrying about their normal activities and an unsaved person attempts to entice them into evil, the believer can firmly reject their enticement and state the reasons why they will not participate, which will thus expose their dark deeds.

Ephesians 5:12

¹²It is shameful even to talk about the things that ungodly people do in secret.

This verse helps to justify the commentary on the previous verse. While some Christians have established themselves as moral-police by exposing the shortcomings of other Christians, such as the ridiculous state of affairs between American Televangelists during the 1980s. During this era it was common for Television evangelists to dedicate their entire TV programs to “expose” the sins of other (“rival”) Television evangelists. But this verse makes it clear that it is talking about the *ungodly* not fellow believers.

Believers need a healthy understanding of what sin is: the most offensive acts possible to be committed against God. Paul says that Christians shouldn't even talk about the things done by the ungodly that profoundly grieve our heavenly Father. The ungodly do things that are so disgusting that they try to do them in secret. This suggests that even they realize how vile they are. Therefore, if the ungodly even acknowledge what they are doing is wrong, Christians most certainly shouldn't joke or dispassionately discuss such vile deeds.

Ephesians 5:13

¹³But when the light shines on them, it becomes clear how evil these things are.

In this context, the light referred to is the witness of the believer exposing the darkness of the ungodly. Jesus has told

us to “*let your light shine before people...*” (Matthew 5:16). The constant, consistent, life of the believer is often enough for the ungodly to sense the piercing light of the Holy Spirit bringing conviction. This can happen even without the believer saying a word to the ungodly. I recently received a letter from a non-Christian who is a member of the same sporting club as me where I have played for the past four years. The letter, filled with questions about God, opens-

“Firstly let me say that I am impressed with your obvious dedication to God...The best expression of God's love is the way in which we live our lives and the way in which we relate to other people, because the old truism that “actions speak louder than words” remains dynamic. Your life is an expression of your relationship with God and must have an impact on other people with whom you relate...”

Sport brings out the best and worst in people. I was rapt to receive such a positive form of feedback from a non-Christian who had had the opportunity to observe my life over four years of sometimes heated competitive battles with people in the sporting arena. In that time I had never “preached” at anyone, or even forcibly tried to convey my views on others at the club. All I had done was let my shine in a way that everyone could see.

Ephesians 5:14

*¹⁴And where your light shines, it will expose their evil deeds.
This is why it is said,
“Awake, O sleeper,
rise up from the dead,
and Christ will give you light.”*

This is why “*it is said*”? The NLT formats this verse as if it were citing an Old Testament Scripture. But occasionally Paul seems to distinguish citations by saying “as the Scriptures say” (for example, Ephesians 5:31) to make it clear that he is referring to the Old Testament. In this instance we have two plausible possibilities. Either Paul is summing up several Old Testament passages that command its readers to “awake” or “rise up” (Isa. 26:19; 51:17; 52:1; 60:1) and paraphrasing them into a New Testament application; or, he is citing a well known First Century Christian saying, that may have been used as a motivational statement to reach the unsaved. We have other examples of this, for example 1Timothy 1:15-

¹⁵This is a true saying, and everyone should believe it: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—and I was the worst of them all.

We note from this verse that the unsaved are metaphorically described as asleep, dead, and without light. When the believer lives boldly for Christ their lives send a loud wake up call to those who are asleep. Winkie Pratney tells how God started to challenge him as a teenager in New Zealand to a more committed walk with Him. He reasoned that he could continue walking in mediocrity since no one else his own age was “on fire” for God. Then one Sunday night a youth group from another church visited the church where Winkie attended and caused him to “wake up”. These young people were the same age as Winkie, yet they were totally sold out to the Lord and on fire for Him. This caused a revolution in the life of young Winkie who felt so awake after he committed his life fully to the Lord that he requested from his Principal whether he could repeat his final year of High

School, even though he had just completed it with marks high enough to enter University to study Nuclear Science. The bewildered Principal agreed, and the following year Winkie Pratney led 10% of the large school population personally to the Lord! Its one thing for the unsaved to be asleep, but it's a terrible matter for the church to be asleep!

(iii) Living in the Spirit (Ephesians 5:15-20)

(a) Live wisely (Ephesians 5:15-17)

Ephesians 5:15

¹⁵So be careful how you live, not as fools but as those who are wise.

Wisdom is the lifelong pursuit of the godly believer. The Old Testament Book of Proverbs implores us to seek wisdom. The believer has access to an inexhaustible supply of wisdom in Christ.

²⁴But to those called by God to salvation, both Jews and Gentiles, Christ is the mighty power of God and the wonderful wisdom of God.

1Corinthians 1:24

³⁰God alone made it possible for you to be in Christ Jesus. For our benefit God made Christ to be wisdom itself. He is the one who made us acceptable to God. He made us pure and holy, and he gave himself to purchase our freedom.

1Corinthians 1:30

It is possible for the believer to waste their life and thus live like a fool. We are not called to exist, but to live. We are not called to live selfishly, thus foolishly, but wisely affecting

as many as we are called to for the sake of Christ and His Kingdom.

Ephesians 5:16

¹⁶Make the most of every opportunity for doing good in these evil days.

The believer lives with a constant awareness of the value of time. While we have an abundance of everything else, we do not have an abundance of time. We can even waste our time doing a lot of things that appear to be godly and religious, but yield very little. Some may argue that this is too pragmatic, and that Christianity is more about sowing into eternity than reaping in the here-and-now. There is an aspect of truth in this of course, but when it comes to the eternal destinies of those who are currently lost, I personally don't want to spend my time doing things that don't work!

In the last year or so I have personally come into very fruitful time of impacting unsaved with the Gospel of Christ. This has had an affect on our church as well, with more people coming to Christ in the past twelve or so months than the previous five years put together. What changed? For years I spent my time in prayer meetings pleading with the Lord for the lost to be saved, yet experiencing very little fruit. Then, just over a year or so ago I stopped going to my own prayer meeting! I used the time instead to meet and spend time with unchurched people down at the local sporting club. A few weeks ago from the date of writing this, around twenty of them came to an event put on by our church! I feel that I am now redeeming the time, or making the most of every

opportunity to promote Christ and His cause, and seeing a modest level of fruit to confirm this feeling.

The injunction here is not for the believer to be more religious with their time, but to make the most of it. Paul doesn't have to say don't waste your time being distracted by the world away from your daily devotional time in His Word and prayer, since it is assumed that that is what Christians most naturally do anyway. The injunction here is to be seen to be doing good in the midst of evil. Feeding, clothing, and caring for the poor gives the believer the credibility to share the message that goes with that display of practical love.

Ephesians 5:17

¹⁷Don't act thoughtlessly, but try to understand what the Lord wants you to do.

Give thought to what you do. "Lord what do you want me to do?" was the prayer of Saul of Tarsus when knocked off his horse while on the road to Damascus.

So he, trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" Then the Lord said to him, "Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

Acts 9:6 (NKJV)

This is a good, but a too little used, prayer. It is the beginning of the process that helps us to understand what the Lord wants us to do. We can be sure that God wants us to do *something*. Sometimes we can know what God wants us to do but fail to get the timing right. We should pray for understanding as to when God wants us to act. Moses knew that God had called him to be the deliverer of Israel but he

acted way too soon and skewed the plan with his presumption.

²⁵*Moses assumed his brothers would realize that God had sent him to rescue them, but they didn't.*

Acts 7:25

A few verses after this statement of presumption comes the chilling words: *forty years later...*It took another forty years of oppression, murder and brutality to bring the plan back online. Moses had acted thoughtlessly by murdering an Egyptian oppressor. I remember when I first came to Tasmania in 1995 I murdered a lot of my own “*Egyptian oppressors*” assuming that the locals would understand that God had sent me to deliver them from the bondages of apathy, smallness, introspection, poverty and doubt. Moses only murdered one Egyptian, I murdered many! It has taken God several years of leading me through the “backside of the wilderness” to teach me that such arrogance rarely if ever serves His purposes or represents His cause appropriately. I now have a greater understanding of what God wants me to do, and far less “Egyptians” are now dying as a result!

(b) Don't become drunk (Ephesians 5:18)

Ephesians 5:18

¹⁸*Don't be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead, let the Holy Spirit fill and control you.*

It's an interesting comparison between drinking alcohol and being filled with the Holy Spirit. For a fuller elaboration of this verse see my article *What The Bible Has To Say About Alcohol* (available online). Christians need to understand the

seriousness of drunkenness. It robs a person of dignity, self control, and their health. The context of the comparison between drunkenness and being filled with the Holy Spirit is an issue of control. Drunkenness makes a person vulnerable to sin and evil manipulation. In the Old Testament we see the consequences of drunkenness in the lives of Noah (Gen. 9:21), Lot (Gen. 19:32), and, Nadab and Abihu (Lev.10:9). The Bible paints a bleak picture of what can happen when someone gets drunk. Proverbs 23 talks about the woes of even drinking alcohol let alone the shame of drunkenness.

**(c) Be filled with the Holy Spirit
(Ephesians 5:18-19)**

The believer needs to be *continually* filled with the Holy Spirit. The Greek word for “filled” is *plhrou/sqe* (*pleeroosthe*) is a present continuous verb. It means *be filled and keep being filled*. The comparison to getting drunk is a graphic one. Just as a drunk keeps drinking until he is inebriated we are to seek the filling of the Holy Spirit until we are completely filled and controlled by the Holy Spirit. The fullness of the Holy Spirit involves a well lubricated operation of spiritual gifts. Paul speaks in 1Corinthians 14 of the spiritual gifts, and in particular the personal value of praying in tongues (Gr. *glossolalia* “unlearned languages”), which builds up the believer spiritually.

⁴A person who speaks in tongues is strengthened personally in the Lord, but one who speaks a word of prophecy strengthens the entire church.

1Corinthians 14:4

In Acts 2:4 this, praying in tongues, was one sure sign that the believers were filled with the Spirit, and many testify (including the writer) that this is a means for being *continually* filled with the Holy Spirit.

Ephesians 5:19

¹⁹Then you will sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, making music to the Lord in your hearts.

“Then”, the result of being filled with the Holy Spirit is singing hymns and spiritual songs, and making melody to the Lord in hearts. In this sense the Holy Spirit *puts a song in our hearts*. One of the clearest fruits of being filled with the Holy Spirit is a heart to worship.

(d) Be thankful (Ephesians 5:20)

Ephesians 5:20

²⁰And you will always give thanks for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

A further fruit of being filled with the Holy Spirit is *thankfulness*. The believer is made aware of how God is the Provider of everything. We take nothing for granted. We are thankful to God for the very air we breathe. Believers have made it a universal habit to take time out before every meal and give thanks.

**(iv) The influence of Christ in the home
(Ephesians 5:21-6:4)**

**(a) W i v e s s u b m i t t i n g t o t h e i r h u s b a n d s
(Ephesians 5:21-24)**

Ephesians 5:21

²¹And further, you will submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Spirit filled Christians are not spiritually competitive. Believers submit to each other in loving and supportive way. Rather than trying to get ahead of other believers, believers willingly submit to each other and do their best to spur each other on. Rather than a competitive spirit, believers live out a servant-spirit. We do this because Christ both lived this way and taught that we should live this way too.

²⁶But among you, those who are the greatest should take the lowest rank, and the leader should be like a servant.

²⁷Normally the master sits at the table and is served by his servants. But not here! For I am your servant.

Luke 22:26-27

Ephesians 5:22

²²You wives will submit to your husbands as you do to the Lord.

While some teachers have tried to make this verse say something other than what it plainly says, it actually is an instruction to wives to submit to their husbands. Some have taught that “submit” means to *cooperate* with. Other have taught that wives should only submit to their husbands if their husbands are following the Lord. But the plain

statement of this verse is for wives to obey, in a submissive way, their husbands.

If ever there was a Scripture, which reinforced the need for premarital preparation, this has got to be it. If we take this verse as meaning what it says, then women need to be extremely careful who they marry. Therefore a reasonable question for a woman to consider prior to marriage is: *can I submit to this man?* This verse is not Paul espousing some misogynist bias that he is accused of having. He gives a profound reason for wives to submit to their husbands. The inclusion of “*as you do to the Lord*”, affirms that the family unit is a reflection of divine order.

Ephesians 5:23

²³*For a husband is the head of his wife as Christ is the head of his body, the church; he gave his life to be her Savior.*

Just as there is order within the Trinity, it is God's design for there to be order within the family. Order should not be confused with superiority or rank. The family is ordered with the father (the husband) as head of the house. But being head of the family is like Christ is Head of the Church: *it is a servant role*. It is a role that carries tremendous responsibility. Therefore, just as every woman considering marriage should question her ability to be able to submit to her future possible husband, so must every man question whether he can accept the responsibility of being the head of his potential family. Just as Christ provides for, protects, prays, and parents His church, so must the man fulfil this headship role. This role

could be summarised as *giving your life to your wife and family*, just as it says of Christ that He gives His life to the Church.

Ephesians 5:24

²⁴*As the church submits to Christ, so you wives must submit to your husbands in everything.*

This verse should give wives a tremendous sense of release and freedom. The onus of responsibility in this verse is on the husband, not the wife. Submission is passive. The one being submitted to is the one who bears responsibility. Just as Christ is responsible for the Church, so husbands are responsible for their wives. Wives are to submit to their husbands just as the Church submits to the Lord Jesus.

(b) Husbands, love your wives (Ephesians 5:25-30)

Ephesians 5:25

²⁵*And you husbands must love your wives with the same love Christ showed the church. He gave up his life for her*

Again the onus of responsibility is in the husband. How much does Christ love the Church? To the same measure, husbands must love their wives. The Old Testament book, *The Song of Songs (Solomon)*, is considered by many to be typological of the love relationship between Christ and the Church. Consider the words of the Lover to his bride in Song of Songs 4:7 -

⁷*You are so beautiful, my beloved, so perfect in every part.*
Song of Songs 4:7

This verse is a beautiful yet tame description of how Christ feels about His Church. Consider some of the other passages in Song of Songs which anthropomorphically convey the passion that Christ has for the Church:

⁷You are tall and slim like a palm tree, and your breasts are like its clusters of dates. ⁸I said, 'I will climb up into the palm tree and take hold of its branches.' Now may your breasts be like grape clusters, and the scent of your breath like apples. ⁹May your kisses be as exciting as the best wine, smooth and sweet, flowing gently over lips and teeth."

Song of Songs 7:7-9

These passages give husbands a clue in to how passionate they are expected to be for their wives. The love of husband for his wife is articulated often in Song of Songs, this is a good example to husbands today to tell their wives often that they love them. The love that Christ has for His Church is backed up by His actions. Husbands need to walk the talk when it comes to their love for their wives. Christ honours the Church as it worships Him. Not to make too fine a point about it, but worship in the Greek language (*proskuneo*) means to move toward and kiss and has almost sexual overtones to it. That is, when the Church worships God, we are spiritually making love. Sexual love is a critical expression of love that a husband has for his wife and vice versa, and should be treated as a precious, deeply intimate, manifestation of that love. It should not be cheapened, denied, or abused.

Ephesians 5:26

²⁶to make her holy and clean, washed by baptism and God's word.

The New Living Translation renders this verse quite controversially. Most other English translations render this passage as the Church being washed by the Word of God. The NLT renders it as being washed by baptism *and* God's Word. Does baptism wash the Church thereby making it clean? If it doesn't, why is it such an important New Testament rite included in the Great Commission as fundamental to discipleship?

I regard water baptism as *sacramental*. A sacrament is a rite that touches all three time zones and makes visible an "invisible" truth. It is rooted in the past by drawing upon its origin. It has present relevance in both its act and its spiritual impact. And it has future implications as a foreshadow (Col. 2:17). Marriage is a sacrament. It looks back to the Garden of Eden when God instituted marriage. It has a present relevance in the covenant ceremony, and spiritually bringing two people together to become one flesh. It is a shadow of the future uniting of Christ and the Church. (Holy Communion is also a sacrament.)

Water baptism as a sacrament is rooted in the past through following the example of Christ and identifying with His death, burial and resurrection (Rom. 6:2-5). It is a present reality in that it publicly seals our covenant with Christ (Col. 2:11-12, in the same way that circumcision sealed the Older Covenant), and it spiritually affects us as well. It's future implication is in the hope of the resurrection since it foreshadows our own resurrection to complete newness.

But does the New Testament consistently identify water baptism as cleansing or washing the Church? No. The rendering by the NLT translators here is hermeneutical

licence. Theologically there is dubious case to be made for water baptism *cleansing* the believer (refer to Acts 22:16). All New Testament references to being washed, cleansed, or purified have more to do with the Holy Spirit's outworking of the blood of Christ in the life of the believer. In the Old Testament it was the blood of the animal sacrifices that "cleansed" Israel (Lev. 16:19). The New Testament is consistent however that it is the blood of Christ that cleanses us from sin (Rom. 5:9; Heb. 9:13-14; 10:29).

Under the Older Covenant animals were sacrifices repeated to atone for Israel's sins. But the priests were also required to look into the Bronze Washbasin (other translations include: Sea, large basin, bowl, laver) and wash themselves clean from dirt and dust.

¹⁸Make a large bronze washbasin with a bronze pedestal. Put it between the Tabernacle and the altar, and fill it with water. ¹⁹Aaron and his sons will wash their hands and feet there ²⁰before they go into the Tabernacle to appear before the LORD and before they approach the altar to burn offerings to the LORD. They must always wash before ministering in these ways, or they will die.

Exodus 30:18-20

It is generally agreed that the washbasin, made of bronze mirrors, was typological of the Word of God and both its mirror and washing qualities (James 1:23). Whether or not the NLT is simply trying to be consistent in its hermeneutics or not I don't know, but curiously they render John 15:3 where Christ says that His word cleanses His followers, as being Christ's words pruning His vine-like people.

You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.

(John 15:3 NIV)

³*You have already been pruned for greater fruitfulness by the message I have given you.*

NLT

Just as the priest was required to daily wash from the washbasin to be cleansed from the grime of the day, the believer is required to regularly check into the washbasin of the Word of God and “wash” themselves with the words of God. As the Church lives out the Word of God it is being washed and separated from the grime of the world.

Ephesians 5:27

²⁷*He did this to present her to himself as a glorious church without a spot or wrinkle or any other blemish. Instead, she will be holy and without fault.*

Some see this verse as only referring to the glorified (heavenly) state of the Church. But the context of the previous verse shows that the means of cleansing, glorifying, de-spotting, de-wrinkling and de-blemishing to make the Church holy and without fault, is the washing of water by the Word of God. The problem for those who regard this verse as only applying to the Heavenly Church is that the Church in Heaven isn't really going to need to be cleansed by the Word of God. As unlikely as it sounds, this verse forecasts a last days Church that is thoroughly immersed and applying the Word of God that it is without wrinkle or blemish. As a student of Church history I can see the Word of God maturing the Church throughout the ages. We now take for granted the deity of Christ; the nature of the Godhead; salvation by faith in Christ; the priesthood of all believers; and the recognition of the various ministry gifts that Christ has given to the

Church. But all of these doctrinal positions came about at distinct points in Church History. If Christ can be seen to direct the affairs of His Church throughout history, He can most definitely do it in the present and future.

Christ is going to present to Himself a holy and faultless Church. If being washed by the Word looks like a Church living and applying the Word of God corporately, we can expect a holy and faultless Church to look like a Church that is pure in doctrine, united in spirit, each individual part doing its part, and engaging the powers of darkness by spreading the Gospel to every nation, tribe and tongue. Jesus Himself alluded to this when He said-

¹⁴And the Good News about the Kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, so that all nations will hear it; and then, finally, the end will come.

Matthew 24:14

While some Christians have previously looked to the happenings in the nation of Israel as the indicator of what God is doing according to His prophetic fulfilment agenda, the New Testament clearly points the Christian toward seeing what God is doing in the Church. Historically the Church has grappled with holiness and aloofness from the world. For the Church to be genuinely holy it must be *in the world* and therefore relevant, but not *of the world* and therefore corrupted. The last Church will be a relevant, respected but righteous Church.

Ephesians 5:28

²⁸In the same way, husbands ought to love their wives as they love their own bodies. For a man is actually loving himself when he loves his wife.

Paul beautifully draws very down-to-earth applications out of some of the most profound theology in the New Testament. While *Ephesians* predominantly lays the fullest New Testament revelation of the Church, Paul is quick to show the reader how this theology applies to their home life. Because marriage is a *type* of the union between Christ and the Church, Paul draws lessons from our relationship with Christ and applies these lessons to marriage in general. Husbands ought to love their wives because Christ loves the Church. Husbands ought to love their wives because when they do, they are actually loving themselves since they are one.

Ephesians 5:29-30

²⁹No one hates his own body but lovingly cares for it, just as Christ cares for his body, which is the church. ³⁰And we are his body.

This is how husbands are to love their wives. Early in my own marriage, the first twelve years of it, I was quite impatient and intolerant of my wife. While some things come easily and quickly to me, like computers, reading, studying and playing competitive sport, they don't particularly come so quickly or easily to my wife. I spent time showing my wife how to do these things better, but she couldn't get it. I couldn't understand this. Then it dawned on me that I was being a

pain to her. Rather than looking at it from the typical male point of view (logically) I needed to be more considerate of how my wife *felt*. When I started to do this I became far more patient and understanding of my wife. It then further dawned on me that this is actually how Christ must treat me: *with patience and tolerance*. Therefore, this verse reinforces that husbands should love their wives more than they ordinarily think they have to, because this is how Christ treats His bride: the Church.

(c) The Church is like marriage (Ephesians 5:31-33)

Ephesians 5:31

³¹As the Scriptures say, "A man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one."

Unity is a consistent theme throughout Ephesians. Again Paul draws on the theology that he has established earlier in this epistle. He has already established that Jews and Gentiles are *united* into the one Church. He then established that the Church was united with Christ. Just as the Church is in a marriage-like relationship with Christ, those same principles of marriage can be applied to our marriages.

The typology of a man leaving his father and mother is the same as a person leaving behind the way they used to live before coming to Christ. Being united to his wife is typological of a believer being united to Christ.

We should also understand the anti-type of what is being said here. This is a key New Testament passage about

marriages and families. It is therefore worth understanding what the New Testament teaches about these filial relationships. Firstly, having established that love is the bond between a husband and wife, there also needs to be unity and intimacy that excludes all others. Primarily, a man must leave his parents when he marries. Parents also need to understand that they need to let go of their children when their children marry. My mother in-law said to my bride-to-be that she could never come back to her with marriage problems since all problems would now have to be sorted out with her new husband. This takes emotional and character strength on the part of both newlyweds and parents in-law.

Two becoming one involves a man and woman coming together emotionally, sexually, and spiritually. Too many people are too ignorant about the relationship between sex and spirit. When a man and a woman unite together sexually they are merging their spirits and bodies.

¹⁶And don't you know that if a man joins himself to a prostitute, he becomes one body with her? For the Scriptures say, "The two are united into one." ¹⁷But the person who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him.

First Corinthians 6:16-17

Some people refer to this as a "soul tie". There is a reference here to Genesis 2:24. Becoming one body (older translations use the word "*flesh*") means more than just the physical sense. The original idea behind the Hebrew word (*basar*) in Genesis 2:24 is *person*. The passage in First Corinthians 6 shows the kind of unity between a man and a woman that the New Testament is talking about. Joining together sexually with a person means a physical oneness and verse 17 also shows that such unity involves people's spirits.

This is one reason why the sexual relationship between a husband and a wife is so critically important. It is an aspect of their unity. But because it is the culmination of emotional closeness, it is imperative that men and women guard their emotions with people outside of their marriage covenant (note Prov. 4:23).

Husbands and wives should guard their unity together through keeping their levels of intimacy deep. For help on how to do this, it is worth ordering my video teaching series: *Inoculating Against Relationship Germs*. The first step to intimacy is communicating openly and honestly. Without communication, where a couple can share intimately and truly seek to understand the other person before they seek to be understood, there is no real intimacy, and therefore diminished unity.

This also reveals to us the kind of unity that God wants us to have with Him. He wants us to be intimate with Him. Sexual activity is a *type* of the kind deep worship relationship that God longs for us to have. Intimate communication between a husband and wife is also a *type* of the kind of prayer life that God yearns for us to have.



Paul wrote to the Ephesians while in chains in a prison cell (3:1; 4:1; 6:20)

Ephesians 5:32

³²*This is a great mystery, but it is an illustration of the way Christ and the church are one.*

This is a great mystery. In other words, Paul is saying that although he has just attempted to explain this, he doesn't fully understand it. That's comforting, because neither do I. I don't understand how the kind of unity that the New Testament has just spoken about between Christ and the Church and a man and his wife, works. Our faith in Christ is not based entirely upon our understanding. There are some things we accept by faith despite our lack of understanding. In fact that is the very nature of faith.

Mystery is a beautiful word. The Book of Ephesians acknowledges mystery more than any other Book of the Bible. Mystery. It ably describes how two apparent opposites can be mutually and simultaneously possible. For example, the Bible says that Christ is a mystery since He was mutually God and man, simultaneously (1Tim. 3:16).

Just because I don't understand some things, doesn't mean that I can't accept them. Like the old farmer who overheard a brash young man say to someone that because he couldn't understand how there could be a God he couldn't believe there was one. The farmer said to the young man, "See those sheep over there eating grass?" "Yes" replied the young man. "They turn that grass into wool. Do you see those cows over there eating grass?" "Yes" replied the young man. "They turn that grass into milk. Do you see those goats over there?" asked the old farmer. "Yes" replied the young man. "They turn that grass into fur. Do you understand how each of those

animals turns grass into wool, milk or fur?" "No" replied the young man. "Then there are some things you accept without understanding it first then!" The young man got the point.

Ephesians 5:33

³³So again I say, each man must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

What a simple yet profound way to sum up all that Paul has just said about the relationship between a husband and wife. In this simple little verse the Holy Spirit has used Paul to reveal to us what it is that men and women really want. Women want loving attention, especially from their husbands. Men want admiration and respect, especially from their wives. In a major research survey conducted by psychologist, Dr. Gary Smalley (*The Secrets To Lasting Love*), it was found that what most men really want from their wives is their appreciation and respect for the everyday, mundane, little things that they do the wives, families and homes. This research supports what Paul the apostle said almost 2000 years ago.

If husbands gave their wives more loving attention by listening to, and talking more with, their wives, families would be immensely stronger, since research now shows that children who are brought up by both their father and mother are more secure and stable than children raised by just one divorced or separated parent. Paul's comments on the family continue into the next chapter.

EPHESIANS

Chapter 6

(d) Christ's effect upon parents and their children (Ephesians 6:1-4)

Ephesians 6:1

¹Children, obey your parents because you belong to the Lord, for this is the right thing to do.

The nuclear family is a type of the relationship between God and His people. He is our Father and we are His children. Because we obey God our Father, it is right for children to obey their parents, who are their “temporary” parents. Children and parents need to realise that ultimately God is our Father and earthly parents only have their children “on loan”. Parents should not undervalue the need for their children to obey them. Children will always push to the outer limits of how far they can go in obeying their parents. Many parents who have reared compliant children have found that it is best to deal with rebellion and disobedience as swiftly

and decisively as possible, at the earliest appropriate age of the child.

Ephesians 6:2

²"Honor your father and mother." This is the first of the Ten Commandments that ends with a promise.

One of the first reasons that children should understand about why they need to obey their parents is that it is the right thing to do (verse 1), and that the Scripture requires it. This does two things for a child. Firstly, it reinforces the authority of the parents (which is a type of the authority that people have with God the Father), and secondly it reinforces the authority of Scripture.

Ephesians 6:3

³And this is the promise: If you honor your father and mother, "you will live a long life, full of blessing."

The Scripture cited here is the fifth of the Ten Commandments. It states that it is the only command with a promise. The promise includes the blessing of a long (fruitful, full) life. This is reminiscent of much of the Old Testament promises that offer blessing in return for people honouring God. The use of this promise again reinforces the vital role and responsibility that parents have in representing God to their children.

If a child can't honour their earthly parents how can they reasonably honour their heavenly Father? By honouring

parents a person qualifies for a long and fruitful life as stated in Exodus 20:12.

¹²Honor your father and mother. Then you will live a long, full life in the land the LORD your God will give you.

Exodus 20:12

The relationship between child and parent should not be underestimated. A child's character and personality are moulded by her parents in her earliest years. Learning to honour parents is a character strength. Learning to love and lead children is the parent's greatest privilege.

Ephesians 6:4

⁴And now a word to you fathers. Don't make your children angry by the way you treat them. Rather, bring them up with the discipline and instruction approved by the Lord.

Stereotypically it is the father who is generally harsher on their children than their mother is. Thus Paul addresses fathers here, but the advice is just as pertinent to mothers as well. "Parenting" is not a project. It can't be brought out of a box and tinkered with, then put back into the box for later. Parenting is inconvenient. It is expensive. It is time consuming. It can be heartbreaking. It is easy to become a father, but much harder to be one. For the father that has little time to develop his children, there is always the temptation to look vainly for quick fix solutions such as yelling and screaming at kids to change their behaviour, when their behaviour is only the fruit of the root of the problem.

In our video series on relationships (*Inoculating Against Relationship Germs*) we cover the issue of successful parenting.

The two basic ingredients that parents must administer simultaneously and appropriately are: *love* and *limits*. Training is an expression of love. It is the very first thing that a child needs, even before self-esteem. Much of the self-esteem teaching by modern psychologists is anti-biblical as it promotes the idea of self-focusing and self-centredness. But Biblical psychology is rooted and grounded in love, not pride. Parents need to love their children unconditionally which is expressed through their training of their child in how to be a person of character. Secondly, love is expressed through discipline, the setting of *limits*. Children need to learn that in life there are limits and boundaries. If parents are serious about imparting love and limits to their children it will take quantity time rather than the mythical notion of *quality* time.

(v) The influence of Christ in the work place (Ephesians 6:5-9)

(a) Work for your employer as you would for Christ (Ephesians 6:5-8)

⁵Slaves, obey your earthly masters with deep respect and fear. Serve them sincerely as you would serve Christ.

This is not an endorsement of slavery, as some would suppose. It is simply an acknowledgement of a cultural reality that existed during the time of the New Testament. The closest application that we have today is the employer-employee relationship. Christians should be noted for their

work ethic. Laziness, slothfulness, tardiness, mediocrity and Christianity are incompatible.

³⁰I walked by the field of a lazy person, the vineyard of one lacking sense. ³¹I saw that it was overgrown with thorns. It was covered with weeds, and its walls were broken down. ³²Then, as I looked and thought about it, I learned this lesson: ³³A little extra sleep, a little more slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest—³⁴and poverty will pounce on you like a bandit; scarcity will attack you like an armed robber.

Proverbs 24:30-34

The principle behind the Christian work ethic is to work as if you were working directly for Christ.

Ephesians 6:6

⁶Work hard, but not just to please your masters when they are watching. As slaves of Christ, do the will of God with all your heart.

Here is another principle of the Christian work ethic: *don't work hard just when the boss is watching, for your real boss, Christ, is watching continually.* Christian employees should give their heartfelt all to their job. This is doing the will of God from the heart. Many Christians look to escape the market place and working a "9 to 5" job in the hope of going "full-time" in the Lord's service. But every Christian is already working full-time for the Lord. It doesn't matter if their job is manual or intellectual, service or sales; whatever the Christian worker does they do for the Lord.

Ephesians 6:7

⁷Work with enthusiasm, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people.

Enthusiasm is an attitude that can transform a boring routine job into an enjoyable, fulfilling and rewarding job. Again the principle behind working with enthusiasm is to reflect how Christians serve the Lord.

Ephesians 6:8

⁸Remember that the Lord will reward each one of us for the good we do, whether we are slaves or free.

The final aspect of the New Testament Christian work ethic as stated here is to recognise that the worker's reward is not just their paycheque, but what the Lord will give them for working for, and representing Him. This principle of a work ethic is not just restricted to paid employment but to all *the good we do*, whether paid (slave) or voluntary (free).

(b) Treat employees right (Ephesians 6:9)

Ephesians 6:9

⁹And in the same way, you masters must treat your slaves right. Don't threaten them; remember, you both have the same Master in heaven, and he has no favorites.

The origins of Labour Trade Unions can be traced back to Christians concerned about social justice and equity for oppressed workers. While many associate Christianity with fighting for the rights of the poor, and to be sure, the Bible has much to say about fairness for the poor, yet not everybody is either poor or an employee. This verse speaks directly to employers. In the same way that employees should treat their masters as they would Christ, so should employers treat their workers as if they were Christ.



⁴⁵*And he will answer, 'I assure you, when you refused to help the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were refusing to help me.'*

Matthew 25:45

Presumably, employers are wealthier than employees. God doesn't favour the poor or the rich, and neither should we.

¹⁵*Always judge your neighbors fairly, neither favoring the poor nor showing deference to the rich.*

Leviticus 19:15

²*For instance, suppose someone comes into your meeting dressed in fancy clothes and expensive jewelry, and another comes in who is poor and dressed in shabby clothes. ³If you give special attention and a good seat to the rich person, but you say to the poor one, "You can stand over there, or else sit on the floor"—well, ⁴doesn't this discrimination show that you are guided by wrong motives?*

James 2:2-4

Christian employers should obey all aspects of legal employment conventions. They should provide all that laws of the land require them to, and go further. We now live in a

global village where some employers who don't want to meet the statutory requirements for an employer, simply move their operations overseas where there are less obliged to provide the same safeguards or benefits for their employees. Christian employers should *treat their employees right*. This demands that Christian employers go beyond the requirements of the law, and treat their employees morally and ethically right. Just because a shoe manufacturing company can employ workers in some Asian country for around twelve cents an hour, while those very shoes are sold back in the West for over one hundred and fifty dollars, doesn't mean that it is morally or ethically right to do so. Just as employees need to understand that they are accountable to God for how they serve their employers, so employers need to understand that they are also accountable to God for how they treat their employees.

3. THE CHURCH'S BATTLE STRATEGY

F. THE POWER OF THE CHURCH'S PRAYERS

(i) Be clothed with the armour of God (Ephesians 6:10-18)

(a) Our real fight is spiritual (Ephesians 6:10-12)

Ephesians 6:10

¹⁰*A final word: Be strong with the Lord's mighty power.*

We need to appreciate that this verse is in the context of all that has gone before it in this epistle. Some people pull this section about spiritual warfare right out of its context, without considering the rest of the epistle. It is my opinion that this is not an abstract addendum to this epistle. If we consider the issues that Paul has addressed in this epistle, I think it is abundantly clear that this teaching on spiritual warfare is in the context of the whole epistle.

“*A final word*” is a clue that this flows logically on from all that has just been written. It is an injunction to be strong in the Lord and on guard against the enemy, Satan. The issues that Paul has addressed in this epistle are all areas that the devil can attempt to distort and divide the Church over:

- The glorious position and inheritance of believers
- Salvation by grace through faith in Christ
- The unity between Jews and Gentiles into the Church

- The mystery of the glory of Christ revealed through the Church
- The diversification of ministries within the Church
- Living in the light
- Building strong families
- Ethical workplace conduct

All of these issues covered in this epistle are areas where the Church is both blessed but vulnerable. Thus, in order to appropriate these blessings there is a need *to be strong in the Lord's mighty power*.

Ephesians 6:11

¹¹Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies and tricks of the Devil.

While God offers the believer all the blessings revealed in this epistle, the New Testament warns us that the devil will have strategies and tricks to deprive us of these blessings. The epistle now takes on a decidedly militant tone to it. This passage details how the believer is to withstand the attacks of the devil.

Armour is usually associated with *defence*, but in this instance it is a part of the believer's offence. By applying God's armour and weaponry the believer is summoned to at least *stand firm*. Many have noted that the following description of the armour and weapons contains no rear

protection; there is therefore no allowance for retreat, that is *backsliding*.

Ephesians 6:12

¹²For we are not fighting against people made of flesh and blood, but against the evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against those mighty powers of darkness who rule this world, and against wicked spirits in the heavenly realms.

Jesus didn't come to overthrow the Roman Empire (even though it was a brutal totalitarian regime). When confronted directly with authority of Rome, Jesus declared before Pilot that His battle was not earthly, but "heavenly" (in the sense that it was in the *heavenly realms*).

³⁶Then Jesus answered, "I am not an earthly king. If I were, my followers would have fought when I was arrested by the Jewish leaders. But my Kingdom is not of this world."

John 18:36

While we live in the world where secular governments rule, we are ever mindful that the real world is unseen, spiritual, both angelic and demonic. The message of *Ephesians* is that the believer jointly plays *the* key role in determining the tenor of the unseen realm.

³How we praise God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we belong to Christ.

Ephesians 1:3

Ephesians declares that Christ is seated on the throne of power in the heavenly realms, and that He now rules the heavenly realm with the Church.

²²And God has put all things under the authority of Christ, and he gave him this authority for the benefit of the church.

Ephesians 1:22

⁶For he raised us from the dead along with Christ, and we are seated with him in the heavenly realms—all because we are one with Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 2:6

Our battle against these *wicked* forces is not fought like a natural battle. In 2 Corinthians 10:4 we are told that our weapons are not carnal, that is natural, but spiritual.

³We are human, but we don't wage war with human plans and methods. ⁴We use God's mighty weapons, not mere worldly weapons, to knock down the Devil's strongholds.

2Corinthians 10:3-4

When confronted with the devilish attack of arrogance and pride, we counter this attack with the spiritual weapons of humility and meekness. When attacked by error and deception, we counter with truth and honesty. When confronted with the devilish attack of fear and discouragement we counter with acts of faith, boldness, courage, and godly daring. The following verses in Ephesians give the metaphor of a Roman soldier dressed and ready for battle and how the seemingly natural attacks are to be countered with spiritual weaponry.

(b) Why we need God's armour (Ephesians 6:13)

Ephesians 6:13

¹³Use every piece of God's armor to resist the enemy in the time of evil, so that after the battle you will still be standing firm.

The onslaught of the enemy is destined to make the believer retreat. Retreat often looks like-

- A cold heart toward the eternal fate of the lost (Proverbs 24:12)
- A lack of desire to participate in the worship of the broader church resulting in a violation of Hebrews 10:25
- The allowance of compromise and the lowering of acceptable moral standards (Phil. 4:8)
- Laxness when it comes to private devotions: reading of Scripture; personal prayer time; godly meditation (Psalm 1)
- A root of bitterness toward another person(s) that reflects an unwillingness to forgive (Mat. 6:14; Heb. 12:15)

The purpose of putting on the armour of God is to resist the strategies of the powers of darkness to retreat (that is, backslide). Thus the New Testament says that we are to put on the armour of God so that we can *stand firm* in our faith in and walk with God.

(c) Descriptions of the armour (Ephesians 6:14-17)

Ephesians 6:14

¹⁴Stand your ground, putting on the sturdy belt of truth and the body armor of God's righteousness.



In order to stand our ground, the first thing the believer must do is put on the *belt of truth*. The belt on a Roman soldier served three very immediate purposes. Firstly, it gave lumber support to the spine of the soldier. An understanding of the truth (right doctrine) is essential if the Christian is to have the spine (courage) to face up to the war of lies and deception that the Devil will hurl at them (an excellent study guide that helps

the believer to be grounded in right doctrine is my: “*The Survey of Christian Doctrine*”, an overview of 36 fundamental doctrines to Christianity). Secondly, it allowed the soldier to *gird* themselves so that they were ready to quickly march or attack. Thirdly, the belt served as a holder for the sword and it is from the nest of truth that the Word of God is launched.

The body armour, also rendered as *the breastplate of righteousness* guards the heart. Righteousness shields the believer's emotions. We are told in Proverbs 4 that above all else we are to guard our hearts (Proverbs 4:23). The powers of darkness will seek to lure the believer away from the Lord by manipulation of their emotions. Many a young man or woman who has completely committed their life to the Lord has been led to distraction by having their emotions captivated by a

love interest who was less committed to the Lord. To live righteously demands that the believer doesn't compromise their walk with the Lord in any way.

While the belt of truth has to do with what the believer knows, the breastplate of righteousness (or body armour) has to do with the believer's motives and actions. This also highlights the relationship between knowledge and action. Thus, all of Paul's New Testament epistles start with truth (doctrine) then move toward showing how this truth is applied.

Ephesians 6:15

¹⁵For shoes, put on the peace that comes from the Good News, so that you will be fully prepared.

In order to stand firm against the buffeting of the devil's hordes the believer must always be prepared to share the Gospel. To have your shoes on is to be ready to move immediately. The epistle of Ephesians has already stated the essence of the Gospel (2:8-10), and the believer must passionately seek to share the Gospel of peace at every opportunity (and thus be ready to move immediately).

Ephesians 6:16

¹⁶In every battle you will need faith as your shield to stop the fiery arrows aimed at you by Satan.

This is real faith. Faith is not faith if the believer abandons the Lord when under attack from the enemy. This verse naturally assumes that the believer will be fired upon by the devil. These fiery arrows are all the devilish doubts that are hurled at the mind of the believer (note 2Cor. 10:3-5). While some narrowly define *faith* as believing for a miracle, the Bible presents real faith as much more and even more fundamental than this. What's the point to the kind of faith that believes for a miracle, yet crumbles under an onslaught of doubts from the enemy? Real faith counters the doubts of the devil with the power of the Word of God. Belief in the Word of God is the fuel for the kind of faith that can thwart the fiery darts of Satan.

Ephesians 6:17

¹⁷Put on salvation as your helmet, and take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Helmets guard the head. The believer needs to have their mind regenerated by the same salvation that has redeemed their souls. Romans 12:1-2 implores the believer to renew their mind according to the salvation they have received. Christians need to realise the importance of what they allow into their minds, and that the thinking process of a believer should be different to that of an unregenerated person. For example, Christian thinking thinks in terms of consideration for others, the laws of God, and the will of God. When the believer applies Christian thinking to their life and thus any decisions they may have to make, they are able to stand against the devil.

The sword was the weapon of the Roman foot soldier. For the believer, the Word of God is a spiritual weapon. We see in Matthew 4 that Christ used the Word of God as a spiritual sword against Satan. This is at least one good reason for the believer to be a student of the Word of God. We need to be intimate with the contents of the Word of God and there is no better way to do this than to be a regular, if not daily, reader of the Bible.

Some people suggest that use of the sword of the Spirit is functioned by quoting Scriptures at the devil. But it seems more appropriate to draw the analogy of the sword of the Spirit being the application and sharing of the Word of God with others. There is naturally nothing wrong with the believer quoting Scripture for personal edification. In fact this can be quite beneficial. For more teaching on this subject please refer to my booklet *Christianised Witchcraft - An Examination Of Spiritual Warfare*.

(ii) Pray (Ephesians 6:18-20)

(a) Pray persistently (Ephesians 6:18)

Ephesians 6:18

¹⁸*Pray at all times and on every occasion in the power of the Holy Spirit. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all Christians everywhere.*

It is possible to pray naturally, and it is possible to pray *in the Spirit*. In First Corinthians 14, Paul teaches that Spirit filled believers can pray with their natural understanding, and *in the Holy Spirit*.

¹⁵*Well then, what shall I do? I will do both. I will pray in the Spirit, and I will pray in words I understand. I will sing in the spirit, and I will sing in words I understand.*

1Corinthians 14:15

The strong message of Ephesians is that the Church has great influence in the heavenly realms through its prayers. Believers are enjoined to pray at all times, that is, to continually be in attitude and spirit of prayer. The injunction to do this in the Spirit is really the only way that this is actually possible.

To pray in the Spirit is to pray in tongues (as made clear in 1Corinthians 14:14-16). It is also allowing the Holy Spirit to lead and guide the believer in their *natural* praying, which actually makes it *supernatural* praying. Revivalist Charles Finney attributed the groanings mentioned in Romans 8 to the Holy Spirit interceding through the believer on behalf of the lost.

²⁶*And the Holy Spirit helps us in our distress. For we don't even know what we should pray for, nor how we should pray. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words.*

Romans 8:26

While we should be sensitive to the Holy Spirit and His leading to pray for whatever He places on our heart, we are also told to pray for each other. We should pray that all Christians everywhere will receive all that the epistle to the Ephesians promises. We should also pray for other believers as we become aware of the needs that they face.

(b) Pray for clarity (Ephesians 6:19)

Ephesians 6:19

¹⁹And pray for me, too. Ask God to give me the right words as I boldly explain God's secret plan that the Good News is for the Gentiles, too.

Good preachers know that their effectiveness is not simply attained by good preaching. Without prayer support from others, the preacher is deprived of a greater level of effectiveness than they would otherwise experience. Over the years I have felt the difference between preaching with others praying for me, and preaching without prayer support. This is especially the case whenever I have travelled overseas to preach and my home church has been praying for me. Rarely do I preach under these circumstances and fail to see immediate fruit in people coming to Christ, being healed, set free, or built up. Preachers who fail to recognise that they need prayer support, and thus fail to frequently request it, are actually robbing themselves of greater effectiveness.

As a pastor I have learned to continually request from my church partners to pray for me. Paul's request here is for the wisdom to be able share the Gospel especially well with Gentiles. Modern preachers would do well to muster an army of intercessors who could likewise pray for them to be able to share the Gospel especially well with those outside the church.

(c) Pray for bold fearlessness (Ephesians 6:20)

Ephesians 6:20

²⁰I am in chains now for preaching this message as God's ambassador. But pray that I will keep on speaking boldly for him, as I should.

This is Paul's third reference to his imprisonment (3:1; 4:1). He refers to it at the end of his epistle again to remind the reader that he is paying a price for what he is teaching here. His preparedness to endure prison and chains adds a weight of credibility to what he is saying. What I personally find intriguing is that his prayer request is not for his freedom, but boldness.

The early Church seemed to have a different perspective on life circumstances than the modern western Church generally does. The early Church appears to have concentrated on remaining faithful to God in the midst of their circumstances and prayed accordingly, whereas the modern Church all too frequently prioritises a change in circumstances over remaining faithful to God in the midst of circumstances. Naturally there are some circumstances that we should pray about, but I wonder whether we post-moderns aren't too preoccupied with being comfortable rather than being faithful to God despite the circumstances (?). Perhaps we should pray more, and request more prayer, for *boldness*.

In Closing

Ephesians 6:21

²¹Tychicus, a much loved brother and faithful helper in the Lord's work, will tell you all about how I am getting along.

¹²I sent Tychicus to Ephesus.

2Tim. 4:12

Tychicus was the messenger and bearer of this epistle to the Ephesians.

Ephesians 6:22

²²I am sending him to you for just this purpose. He will let you know how we are, and he will encourage you.

Great leaders, like Paul the apostle, need great help. For a leader to increase their influence, it is necessary to have people like Tychicus working with them. Consider the things that we know about him based on these verses:

- (i) He was loved (therefore he knew how to get along with people)
- (ii) He had a servant spirit (he was a helper)
- (iii) He was faithful (He had most probably proved himself over time)
- (iv) Paul trusted him (Tychicus probably proved faithful in doing a little things over a long period of time)
- (v) He was an encourager of people

- (vi) He was presumably a competent preacher (since Paul wanted him to address the church about his situation)

Benediction

Ephesians 6:23

²³May God give you peace, dear brothers and sisters, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The most common element of the Christian benediction is *peace*. While the general tenor of the early Church's praying was to remain faithful under adverse circumstances (persecution, martyrdom, trials, and oppression), the most inductive attribute for remaining faithful under such circumstances is *peace*. This kind of peace cancels all worry and anxiety. It stills fretting. It under girds the believer with a quiet confidence that God is in total control despite appearances to the contrary. The lives of many great Christians throughout the centuries who have laid down their lives in service to Christ and endured terrible treatment at the hands of cruel persecutors demonstrates God's peace in action. This is not like the peace that Eastern Gurus offer where the practitioners chant themselves into a self-induced state of mindless meditation. This kind of peace only comes from God. It is perfectly independent of present circumstances. What a glorious blessing for the believer to have the New Testament pronounce such a benediction over them! Perhaps you should receive it right now (?).

The benediction also includes *faith* to be bestowed upon the believer. The kind of faith that the New Testament mostly endorses is not *necessarily* the miracle working kind, but the *faithful* kind: the kind of faith that endures to the end.

⁸I tell you, he will grant justice to them quickly! But when I, the Son of Man, return, how many will I find who have faith?"

Luke 18:8

But this kind of faith is not cold clinical faith, but a faith that is only activated by love.

⁶For when we place our faith in Christ Jesus, it makes no difference to God whether we are circumcised or not circumcised. What is important is faith expressing itself in love.

Galatians 5:6

We need to keep in mind the integral relationship between faith and love. We can really love another person without exercising faith. Neither can we exercise faith without expressing love simultaneously.

Ephesians 6:24

²⁴May God's grace be upon all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love.

Man's greatest universal need is not self-esteem, but love received and expressed. We need love. Yet today many people live their lives as if love were a luxury (something they can actually do without). They place their job, their career, their success, their personal ambition above loving and being loved. This is unnatural. Much of Ephesians has described how much God loves us. When, a person is loved by another, it is an act of grace. Ultimate love, which God offers and extends

toward us, is also an expression of ultimate grace, as none of us deserve God's love. When a person is loved they live confidently, and unafraid (1John 4:18). Self-esteem is no longer the issue to whether a person feels they are of worth, because they are *loved*.

But having shared how much God has done for us as an expression of His indescribable love for us, the final word of the benediction now enjoins us to love Christ in return. And based on what we have studied in Ephesians, that's the least we could do!

Amen.

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