

EPHESIANS

**An Explanation
with Notes and Quotes,
Illustrations and Applications**

G. Michael Cocoris

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PREFACE

The purpose of this commentary is to provide a practical explanation of Ephesians. The objective is a balanced exposition—explaining the passage in context and applying its truths to life with illustrations. Some commentaries are, by design, of a technical nature, delving into the meanings of words and phrases even outside their use in the book under consideration. Those commentaries tend to ignore the context of the book and its application. Other commentaries go to the other extreme and concentrate on the application, often not fully expounding the passage. Commentaries should do both. They should offer a contextual exposition of the book and apply the truths of that book to life. Adding illustrations facilitates clarity.

First and foremost, this is a contextual exposition. The context is not just the paragraph or the chapter but the whole book. In studying any book of the Bible, the first question that should be asked is: “What is the subject of this book?” Each natural literary unit, whether a paragraph or a narrative, develops a subject. A legitimate exposition will show how the author develops his subject. That, and only that, is contextual Bible study. All details in a book must be explained in light of the message and structure of the entire book. Words only have meaning in a context. A detailed explanation of words and phrases ripped from their sentence and the broader context is not exposition. The flow of the thought of the passage in the context of the book is the message the author intends to convey.

The Bible was written for living (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Even the most brilliant explanation that stops short of the applications is an abortion of what God intended. Thus, the practical ramifications of every passage must always be considered.

The procedure of study I use is to first divide the biblical book into its natural literary units (narratives or paragraphs). Then, I analyze each unit. The analysis includes an outline of the development of thought in that unit (major points and sub-points), an explanation of each sentence, and a summary statement. After I have personally analyzed each unit, I read commentaries, deliberately reading commentaries from different theological perspectives. I credit commentators’ comments by putting their names in parenthesis, even if I had seen that point in the text during my study before I read their comments. Thus, each chapter of this material expounds a natural literary unit of the book of Ephesians.

In the process of study, I also wrote a tentative title, introduction, and conclusion as if what I was working on was a sermon. If I stumble across an illustration, I include it, but, at this point, I do not search for illustrations. I write all of this for each literary unit in the book before preaching the first sermon in the book. As a result, when I begin speaking through the book, I have the whole book in mind.

As I prepare to preach each literary unit, I may change the tentative title, introduction, and/or conclusion. I rarely change the explanation of the text. It is as I preach each unit that I search for illustrations. Again, having studied the whole book first is helpful here. I sometimes found an illustration I knew would fit better later in the book.

The introduction of each chapter briefly relates that section to life and/or the context. The captions throughout the chapters are divisions of that portion of Scripture and correspond to the main points of a sermon. The italicized headings correspond to the sub-points of a sermon. Rather than footnotes, the author’s name is in parenthesis in the text. While applications are made throughout the exposition, the passage as a whole is summarized and applied at the end.

May the Lord be pleased to use this approach to the Scripture to enlighten, encourage, and edify believers, thus glorifying His Son.

G. Michael Cocoris
Santa Monica, CA

INTRODUCTION

Ephesians has been called “Paul’s third heaven epistle” for in it, “he soars from the depth of ruin to the heights of redemption” (Pierson), the “Alps of the New Testament,” “the profoundest” of Paul’s epistles (Baxter), “the church epistle” (McGee), and Paul’s most “labored epistle (Scroggie).” It has been said, “This epistle surpasses all others in sublimity of style and is preeminent even amongst the apostle’s writings for the sustained majesty of its theme and for certain spiritual splendor both in concept and language” (Lee).

Author

Twice, the author identifies himself as Paul: “Paul an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God” (1:1) and “For this reason, I, Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles” (3:1). Furthermore, the language of the book is clearly Pauline. Tradition is unanimous that Paul wrote Ephesians.

Despite the evidence favoring the Pauline authorship, the genuineness of the epistle has been questioned. Schleiermacher (1768-1834) seemed to have been the first to cast doubt upon it. The objections to it are things like forty-two words that are particular to it, but there are no more words that are particular to Ephesians than any other recognized Pauline epistle (Thiessen, p. 240, 241).

Recipients

There is no doubt that Paul was in prison when he wrote Ephesians (4:1). Four of Paul’s epistles refer to his imprisonment (Eph. 3:1; 4:1; 6:20; Phil. 1:7, 13, 14; Col. 4:3, 10, 18; Philem. 9, 10, 13, 23). At least three of the four were no doubt dispatched at the same time (Eph. 6:21-23; Col. 4:7-9; Philem. 10-12). Thus, these four epistles are commonly referred to as prison epistles.

The problem is that he was in and out of prison many times. So, during which imprisonment did he pen Ephesians? The prevailing view is that all four were written from Rome during Paul’s two-year imprisonment there, as recorded in Acts 28:30-31. The support for this view is compelling. Paul says the gospel had spread to the whole Praetorian Guard (Phil. 1:13) and that the saints in Caesar’s household greet you (Phil. 4:22). Furthermore, he anticipated that his case would soon be settled, resulting in his release (Phil. 1:23-24). Onesimus would have been more likely to have gone to a city like Rome where he could drop out of sight like runaways today flee to Los Angeles.

Some commentators, however, have favored the Caesarea imprisonment as the time of the composition of these four epistles, but the facts do not fit. For example, Paul indicates that the outcome of the verdict would be either life or death (Phil. 1:20ff). That was not the case at Caesarea, where he could always appeal to Caesar, which is exactly what he did. Furthermore, if Paul wrote from Caesarea, why did he not mention Phillip, the evangelist, who, shortly before Paul’s arrest, had entertained him in his home in Caesarea (Acts 21:8)?

A few have held to an Ephesian imprisonment. This hypothesis is based on Paul’s statement in 2 Corinthians 11:23, written shortly after his ministry in Ephesus, which says, “in prisons more abundant.” It is a novel theory but contains so many difficulties that few have embraced it.

Assuming Paul wrote from Rome, the date for Ephesians is AD 61.

To whom did Paul write? Ephesians 1:1 says he wrote to the saints “in Ephesus,” but that is a problem. The two words “in Ephesus” are not in some Greek manuscripts, making this a general epistle. The traditional view contends that these words were in the original. All the manuscripts, both the Uncial and Minuscule, except three, contain the words “in Ephesus.” The early church believed that it was written to Ephesus. The encyclical theory, first advanced by Bishop Usher (1581-1656), holds that these words were not in the original and, therefore, the epistle was intended to be a general letter to be circulated to all the churches. This theory is inconsistent with the contents since Ephesians 1:15 ff. and Ephesians 6:22 show that Paul had a definite group in mind when he wrote the epistle. The words “in Ephesus” are genuine. Therefore, Ephesians was written to the church at Ephesus and to all believers everywhere (see “to all who are faithful in Christ Jesus” in 1:1; see also 2 Cor. 1:1 and Col. 4:16).

Is there a suggestion in the use of the word “faithful” that Ephesians was not intended to be digested by all believers but rather more mature among believers? First Corinthians is addressed to the church at Corinth along with “all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Cor. 1:2). In contrast, Ephesians is addressed to the “faithful in Christ Jesus.” Is there not a difference? In 1 Corinthians, Paul teaches that he speaks “wisdom among those who are mature” (1 Cor. 2:6) and goes on to say that he speaks the “wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory” (1 Cor. 2:7) as part of the wisdom that he spoke among the mature. It’s just such kind of wisdom that he wrote about to the Ephesians (see 3:1-13).

Paul greets those to whom he writes with his uniform salutation: “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (1:2). The regular Greek greeting was “rejoice,” whereas the customary Jewish greeting was “peace.” Paul combined the two but replaced “rejoice” with a similar-sounding Greek word, “grace.” The words of common courtesy in the secular world became words of apostolic benediction in Paul’s epistles. Paul acknowledges that grace and peace have their source in God the Father and in His Son Jesus Christ. In the Greek text, there is only one preposition linking the two together and, thus implying the deity of Christ.

Message

Many feel that the subject of Ephesians is the church. There is no question that the church is a major theme of the epistle. However, it is questionable that it is the book’s main subject. It would be more accurate to say that the subject of Ephesians is the believer’s calling. After a glorious doxology, Paul prays that the readers would have their understanding enlightened so that, among other things, they would understand “what is the hope of His calling” (1:18). Then, after describing that calling, in what is the hinge verse of the book, Paul says, “I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to have a walk worthy of the calling with which you were called” (4:1). The believer is called to participate in the church, the body of Christ, but Ephesians teaches that the believer is not only called to the church but he is also called to a relationship with God Himself (Eph. 2:1-10). Therefore, “calling” encompasses all of the material covered in Ephesians, including the subject of the church. The subject of Ephesians is the believer’s calling (1:18; 4:1).

The message is since believers have been called to be in Christ in the church, they should live a worthy life in unity, righteousness, love, and wisdom and stand against all the forces that would move them away from that lifestyle.

Structure

Ephesians is in the format of an ancient letter, but here, that is tricky. Paul begins with thanksgiving and a prayer (1:3-23). In the midst of the prayer, he develops several other themes. Then, he prays again (3:1) and again wanders off on another subject, finally coming back and praying a second time (3:14). No wonder this has been called Paul’s most “labored epistle” (Scroggie). Beyond that, the unique feature of the body of this epistle is that it is divided into two parts: doctrine and duty, wealth and walk, calling and conduct.

I. Salutation	1:1-2
II. Thanksgiving	1:3-14
III. Prayer	1:15-23
IV The Body of the Letter	2:1-6:20
A. The Calling of the Church	2:1-3:21
1. Our Calling Individually (Regeneration)	2:1-10
2. Our Calling Corporately (Reconciliation)	2:11-22
3. The Revelation of this Calling (Revelation)	3:1-13
4. Prayer for Power and Perception	3:14-21
B. The Conduct of the Church	4:1-6:20
1. Walk in Unity (in Church)	4:1-16
2. Walk in Righteousness (in the Flesh)	4:17-32
3. Walk in Love	5:1-7
4. Walk in the Light (in the World)	5:8-14
5. Walk in Wisdom	5:15-6:3
6. Walk in Strength—Stand in Armor (Warfare)	6:10-20
V. Greeting and Benediction	6:21-14

Purpose

Paul’s penning Ephesians has a major and perhaps a minor purpose. The major purpose is to enlighten believers concerning their calling to Christ and the church so they would walk worthy of that calling. Paul begins by praising the Trinity for salvation: chosen by the Father (1:3-6), redeemed by the Son (1:7-12), and sealed by the Spirit (1:13-14). After that praise, Paul prayed that his readers would be enlightened to understand the hope of their calling (1:18). Paul prays and writes to enlighten believers concerning their calling. They were called to fellowship with God and the church, which was a mystery and is now revealed (2:16a, 18, 3:6, 12). Of course, he enlightens them and exhorts them to walk worthy of their calling.

There seems to be a minor purpose in that Paul wanted to encourage them not to lose heart (3:13). No doubt, the arrest and imprisonment of none other than the apostle Paul discouraged many believers. Therefore, he says, “Don’t feel sorry for me or be discouraged by what has happened. God has especially blessed me in revealing to me the mystery of the church.”

This book, written to enlighten faithful believers concerning their calling in the church and exhort them to walk worthy of that calling, is worthy of careful consideration. In his book, *How to Master the English Bible*, Dr. James M. Gray tells of meeting a Christian who struck him as particularly godly at a conference. He saw something in that man’s life—a peace, a rest, a joy, a

kind of spiritual poise that he confessed he knew little about. One day, he asked him how he had come to possess such an experience, and the layman told him, “By reading the book of Ephesians.”

He told Gray that he had gone to the country with his family on one occasion, taking a pocket copy of Ephesians with him. In the afternoon, he began reading it in the woods and lying down under a tree. He read it through at a single sitting and, finding his interest aroused, read it through again and again. Gray recalls saying that he read it twelve to fifteen times. Then the man told him, “When I arose to go into the house, I was possessed of Ephesians, or better yet, it was in possession of me, and I had been lifted up to sit together in heavenly places in Christ in an experiential sense in which that had not been true in me before and will never cease to be true in me again.”

Perhaps few have had as dramatic an experience with Ephesians as that godly layman. At the same time, there is no doubt that all who so expose themselves to the book of Ephesians will discover that Ephesians will begin to master them and they will end up deeply godly Christians.

KEEP LOOKING DOWN

A pastor greeted a Christian friend with the familiar, “How are you?” The friend replied, “Okay, I guess, under the circumstances.” The pastor quickly responded, “Under the circumstances! What are you doing there?”

Where are you? On earth? Obviously, not Pluto, Jupiter, or Mars. In America? Definitely not Africa or Afghanistan. In California? Certainly not Connecticut or Colorado. In Southern California? Well, not in the Redwood Forest or Death Valley. In Tarzana? Clearly, it’s not in Temple City or Thousand Oaks. In church? This is not a cafe or the civic center.” All such distinctions are, in the final analysis, superficial and immaterial. It does not really matter that you are in church in Tarzana, California, in the U.S.A. on planet earth.

Where are you? Are you in good health or poor health? Are you in red or black? Are you in a good mood or in a bad mood? All such distinctions are a little more helpful, but they, too, are not the determining factor.

Where are you? Are you under the circumstances, or have you risen above them? Now, that supersedes geographical location, physical status, financial state, or even psychological mood. Let’s talk about where you are. God wrote a book to communicate to you and clarify exactly where you are. Your understanding of what He said about your location affects everything.

In Prison

Paul When Paul wrote Ephesians, he was literally in prison in Rome. He mentions that three times in six chapters (3:1, 3:14; 6:20). Why was the apostle Paul in prison? Several years before, Paul had stirred up the Jewish religious leaders in Jerusalem and they had him arrested. Being a Roman citizen, he appealed to Caesar. After spending two years in jail in Caesarea, he was transported to Rome, where he awaited trial.

His prison was not a dungeon. Paul was under house arrest, confined to his house under guard. People were apparently allowed to come and see him, but he was not allowed to leave his house to travel about the city (see Acts 28). While under house arrest in Rome, Paul received a visitor named Epaphras, who told him about conditions in the church of Colossae. He also led a runaway to Christ named Onesimus. Those two events prompted him to pen two letters: Colossians and Philemon. Evidently, shortly thereafter, he wrote Ephesians.

Paul had spent three years in Ephesus, longer than any other place. There were no immediate problems he was writing to solve. Instead, he wrote for their edification. He could easily have written to complain about his circumstances, for he was in prison. He could have felt trapped because he was.

You Are you in prison? Do you feel trapped? Are you trapped in your job, marriage, and singleness? In his book *Love Must Be Tough*, James Dobson describes the feeling of being trapped in a marriage.

“I have observed that the lust of forbidden fruit is often incidental to the real cause of marital decay. Long before any decision to ‘fool around’ or walk out on a partner, something basic has begun to change in the relationship. Many books on this subject lay the blame on the failure to communicate, but I disagree. The inability to talk to one another is a *symptom* of a deeper problem, but it is not the cause itself. The critical element is how one spouse perceives his mate and their

lives together. It is a subtle thing at first, often occurring without either partner being aware of the slippage. However, as time passes, one individual begins to feel trapped. That's the key word: *trapped*. In its more advanced stages, a man considers his wife (gender is interchangeable throughout these discussions) and thinks these kinds of thoughts: 'Look at Joan. She used to be rather pretty. With those 15 extra pounds, she doesn't even attract me anymore. Her lack of discipline bothers me in other areas too—the house is a perpetual mess and she always seems totally disorganized. I hate to admit it, but I made an enormous mistake back there in my youth when I decided to marry her. Now I have to spend the rest of my life—can you believe it—all the years I have left—tied up with someone I'm disinterested in. Oh, I know Joanie is a good woman and I wouldn't hurt her for anything, but man! Is this what they're calling living?'

"Or Joanie may be doing some thinking of her own: "Michael, Michael, how different you are than I thought you would be. You seemed so excited and energetic in those early days. How did you get to be such a bore? You work far too much and are so tired when you come home, I can't even get you to talk to me, much less sweep me into ecstasy.... Look at him sleeping on the couch with his mouth hanging open. I wish his hair wasn't falling out. Am I really going to invest my entire lifetime in this aging man? My friends don't respect him anymore; he hasn't received a promotion at the plant in over five years. He's going nowhere and he's taking me with him!" (James Dobson, *Love Must Be Tough*, pp. 32-33).

In Christ

Paul begins Ephesians with a customary salutation, which identifies the author, the recipients, and a greeting.

Author "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God" (Eph. 1:1). Paul identifies himself as the author and as an apostle by the will of God, not by individual merit, by a self-assumed title, or by human authority (Lightfoot).

Recipients "To the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus" (1:2a). Some manuscripts do not contain the words "in Ephesus." That fact, and several other factors, have led many to conclude that Ephesus was a circular letter. However, the phrase "in Ephesus" is in most manuscripts. Thus, this letter was addressed to the saints in Ephesus. Yet Paul intended it to be passed around to the faithful in Christ Jesus, not just the believing (Lightfoot; Westcott; Robinson).

Greeting "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (1:2b). This salutation includes Paul's standard greeting of grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. In the Greek text, there is only one preposition linking God and the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ together (see "from"), indicating the deity of Jesus Christ (Toussaint, unpublished class notes).

Their Position After the salutation, Paul composes a long doxology that begins with "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ" (1:3). This verse will be explained in more detail in the next chapter, but notice where he says the saints are; they are "in Christ" (1:3). From a biblical perspective, a person is either in Adam (Rom. 5:19) or in Christ (1:3). In Adam, all are spiritually dead. When people trust Christ, they are removed from Adam and put "in Christ."

In the Greek text, "in Christ" is emphatically stated. Eadie says, "The words (in Christ) are reserved to the last with special emphasis." Paul not only stresses this truth in verse 3, but he repeatedly states it throughout the doxology (1:4, 6, 7, 9, 10 (twice), 11, 12, 13 (twice), and throughout the epistle. Being "in Christ" means being united to Him and immersed in Him. He is

our element, our environment. Believers are “incorporated” into Christ (Hoehner, *An Exegetical Commentary*).

That’s where you are, and that makes a big difference. We tend to respond to our environment. If you perceive that you are in prison, you will begin to act like a prisoner. You will see bars and barriers, locks and limitations, guards and guns. You will complain about the food, the facilities, and fellow prisoners. You will dream and scheme about being somewhere else.

Ruth was a secretary who worked for a law firm. Her “element” for eight hours every day was unsaved, professional, high-powered, dog-eat-dog, pushy, aggressive attorneys. She lived in that environment month in and month out, year after year, until she began to become like them. When she went to church, she acted like an aggressive attorney. She forgot where she was. I don’t mean she forgot she was “at church,” I mean she forgot she was “in Christ.” Christ is gentle and gracious. Oh, He is firm, but He is not pushy. Had she remembered where she was, she would have related to people differently at church and work.

In the Heavens

The Heavens Now, if that is not radical enough, Paul says that believers are not only in Christ, they are in the heavens (1:3). What does he mean by “in heavenly places”? The phrase “in the heavens” occurs five times in Ephesians and nowhere else in the Bible (see 1:3, 1:20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12). Ephesians 1:3 declares that believers are blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ. Ephesians 1:20 announces that after the resurrection, God seated Christ in the heavens above every authority in the universe. In Ephesians 2:6, he teaches that God also raised believers and seated them in heavenly places in Christ. Ephesians 3:10 reveals that principalities and powers in the heavenly sphere are learning about the magnificent manifold wisdom of God by watching the church. Finally, in Ephesians 6:12, Paul speaks of spiritual warfare between believers and spiritual forces in the heavens. For the first time, Paul indicates that evil forces are in the heavens, Christ, and the heavenly host of good angels. The heavens, then, is heaven where Christ is. It is also the sphere of spiritual activities, “that immaterial region, the unseen universe which lies behind the world of sense” (Robinson).

Believers The startling statement in Ephesians 1:3 is that believers are in the heavens. If you are a believer, that’s where you are. Your name is written in heaven (Lk. 10:20), your citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20), and *you* are, in the mind of God, already seated there (1:3; 2:6). Christians are conditioned to think of being in heaven in the future when they die or when the Lord returns for the church. That’s true (Jn. 14:1-6), but it is equally true that if you are in Christ, you are in the heavens right now. Paul says beyond the “things seen” to the “things not seen” (2 Cor. 4:18). He saw not just the material reality but the spiritual reality, not just the temporal, but the eternal.

“Do you expect to go to heaven?” asked someone of a devout Scotsman. “Why, man, I live there,” was the unexpected reply.

The President of the United States is seated in the Presidency. That does not mean that he is always literally sitting in the chair in the Oval Office. It means that he is the president no matter where he is. Likewise, no matter where Christians are on the earth, they are seated in the heavens in Christ.

Summary: Believers are in Christ in the heavens, not in prison or under the circumstances here below.

Remember where you are. We get so caught up in the material and temporal that we forget the spiritual and the eternal. We get so absorbed with here and now that we forget where we are. We need to remember that we're in the heavenlies!

A young couple attended a fairly formal affair that tended to get boring. The husband and some other young men started to horse around, acting like kids on the playground or college students in the dorm instead of seated at a formal banquet. They did things like shoot spitballs through straws. The wife whispered to her husband, "Remember where you are." She assumed that if he woke up, he would realize he was at a formal banquet and act more appropriately. She was at least right about this: given where he was, his attitude, speech, and activities were inappropriate.

If you remember where you are, it will affect you. Instead of pouting, you will practice praise. Instead of feeling trapped, you will feel triumphant.

You also need to keep looking down. Don't look around and don't look up, as if you're under the circumstances. Remember where you are and keep looking down. If you're looking around, you'll see bars and barriers. For example, if you feel trapped in your marriage, you'll perceive your wife as a warden or your husband as a guard. If you look down from where you're seated in the heavenlies, you will: 1) be free from anger and bitterness, 2) be free to submit in love.

God looked down and loved the unlovely. Christ looked down and submitted to the unappealing. The Holy Spirit looked down and came to clean the unclean and dwell in the inconsistent.

When she was young, little Victoria was shielded from the fact that there would come a time when she would be the next ruling monarch of the British Empire. One day, when her teacher finally let her discover for herself that she would one day be Queen of England, Victoria's response was, "Then I will good." Her position would control her life. No matter where she was, Victoria was governed by the fact that she sat on the throne of England.

BLESS GOD

Why do you attend church? Some people might say, “To get a blessing.” You probably wouldn’t express it like that, but you undoubtedly benefit in some way. That’s not necessarily wrong. However, is it possible that believers should gather together to be a blessing instead of being blessed? Who benefits because you are in church? Perhaps others should (Heb. 10:24-25), but for sure, God should. Hopefully, you do not attend church because the pastor is there, and he is not there because you are there; rather, the both of you are there because *He* is there, and He is there so He can be blessed. How is that done? Paul explains in Ephesians 1:3-14.

In Ephesians 1, after the salutation (1:1-2), there follows a doxology of blessing to God (1:3-14). What does “bless God mean? The Greek word translated “bless” means “to speak well of, praise, eulogize, extol.” Simply put, Paul is saying, “Praise God.”

Paul says we are to bless God, who has blessed us with “every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ.” When people trust Christ, they are places in Christ (“in” here is used in the local sense; Hoehner, *Commentary*), which means they spiritually dwell in heavenly places (see the previous chapter). In Christ, in the heavenlies, God has blessed us with all *spiritual* blessings. The saints in the Old Testament were promised material benefits, such as the land of Palestine; saints in Christ are blessed with every spiritual blessing (Lightfoot). These blessings are spiritual, not material; heavenly, not earthly; eternal, not temporal. Since God has blessed us with every spiritual benefit, let us bless Him with praise and gratitude (Hodge). In short, bless God for His blessings. Paul delineates these blessings in Ephesians 1:4-14.

Ephesians 1:4-14 is one long, complicated sentence. Paul punctuates this sentence three times with the phrase, “To the praise of His glory” (1:6, 12, 14). The three occurrences of that phrase naturally divide the passage into three parts, each describing the work of a different member of the Trinity. Thus, Paul says, “Bless God the Father for His blessings, bless Him for the blessings He has bestowed upon us through the Son, and bless Him for the blessings bestowed upon us through the work of the Holy Spirit.” Consider the blessings of each member of the Trinity so that you can bless God.

The Father Blessed us with Predestination and Election

Election Paul says, “Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love” (1:4). Paul begins with the work of the Father on behalf of believers (see 1:3). Some commentators say “just as” indicates the cause of election, which would mean elections is the cause of all spiritual blessings (Hodge). Others say “just as” signifies the manner in which God blessed believers (Pentecost; Toussaint). In the Greek text, the way the word “chose” is written it means “He picked out for Himself” (Lightfoot). The choice of some has nothing to do with the rejection of others. In the Old Testament, God’s choice of Levi for the priesthood had nothing to do with the rejection of the other tribes (Hoehner, *Commentary*). The expression “in Christ” means “God chose believers in connection with or through Christ’s work of redemption” (Hoehner, *Commentary*). God the Father blessed believers by selecting them by means of Christ for Himself.

This is the doctrine of election, which always provokes queries and questions. Some of those questions are answered in this passage, and some are not. For example, this passage reveals *when*

the selection took place. It was “before the foundation of the world” (1:4). God chose us before we were born, before the world was created. He made His decision in eternity past. Someone has said, “I’m glad He chose me before seeing me because after He saw me, He never would have chosen me.”

This passage also gives us the purpose of God’s election: “that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love” (1:4). The Father selected us to be holy, set apart unto Himself. “Without blame” was a term applied to sacrificial animals and means “without blemish” (Lightfoot). Like a man selects a woman to be set apart to him, God selected people to set apart to Him.

Some commentators take “in love” with verse 5, that is, in love, He predestined us (Chrysostom; Bengel; Eadie; NASB; NIV; ESV), but most commentators take it with verse 4 (Erasmus; Luther; Beza; Calvin; Lightfoot; Westcott; Robinson; Hodge; Hoehner; KJV; NKJV). The sphere of our blamelessness, or our blemishlessness, is love. God’s election aimed to produce a group of loving people. Holiness, blamelessness, and sanctification ultimately mean living a life of love. Sanctification is not sanctimoniousness; it is being sensitive to and serving people. God chose you to make a lover out of you.

Predestination The second work of God the Father in blessing believers is predestination. He says, “Having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself” according to the good pleasure of His will” (1:5). The Greek word translated “predestined” means “to predetermine, foreordain.” In this passage, the Greek construction indicates that predestination precedes election (Lightfoot). An accurate translation would be “having predestined us to adoption as His children, He chose us that we should be holy and loving.” Predestination is another teaching of Scripture that has provoked discussion and debate. This passage explains some of the issues but not all. Here, the idea is that God predestined believers to adoption, sonship, and Himself through Jesus Christ. God determined to make us sons, not slaves (Westcott).

How did He make that decision? Some argue that God predestined to be saved those He foreknew would believe. They point out that He chose believers “in Him” (1:4). Granted, God chose believers based on His foreknowledge (1 Pet. 1:2), but the Bible does not tell us what He foreknew. As for the “in Him,” in verse 4, the Greek construction indicates that God predestined believers to sonship first (1:5). Then, once they were “in Him,” He chose them to be without blame in love. The question is: “What is the basis of the predestination to sonship?” The next phrase in Ephesians 1:5 says, “according to the good pleasure of His will.” “According to” indicates the norm or standard by which He predestined believers (Robinson). In other words, He made the decision based on His goodwill.

As F. F. Bruce explains, “The ground of God’s choice to foreordain us to be His sons cannot be found in us. It was not because He foresaw something acceptable in us, not even because He foreknew that we would believe the gospel. The ground was His own gracious character. The glory of His grace means the manifestation of His grace.” McGee says, “Suffice it to say that if God had not chosen us, we would have not chosen God.”

The next verse explains *why* He did it: “To the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved” (1:6). The purpose of God’s selection of us to sonship was so that the glory of His grace would be praised.” Hodge says that God predestined us to sonship so that we might celebrate His grace. As thanksgiving is man’s crowning duty and privilege, praise is God’s ultimate right (Lightfoot).

The English text says grace has made us “accepted in the Beloved.” The Greek text, however, says, “By which He endued us with grace in the Beloved,” in Christ. (see “His grace, which He

freely bestowed on us in the Beloved” in the NASB and “grace, which he has freely given us in the One He loves” in the NIV). The expression “endued us with grace” only appears twice in the New Testament (here and in Lk. 1:28, where it is translated “highly favored One”). Paul emphasizes grace. The thought is to praise His grace, wherein He has endued us with grace. This grace is exercised toward us in the Beloved. Christ is the Beloved for His own sake. Being in Him, we are recipients of God’s grace for Christ’s sake.

The point is to praise God for His grace, whereby He predetermined to make us sons and chose us to make us lovers. Joseph Parker, one of the famous London preachers of the nineteenth century, was once asked, “Why did the Lord choose Judas to be one of the twelve?” He replied, “I’m not able to answer that, but the great mystery to me is not why Jesus chose Judas, but why should the Lord have chosen me.”

With Fanny Crosby, we sing, “to God be the glory.”

To God be the glory, great things He has done,
So loved He the world that He gave us His Son;
Who yielded His life an atonement for sin,
And opened the life gate that all may go in.

Great things He has taught us, great things He has done,
And great our rejoicing, thro’ Jesus the Son;
But purer, and higher, and greater will be,
Our wonder, our transport, when Jesus we see.

Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, Let the earth hear His voice!
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, Let the people rejoice!
O come to the Father thro’ Jesus the Son,
And give Him the glory, great things He hath done.
(“To God Be the Glory,” Fanny J. Crosby)

The Son Blessed us with Redemption and Revelation

The reference to Christ, the Beloved, at the end of verse 6 furnishes the transition to the second person of the Godhead. In verses 7-12, Paul delineates the work of the Son on behalf of believers. The Son has blessed believers.

Redemption Christ has redeemed us. Paul says, “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace” (1:7). This redemption is ours because we are in Christ (Westcott). The Greek word translated “redemption” means “to release upon payment of a ransom, to deliver.” Sinners are slaves, captives of sin (Jn. 8:34). Christ paid the ransom for sinners to be delivered, released from their slavery to sin (Lightfoot). The ransom was His blood. Thus, Paul says our redemption was “through His blood” (Mk. 10:45). Redemption is further defined as “the forgiveness of sins.” The Greek word translated “sins” here means “trespasses.” Trespasses highlight the idea of a violation of a definite law (Westcott). The Greek word translated “forgiveness” means “to send away, dismiss, release.” It is used of a pardon for remission from the penalty of sin.

This redemption, this forgiveness, is “according to the riches of His grace.” The standard by which God forgives is the riches of His grace. It is not “out of” His rich grace, but “according to” the abundance of His grace that God releases sinners from sin.

Down at the cross where my Savior died,
Down where from cleansing from sin I cried,
There to my heart was the blood applied;
Glory to His name!

I am so wondrously saved from sin,
Jesus so sweetly abides within,
There at the cross where He took me in;
Glory to His name!

O precious fountain that saves from sin,
I am so glad I have entered in;
There Jesus saves me and keeps me clean;
Glory to His name!

Come to this fountain so rich and sweet;
Cast thy poor soul at the Savior’s feet;
Plunge in today, and be made complete;
Glory to His name!

Glory to His name, Glory to His name;
There to my heart was the blood applied;
Glory to His name!
 (“Glory to His Name,” Elisha A. Hoffman)

Revelation God’s grace has not only given us redemption in Christ, it has also given us a revelation of His wisdom in Christ, “Which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence” (1:8). God’s grace (1:7) has abounded (1:8) toward us. The Greek word translated “abounded” means “over and above, abundance.” The papyri uses the word in the sense of “superabound” (Pentecost).

God’s grace has been abundantly bestowed on us in Christ “in all wisdom and prudence.” “Wisdom and prudence” are synonyms used here for understanding. Wisdom is perhaps understanding of the theoretical; it deals with principle. Prudence is practical; it deals with action (Lightfoot; Westcott). The second is the child of the first (Pentecost). With wisdom, believers understand the divine purpose of the ages and see its relevance in this present (Hodge). Prudence enables the believer to see its relevance now (Hoehner, BKC). At any rate, God’s grace has given believers revelation.

God’s grace has abounded to us so we can understand His will (Hoehner, BKC). Paul says, “Having made known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself” (1:9). Because God, by his grace, has made the mystery of His will known to believers, they have wisdom and prudence. In the New Testament, a mystery is not something mysterious or unknown; it is something that was hidden but is now revealed (Lightfoot; Hodge).

God has made known to the saints the sacred secrets of His will. Thus, they have wisdom and prudence.

What does Paul have in mind when speaking of God's will here? He explains, "that in the dispensation of the fullness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him" (1:10). The Greek word "dispensation" means "administration." God has administered different programs in the past. This verse speaks of the ultimate program to be realized in the future. In the future, in the fullness of time, God will sum up, gather up, everything in Christ (Westcott). Ultimately, everything will be united in Him (Hodge). This program and purpose of God are "according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself" (1:9). The basis of this decision was God's goodwill, which came from within Him, not something outside Him.

Sin brought separation, sorrow, suffering, division, discord, and death. Ultimately, in the future, after the Millennium in the eternal state, which is the new heaven and the new earth, God will bring entire harmony to creation (1 Cor. 15:24-28; Lightfoot; Pentecost; Toussaint). God's grace will accomplish all this through the redemption, which is in Christ. God has revealed it all to the saints.

Paul goes on to say, "In whom also we have obtained an inheritance" (1:11a). Although it is possible to render this phrase, "We have obtained an inheritance" (Hodge), it probably should be translated, "We were chosen to be God's portion," or "We were made an inheritance" (1:18; Deut. 32:9; Zech. 2:12; etc.; Westcott; Robinson; Pentecost; Toussaint). While there is a difference between the two, both ideas are true and the one includes the other. Saints are an inheritance, and they have an inheritance.

The saints not only know about God's purpose and program, but they also participate in it (1:11-12)! Technically, Ephesians 1:11-12 refer to Jewish believers. The "we" in verse 11 seems to be different from the anonymous "we/us" in Ephesians 3:1-10 (see "also" in verse 11). More important, verse 13 changes to "you also," which refers to Gentile believers. Even though these verses refer to Jewish Christians, Gentile Christians are included (see verse 13).

Jewish Christians (and for that matter Gentile Christians—see 1:14, 18) are God's inheritance "being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will" (1:11b). Saints were made an inheritance because they were predestined (same word as the one used in 1:5), and this predestination was based on God's purpose, which was in turn based on the "counsel of His will." This phrase occurs only here in the New Testament and means "counsel which has its origin in His will" (Hodge). God's purpose was not determined by anyone or anything outside Himself; it was decided by His own sovereign will (Hodge).

The purpose of God choosing Jewish Christians as His inheritance is: "That we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory" (1:12; see 1:6). In the Greek text, "First trusted" is "first hoped." This statement further supports the view that verses 11 and 12 refer to Jewish believers (Pentecost; Toussaint; Westcott; and Hodge say this refers to Jews who hoped in the Messiah before He came). Jews were the first to have trusted Christ (Acts 1:8; 13:46; Rom. 1:16; etc.). The inclusion of Jewish Christians in God's inheritance is for God's glory and praise.

The point of Ephesians 1:7-12 is, praise God (1:3, 12) for His grace (1:7), whereby He has redeemed us and revealed His will to us that all things will ultimately be headed up in Christ, including Jewish believers.

When morning gilds the skies,
My heart awakening cries:

May Jesus Christ be praised;
Alike at work or prayer
To Jesus I repair:
May Jesus Christ be praised.

In heaven's eternal bliss,
The loveliest strain is this,
May Jesus Christ be praised;
The powers of darkness fear,
When this sweet chant they hear:
May Jesus Christ be praised.

Be this, while life is mine, My canticle divine,
May Jesus Christ be praised;
Be this th' eternal song, Through all the ages long:
May Jesus Christ be praised.

(German hymn, trans. by Edward Caswall)

The Holy Spirit Blessed us with Sealing and Earnest

Paul concludes with the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer (1:13-14). Having discussed God's gathering together all things in Christ in general (1:9-10) and the inclusion of Jewish believers in particular (1:11-12), Paul now turns his attention to Gentile believers (1:13-14). Having delineated the work of the Son in redemption and revealing (1:7-12), he now shifts to the work of the Holy Spirit (1:13-14).

Seal The Holy Spirit seals us. Paul explains, "In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise" (1:13). These *Gentiles* first heard the word of truth, further defined here as the gospel of salvation (Hodge; Pentecost; Toussaint). The gospel is the good news that Christ died for our sins and rose from the dead (1 Cor. 15:1-8). Having heard, they believed. Even though God chose (1:4) and predestined (1:5), they still had to trust Christ personally.

When they believed, they were sealed. The sealing did not occur *after* faith but *at the moment* of faith (Toussaint). Sealing signifies ownership and protection (Westcott). The owner places his seal upon his property to identify it as his and to indicate his protection of it. Sealed believers not only belong to God, they are secure. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of promise; Christ promised to send Him (Lk. 24:29; Jn. 14:6; 15:26; 16:13; Acts 1:5).

Earnest Concerning the Holy Spirit, Paul adds, "Who is 'the guarantee of our inheritance' (1:14a). The Greek word translated "guarantee" means "earnest," a first installment, a partial payment that guarantees full payment in the future. When purchasing a house, the buyer puts down earnest money, a down payment with a promise of more to come. What is given is related to what is to come—as part of the whole (Lightfoot). The Holy Spirit is the first installment. More is coming, more of the same. The present gift is only a fraction of that which is to come. The deposit of the Holy Spirit is a little bit of heaven now. There is much more to come later.

The word "our" is a return to the first person and brings together the Jewish and Gentile Christians mentioned above. By the presence of the Holy Spirit, both groups are guaranteed an inheritance.

This sealing and earnest are “until the redemption of the purchased possession” (1:14b). This refers to the redemption of the body at the return of Christ (4:30). Believers have been sealed and have received the Holy Spirit as an earnest until Christ returns “to the praise of His glory” (1:14c), that is, that God’s glory should be praised (Hodge).

The point of these verses is: praise God for His grace whereby He sealed us and gave us the earnest of the Holy Spirit. As thy hymn writer has said,

Now I belong to Jesus; Jesus belongs to me,
Not for the years of time alone, but for eternity.
(Norman J. Clayton)

Summary: Although this extended passage is in one long, complex sentence, the basic thought is simple: praise God for His grace whereby He has blessed us with every spiritual blessing.

God has blessed us by His grace. The Father has blessed us by choosing us and predestinating us. He has blessed us through the Son by redeeming us and revealing to us the eternal plan of God. He has blessed us through the Holy Spirit by sealing and giving us the Holy Spirit as an earnest of our inheritance. All of these blessings are by grace. The blessing of selection by the Father was by grace (1:6). The blessing of redemption by the Son was by grace (1:7). The blessing of the sealing of the Holy Spirit was by grace (1:14). Believers do not earn or deserve any of these blessings; God just graciously grants them. Count your blessings, name them one by one; weigh your blessings, ton by ton.

God has blessed us by grace to glorify His grace. Ephesians 1:6 says, “To the praise of the glory of His grace.” Ephesians 1:12 states, “To the praise of His glory.” Ephesians 1:14 repeats it, “To the praise of His glory.” Now, because of what God has done for us, we should praise Him. Count your blessings and bless God.

Praise God from whom all blessings flow,
Praise Him all creatures here below,
Praise Him above, ye heavenly hosts;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost;
As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be;
World without end, Amen (Gloria Patri)

PRAY FOR UNDERSTANDING

My wife and I were once in the financial services business. Both of us had a securities license and an insurance license. One of the things I learned from that experience was that people could know something and not understand it. For example, people knew they had a retirement plan, such as a 401(k), but they didn't know what was in it. In many cases, if I told them that what was inside that retirement plan was a mutual fund, they didn't know what a mutual fund was. I recently talked to an educated lady with over \$100,000 and a retirement plan. She had no idea what was in it and when I explained to her that her money was invested in mutual funds, she said she'd heard of the word but didn't understand what a mutual fund was.

I've had the same experience with people concerning their life insurance. They know they have life insurance but do not understand what kind of it they have. When I tell them that it is either a term or a universal life, they don't know what that means.

As a pastor, I've encountered the same thing with spiritual truths. Some people do not even know the basic spiritual truths, but what is surprising is that many Christians know but do not understand some of the most elementary truths of the New Testament. As a financial planner, I could explain what people did not understand and would usually get it, but as a pastor, I explained spiritual truth to people, and they "know" it but do not really understand it. Why is that? What does it take for people to understand spiritual truth?

Paul begins Ephesians by praising God for blessing believers with every spiritual blessing. Then, he expressed concern that they understood what he had just said. In that paragraph, he talks about what they need to understand and how they can gain that understanding. Ephesians 1:15-23 consists of a thanksgiving (1:15-16a) and a prayer (1:16b-23).

The Thanksgiving for Faith and Love

What Paul says, "Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you" (1:15-16a). "Therefore" refers to all of the previous paragraphs (Toussaint). Because they have received predestination and election, redemption and revelation, sealing and earnest, Paul thanks God for them (Hoehner, BKC).

Paul thanked God for them because of what he had heard about them. He founded the church at Ephesus (Acts 19-20). So why does he say, "After I heard"? Some use this to argue that this was a general letter, not a letter to the church in Ephesus (remember the "in Ephesus" textual problem in verse 1), but it is not unnatural for Paul so speak to such a large and constantly changing congregation, because he had not seen them in a long time. The expression need mean nothing more than he continued to hear good reports (Hodge).

Paul gave thanks after he heard of their faith in the Lord Jesus. In other words, he thanked God for their faith in the Lord Jesus. The word "Lord" is a synonym for "God." "His being the object of faith and the ground of trust to immortal beings is irreconcilable with all other assumptions than that He is the true God and eternal life" (Hodge).

Paul also heard of and thanked God for their love for all the saints (1:15). A life of faith produces a life of love (Gal. 5:6). The amazing thing is that Paul says, "for all the saints." Do you love *all* the saints?

When Paul thanked God for their faith and love. This was not an isolated incident. He did it all the time! He says, “I do not cease” (1:15-16), which, in the Greek text, is in the present tense. This does not mean that he prayed every minute, every day. Paul adds, “making mention of you in my prayers” (1:16b). The phrase “in my prayers” indicates that he did not cease to thank God for them at the time of his prayers, that is, whenever he had a formal prayer time (Toussaint). Paul not only praised; he prayed. In this case, his praise looks back and his prayers look forward (Pentecost). Do you have a regular prayer time? Do you thank God for faith and love when you see it?

The Prayer for Understanding

Understand The remainder of this paragraph is Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians. Although the prayer is one long, complex sentence, the basic request is simple and singular. Paul prays, “That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him” (1:17). Paul’s petition is that God the Father, the One to whom all glory belongs (Acts 7:2; 1 Cor. 2:8) and the One who sent Jesus Christ may give them understanding. Only that is not the way he says it. The text reads, “The spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him.” Does the word “spirit” mean the Holy Spirit (Westcott; Hodge) or an attitude within believers (Pentecost)? This cannot refer to the Holy Spirit because they already have Him (Toussaint; 1:13-14). Therefore, it must refer to a spirit or attitude within the individual (see “a spirit of gentleness” in 1 Cor. 4:21). On the other hand, no one can obtain a spirit of wisdom and revelation apart from the Holy Spirit (Isa. 11:2). Thus, the spirit of wisdom and revelation is a gift of the Holy Spirit (Jn. 14:26). The Spirit of God gives the spirit of understanding.

Wisdom is understanding of that which is theoretical (1:8). Revelation refers to illumination (Toussaint). This understanding and insight are to be in the realm of the knowledge of God (1:17). So Paul’s basic request is that they may have a spirit of understanding concerning God.

Paul continues, “The eyes of your understanding being enlightened” (1:18a). The Greek text says, “The eyes of your understanding having been enlightened.” Paul’s request for them is based on the fact that they had been enlightened (see 1:3-14). Believers have been somewhat blessed and enlightened (Hodge; Pentecost; Toussaint). Paul’s prayer is for deeper understanding.

What does Paul want us to understand concerning God’s ways and works? Beginning in the middle of verse 18, he explains the specifics. He says, “that you may know” (1:18b). The word “that” describes the purpose of the prayer. It gives the end in view for which Paul is praying. He wants them to know the things which follow. To be more specific, there are three things he wants them to know, each beginning with “what” (1:18-19).

Your Expectation The first is the “what is the hope of His calling” (1:18c). The Greek word translated “hope” means “expectation.” The idea is that believers have been called (1:4-5) by God to an inheritance (1:14). They now wait for, expect, that final redemption. Paul’s prayer is that they will understand that expectation they have because they have been called (Hodge). “Calling” is the subject of Ephesians. That is obvious from the fact that Paul describes the believer’s calling in Ephesians 1:3-14 and prays that they may understand it. After explaining this calling in more detail (2:1-3:21), Paul exhorts them to “walk worthily of the calling with which you were called” (4:1). Ephesians 4-6 defines a worthy walk.

Let me illustrate. Imagine being called by the President to join him in the Oval Office of the White House to be his advisor. While waiting for Air Force 1 to pick you up, someone might say, “I wish you understood exactly to what you were called.” In our case, only God can open the eyes

of a person's understanding so that he can know the spiritual calling. Hence, Paul prays for God to do just that.

His Inheritance The second specific is, "What are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints" (1:18d). Ephesians 1:14 speaks of the believer's inheritance; this verse speaks of God's inheritance. Our inheritance is "reserved in heaven" (1 Pet. 1:4). God's inheritance is "in the saints" (Hodge; Pentecost). Think of it. God inherits us! Furthermore, He considers this a glorious inheritance containing great riches.

Paul prays that you understand that you are God's glorious, rich inheritance. You're valuable! A mechanic can take material worth a few dollars and make an article worth hundreds. That's skill. Longfellow could take a worthless piece of paper, write a poem, and make it worth thousands of dollars. That's genius. Warren Buffett could sign his name to a check and make it worth millions. That's capital. God can take a worthless, sinful life, clean it up by the blood of Christ, put His Holy Spirit in it, and make it not only a blessing to humanity but an eternal trophy of His grace. That's salvation.

His Power The third specific is, "What is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe according to the working of His mighty power" (1:19). Paul's prayer is that they might apprehend just how great God's power is in believers. Paul heaps word upon word to describe God's power. These words describe the omnipotence of God. The Greek word translated "exceedingly" means "to throw something beyond the mark, hence, beyond all measure. The Greek word translated "working" is the one from which comes the English word "energy." The Greek word rendered "mighty" refers to a power that overcomes resistance and, in the New Testament, is used only of God, never of believers. The Greek word translated "power" (*dunimous*), is the one from which we get the word "dynamite." It contains the idea of prevailing power, absolute strength.

Calvin suggested that "power" is the root, "might" is the tree, and "working" is the fruit. Whatever the distinction, the accumulation expresses the highest form of power. It is not only great, but it is also exceedingly great. Hodge says Paul "prays that his readers may have right apprehensions of the greatness of the change which they had experienced. It was no mere moral reformation affected by rational considerations, nor was it a self-wrought change, but one due to the almighty power of God."

To describe just how great this power of God is, Paul mentions four manifestations of it (1:20-23). First, this power was the one "which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead" (1:20a). No human power can raise the dead. The same power that raised Christ from the grave raised believers from spiritual death (Hodge).

Second, Paul adds, "and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come" (1:20b-21). Christ rose and ascended and sat down at God's right hand, far above every conceivable authority, human and superhuman, whether present or future. The power of God is not only resurrection power; it is ascension power (Toussaint). The words "principality and power and might and dominion" have been interpreted as 1) the divisions of the Satanic realm because these expressions are used of his domain elsewhere, 2) the realm of good angels, 3) the sphere of earthly dignitaries, 4) every form of authority in every realm. "All" indicates that Paul means every kind of authority (Pentecost). By the power of God, Christ is seated above, but He is not yet reigning over every form of authority in every realm now and forever. He will do that later.

Third, this power was the one with which “He put all things under His feet” (1:22a). Christ is not only seated far above all authority, but all authority is under His feet. He has been given dominion over all creation (Hodge). This is an application of Psalm 8:6. This will be fully realized in the future (1 Cor. 15:27).

Fourth, this power was the one with which God “gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all (1:22b-23). The exalted Christ, seated as head of the universe, is made head of the church. The church is the body of Christ and the body is the fullness of Him who fills all in all. This last thought is complex, but the basic idea is that the church is the fullness of God in Christ. It completes Him (Toussaint). A head needs a body (Pentecost). Thus, we complete Christ at the same time He fills “all in all,” that is, He fills the church with His presence (Hodge).

Keep in mind that this power is to us who are believers. It was used to raise us from spiritual death (2:1-10) and strengthen us so Christ can dwell in our inner man by faith (3:16-17). The tragedy is that we don’t understand the power within us and, therefore, don’t utilize it.

A.T. Gibbs once wrote, “Imagine, if you will, a great printing press with the potential of turning out thousands of newspapers per hour. It is ready to begin operation but lies silent and helpless, incapable of producing anything. What is wrong? It has not been brought into contact with the vast energy reservoir generated by the nearby electric company. At last, the switch is thrown, and the contact is made. The power thus released rushes in, and the great press is alive with movement and productive capacity. Surely, this is a parable. All power is vested in our risen, glorified Lord at God’s right hand, but we must be in intimate contact with Him if it is to flow to us and through us. One of the laws of electricity is that it will never flow in where it cannot flow out. So it is with the power of the Spirit” (Gibbs, *Our Daily Bread*, April 12, 1971).

Summary: Because believers are blessed with all spiritual blessings (see “therefore” in 1:15), Paul thanked God for their faith and love and prayed that they would understand their calling, God’s inheritance, and God’s power.

Some believers do not know what spiritual blessing they have. William Randolph Hearst, the great newspaper publisher, invested a fortune in collecting art treasures worldwide. One day, he found a description of some valuable items he wanted to own. So, he sent his agent abroad to find them. After months of searching, the agent returned to report that he had finally found the items. They were in Hearst’s warehouse! Hearst and his employee had been searching frantically for treasures he already owned! Had he read the catalog of his holdings, he would have saved himself a lot of time, money, and trouble.

Some believers know about the spiritual blessing they have, but they do not fully understand what that means. Every believer needs to understand God’s program, His eternal program (we are His inheritance), and our part in it (His calling and power). We are constantly caught up in the “now;” what’s the fashion this fall? What’s “in” this winter? What’s being “shown” in the spring? What’s the fashion for the summer? What’s new? What’s the latest? What difference does it make—really? The temporal is so temporary. Last fall’s dress is out of style this fall. Last winter’s suit is out of date. Last spring’s “in” is “out.” Last summer’s fad has faded. The latest does not last. It may have changed your life, but not for long. Believers need to understand God’s program and their relationship to it.

Who can give us that kind of understanding? A pastor? A gifted Bible teacher? The Word of God? No! No human can do it, not even the unaided written Word of God can do it. Paul wrote Scripture in (Eph. 1:3-14) and prayed for believers to understand what he wrote. He knew only

God could open your understanding of spiritual realities. So you need to pray for understanding (Ps. 119:18) and for other believers to understand (1:17-18).

A little boy had an accident and was taken to the hospital. After he was made comfortable, a nurse brought him a large glass of milk. He looked longingly at it but did not pick it up. He came from a poor home where his hunger was seldom satisfied. If he ever received a glass of milk, it was only partially filled, and even that had to be shared with a sibling. Finally, he looked up at the nurse and asked, "How deep may I drink?" The nurse tenderly replied, "Drink all of it; there's more." When it comes to the power of God in your life, Paul wants you to understand there is enough and there's more.

WHY DID GOD SAVE YOU?

Why did God save you? In answer to that question, one lady said, “For fellowship.” She then quoted the Westminster Catechism, which teaches that men are created to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. There is truth in that answer, but did not the members of the Trinity have fellowship among themselves before man was created? Are the members of the Trinity not sufficient within themselves to satisfy that need? Why would the Trinity need humans for fellowship? Another lady said, “God saved us because we were lost and needed it.” Still another chimed in and added, “Because God loves us.” There is no doubt that God loves us or that He saved us who were lost and desperately needed it, but is that the reason He created and saved us?

One man gave the standard answer: “We are saved to serve.” Some saints get more specific and say, “Believers are saved to witness,” which is, after all, a form of service. It is clear God wants us to serve Him, but is that the ultimate reason He has decided to forgive us? Could not the angels have done a better job in service and even in witnessing?

Why did God save you? There may be multiple answers, but one answer, if not the ultimate answer, is in Ephesians 2:1-10. In this passage, Paul describes what we were like before we were saved (2:1-3) and how we got saved (2:4-10). In the process, he also reveals why God saved us.

Believers were Once Dead in Sin

Dead in Sin Paul begins by describing what all believers were like before they got saved. He says, “*And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins*” (2:1). The words “He made alive” are in italics, indicating they are not in the Greek text. In the Greek text, this sentence is elliptical, so the translators added these words from verse 5 to give the sense Paul had in mind (Eadie). Paul says that before their conversion, the Ephesians were dead. People are alive in some sense of the word. What does Paul mean by dead? At their conversion, they were made alive spiritually. Therefore, the death spoken of here is spiritual death. More specifically, death is separation. Physical death is the separation of the body and the soul; spiritual death is the separation of the person from God (Hodge). All humans were born alienated from God.

Calvinists explain spiritual death by pointing to a corpse in a casket. Their point is that unregenerate people are unable to make spiritual moves of any kind. In the words of Eadie, “Inability characterizes fallen man.” That is going too far. According to Paul, people are able to “grope” for God (Acts 17:27). He even goes so far as to say unsaved people can understand some things about God that render them inexcusable before God (Rom. 1:20).

The World Paul now delineates the state of sin in more detail. For example, he declares, “*In which you once walked according to the course of this world*” (2:2a). The Greek word translated “walk” is a figure of speech for conduct or lifestyle. The Greek word translated “according to” means “norm or standard.” Together, these two words say that when these believers were unbelievers, the standard by which they lived was the course of this world.

The Greek word translated “course” means “age,” and the one rendered “world” is the organized system that is opposite of God (Jas. 4:4; 1 Jn. 2:15). The governing principle of unbelievers (Hodge; Toussaint) is the values and attitudes of the world in which they live, particularly the current fads and fashions referred to in this verse as the age. They bow to peer

pressure. They conform to their present age. Their environment molds them. Unbelievers live like other unbelievers. They march to the drum of the world; they're certainly not alive to God.

Satan Furthermore, when these believers were unbelievers, they lived **"according to the prince of the power of the air the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience"** (2:2b). Their standard was not only the course of this world, it was the prince of the power of the air. The prince of the power of the air is Satan. Satan is further described as the spirit that works in the sons of disobedience. Unbelievers who are in a state of disobedience to God end up living according to the standard of Satan. They reject the standard of God, refusing to be governed by it and live according to the standard of Satan. Satan does not just work in the world; he works in people.

This is not a reference to devil worship. John explains that "the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one" (1 Jn. 5:19). This does not mean that all are demon-possessed. It does not even mean that Satan is personally at work in the lives of each unbeliever. Instead, it indicates that Satan influences the lives of all unbelievers. Satan influences non-Christians more than they are aware. They are certainly not alive to God. Jesus told Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan, because Satan, through the world, had influenced Peter's thinking.

The Flesh You may not have realized or even recognized that as an unbeliever, you are influenced by Satan, but you will readily identify with Paul's following description. He says, **"Among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh"** (2:3a). Notice that Paul changes from "you" (verses 1-2) to "we." Commentators agree the "we" is a reference to the Jews (Westcott; Alford; etc.). Before their conversions, the Ephesian believers' spiritual condition was not particular to them (Hodge). People are alike in this regard. All unbelievers live "in the lust of the flesh." The word "flesh" is not a reference to our physical body but to our sinful nature (Pentecost). People are born with a nature that is sinful and selfish. They are first and foremost concerned with their flesh, that is, themselves. The flesh is me, myself, and I-ism. They are not alive to God. The sinful, selfish nature has "lust," which does not necessarily mean sexual lust, though that may be included. Instead, it denotes desires, inordinate, unlawful desires.

Paul further describes unbelievers as **"fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind"** (2:3b). The mind, too, is affected, which is to say it has sinful desires and designs, contrary to God. Furthermore, unbelievers fulfill the sinful, selfish desires of their base nature and mind. Their actions are sinful because their appetites are sinful (Wiersbe). Sinners are certainly not alive to God.

An evangelist announced that he would speak on "Why Your Dog Does What It Does." He explained that a dog behaves like a dog because he has a dog's nature. He explained that if a cat's nature could be transplanted into the dog, the dog would act like a cat. When you want to know why humans act so sinfully, remember—it's their nature.

Wrath Paul has diagnosed unbelievers. They are spiritually dead, separated from God. In their alienation from God, they are governed by the world, the flesh, and the devil, all that is the opposite of and opposed to God. Therefore, it is not surprising that Paul concludes with **"and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others"** (2:3c). The phrase "as the others" is a reference to Gentiles (Toussaint). The expression "children of wrath" means they are the object of the displeasure of God (Hodge). In other words, both Jews and Gentiles are, by nature, the objects of God's wrath. The problem is their very nature, something innate, not something they were taught, learned, or acquired. People are born sinners and, thus, are objects of God's judgment. They are condemned already (Jn. 3:18). The sentence has been determined but not executed. Sinners are certainly not alive to God.

From a biblical point of view, what is people's most *basic* problem: 1) a bad background, 2) bad breaks, 3) just plain bad, or 4) none of the above? The answer is none of the above. People's most fundamental problem is not that they are bad or sick; it is that they are dead. They are not alive to God.

A funeral director riding to the cemetery with Dr. Walter Wilson, the physician who became a pastor, said, "How can an intelligent man like you follow Jesus who made an ignorant statement like this: 'Let the dead bury the dead'? How can a dead person bury someone? Who was Jesus talking about?" Dr. Wilson replied, "YOU, my friend." He went on to explain that the Lord was saying that the spiritually dead should bury the physically dead. The point is that all men are born separated from God—spiritually dead.

A young sculptor painstakingly worked on a statue of an angel. When Michelangelo came to view it, the young artist hid nearby and waited to hear what the master would say. Michelangelo looked intently at the sculpture and finally remarked, "It lacks only one thing." Hearing that, the young artist was heartbroken. For days, he could neither eat nor sleep. Finally, a friend became so concerned for him that he went to Michelangelo to ask what the statue lacked. The master replied, "It only lacks life; with life, it would be perfect."

God Makes Believers Alive by Grace

The next sentence, extending from Ephesians 2:4-7, is long and cumbersome, but the primary thought is simple. Paul says, "But God ... made us alive" (2:4-5). We were dead (2:1-3); God made us alive. That's the sum of Ephesians 2:1-6. God resurrected us; He regenerated us; He gave us life, spiritual life. Now believers are alive to Him. The Lord did not come to make bad men good or good men better but to make dead men alive.

God Loved us Paul begins by saying, "But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us" (2:4-5a). God, who is by nature love (1 Jn. 4:8), loved us with great love. The Greek word translated "love" means "to seek the highest good for the one loved." Because God loved us, He was merciful; He was rich in mercy. Mercy is compassion. Because God wanted what was best for us, He was compassionate. True mercy is always based on love (Toussaint). God's motive in redemption is His love and mercy (Westcott).

The greatness of God's love and compassion is highlighted by the fact that this was "even when we were dead in trespasses" (2:5b). God was fully aware of the spiritual condition of unbelievers, which Paul so vividly portrays in Ephesians 2:1-3 and which he refers to here. Yet God loved the unlovely and was compassionate toward the corrupt.

God made us Alive Paul says God "made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)" (2:5c). In chapter 1, Paul declared that God, by His great and mighty power, raised Christ from the dead (1:19-20). He also said that some power was exercised "toward us who believe" (1:19). The connection between Ephesians 1:19-23 and Ephesians 2:1-10 is the thought that "the same power that raised Christ from the dead raised us from the dead.

We were made alive *with Christ*. In the Greek text, "made us alive" is in the past tense. In other words, since we were united to Christ, His death is our death, His resurrection is our resurrection, and His exaltation is our exaltation. When the head rose, the body rose (Hodge). Believers are now alive to God.

At this point, Paul inserts a parenthetical thought that God saved us by his grace. That sums it up. Grace is unmerited, undeserved favor. The word "saved" means delivered. In this passage, it means "delivered from spiritual death and the severe wrath of God (2:1-3). Notice also that it is

synonymous with being made alive. Regeneration and “being saved” are the same thing. In the Greek text, “having been saved” is in the perfect tense (past action with present results), which means Paul is saying believers have been, and are saved (Pentecost; Toussaint).

Thus, God saved believers by His marvelous mercy and great grace. Mercy does not give them what they deserve. Grace does give them what they do not deserve. Both were manifested toward them in the cross of Christ. He took their sin, which they deserved, and because He died for sin, they get eternal life, which they do not deserve.

God Raised Us God also “raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (2:6). Again, in chapter 1, Paul declares that God, by His mighty power, raised Christ from the dead and “seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places” (1:20). Now he insists that because of our union with Christ, God’s power has not only made us alive but has raised us up and made us sit in heavenly places. Believers are in Christ. They are united to Him, not just associated with Him (Pentecost). Christ is in the heavenlies, so believers are in the heavenlies. The spiritual life given to believers includes ascension to heavenly places which is where God dwells (Hodge).

Wiersbe says, “We’re not raised from the dead and left in the graveyard” (Wiersbe). Our position, our citizenship, is in heaven (Phil. 3:20). So far as God is concerned, and He is the one who counts, the believer in Christ not only has a seat reserved for him in heaven, but he is seated in it now!

Believers, then, have been delivered from spiritual death and wrath by God’s great power and gracious love. They neither deserve to be saved nor could they save themselves. They were hopeless and trapped in sin, but God, by mercy and grace, saved them. Believers are alive to God.

Centuries ago, in another land, a poor mother with a sick child scraped together what money she could to buy fruit from a wealthy prince who had a large vineyard. Finding the caretaker, she offered to buy a cluster of the luscious grapes but was turned away with a curt, “They are not to be sold! Do you think the prince grows these to be peddled by a huckster?” Not easily discouraged, she came back later to speak to someone else. This time, she was ushered in to see the princess, who immediately handed her a basket filled with the vineyard’s finest fruit. Placing it into the hands of the mother, she said, “My husband does not sell his grapes, but he is always ready to give them to the poor.” Likewise, God does not sell His salvation; He gives it away.

The question is, why does God save us?

God Made Believers Alive by Grace to Demonstrate His Grace

The Purpose Paul states the purpose of God saving us when He said, “that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us” (2:7). The Greek word translated “that” is a word that indicates purpose. God saved us so that in eternity future, He could show—demonstrate, and exhibit, we would say “Put on display”—exceeding riches of His grace. The phrase “the riches of His grace” was used in Ephesians 1:7 to explain the basis of our redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sin. These riches of His grace are expressed “in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” Resurrection demonstrates God’s power (1:19; 2:1, 2:5). Salvation demonstrates God’s grace (2:7). God saved us by grace to demonstrate His grace.

The Confirmation Paul confirms and elaborates on that (see “for” in verse 8; Hodge). He says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (2:8-9). Believers can demonstrate God’s grace in eternity

because salvation is by grace in time (Toussaint). It is by faith, which excludes merit (Hodge). It is “not of yourselves” (2:8); it is of God.

Some interpret the phrase “and that not of yourselves” to mean that the faith is not of you (for example, Hodge). They conclude that God gives believers faith, but that cannot be Paul’s meaning here. In the Greek of the New Testament, gender agreement (masculine, feminine, or neuter) is used to identify the antecedent of a demonstrative pronoun. In Ephesians 2:8, Paul uses a neuter demonstrative pronoun (that). The question is, “What is the antecedent of the pronoun “that.” Is it “faith?” The answer is “No.” Faith cannot be the antecedent of “that” because faith is a feminine noun. The antecedent of “that” cannot be grace for the same reason. Grace is also a feminine noun. The neuter demonstrative pronoun can look back to a phrase or clause. In the case of Ephesians 2:8, the conceptual antecedent of “that” is salvation. It is salvation that is not of us; it is of God (Westcott; Robinson). Romans 6:23 says the gift of God is eternal life.

In his commentary on Ephesians 2:8-9, Calvin says, “Many persons restrict the word gift to faith alone. But Paul is only repeating, in other words, the former sentiment. His meaning is not that faith is the gift of God, but that *salvation* is given to us by God, or that we obtain it by the gift of God” (Calvin, italics added).

Salvation is not of works, lest anyone should boast. If people could save themselves by self-effort, they would get the glory, but since salvation is by grace, the glory goes to God alone.

Paul further explains why salvation is not of us or by our works when he says, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (2:10). The Greek word translated “workmanship” means “that which is made.” It is the Greek word from which we get our English word “poem.” God makes and manufactures those who are alive to Him. We are His work of art, His masterpiece. As someone has said, the master artist is “the One who paints the clouds with rainbows, decks the flowers with their breathtaking hues, and makes ‘everything beautiful in its time.’”

God created us in Christ Jesus *for* good works. Salvation is not “*of* works” (2:9); it is “*for* good works (2:10). We do not create or perform good works to get to heaven. Instead, God creates us and instructs us to walk in good works. If God saves us *for* good works, good works cannot be the basis on which He saves us (Hodge). Thus, people cannot boast in eternity. God will get the glory.

Calvinism teaches that when people trust Jesus Christ, they *will* work. If they don’t work, they were never saved. This passage, as well as others (Titus 3:8), says believers *should* walk in good works, not they *will* walk in good works.

God planned beforehand that believers should walk in good works. He delivered them from a walk according to the course of this world (2:3) so that they would walk in good works according to His will and Word. God made the sun so that it could shine, fish so they could swim, and birds so they could fly. Likewise, He made Christians so they could perform good works. These good works are discussed in Ephesians 4-6. One author talked about believers he knew who performed good works. Richard Nies, the shoe store owner, acquired little wealth because he was so generous. If a poor family needed shoes, he gave a free pair to each of the children. Joe Pyaard, a generous businessman, had the “fastest billfold in the state” because whenever he saw a need, he was quick to meet it. Aunt Christine was always ready to care for a family when the mother was ill or had a new baby (*Our Daily Bread*, January 23, 1989).

Dr. Harry Ironside tells the story of a man who stood up in a testimony meeting to talk about his conversion. The man spoke of Christ and His work but said nothing about what he had done. The leader of the meeting said to him, “You have told us only of the Lord’s work in your heart, but you didn’t relate how you did your part first.” The man replied, “I didn’t forget to tell you

about that. Well, my contribution was to run away from God for over thirty years as fast as my sins could carry. Then Jesus took out after me until I was finally caught and rescued. That was His part.” That’s the story. The man was sinful and separated from God, and by His grace, God saved him so that he could perform good works instead of performing evil deeds.

Summary: God makes spiritually dead people alive, that is, He saves them and seats them in heavenly places by grace to demonstrate His grace in the ages to come. In short, God saves us by grace to demonstrate His grace.

If you have not trusted Jesus Christ, you need to do so. God, in His grace, has done everything necessary for you to have a relationship with Him. Salvation is not of us. God gave His Son to die for you. All you can do is trust in Jesus Christ and Him alone. Salvation is not by works, so trust Christ and be alive to God. Salvation is not a goal to be achieved but a gift to be received. It is not by the merit of men, but by the mercy of God; not by the goodness of men, but by the grace of God.

If you have trusted Christ, you need to know that God wants you to walk in good works. He chose you before the foundation of the world (1:4), He loves you and wants to have a relationship with you (2:4-6), but He also determined beforehand that you should walk in good works, not to get to heaven, but because you’re already there! (2:6, 10).

If you have trusted Christ, you need to know and remember that God saved you to demonstrate His grace. Before the Civil War, when blacks were slaves in the South, two white men, riding on horses, came upon a Black lady washing clothes on a scrub board in a creek bed and singing hymns. The men knew her and she knew them. As they stopped to water their horses, they kidded her, saying, “Mamie, you don’t think God is going to take the likes of you to heaven, do you? Why, you are just a slave!” Looking up from her scrub board, she said, “Yessuh, God is goin’ a take me to heaven.” When one of the men asked why God would do a thing like that, she said, “I’z tells you. When I get to heaven, God is goin’ a take a No. 10 washtub, turn it upside down and put me on top of it. Then He’s goin’ a call all his chilluns roun’ and say, ‘Look at what My grace did.’”

That’s why God saves anybody, to show off His grace.

REMEMBER

We all forget more than we care to remember. Sir John Davies, a poet of a past century, said,

Skill comes so slow and life so fast doth lie,
We learn so little and forget so much.

We all do it. The schoolboy forgets to have his mother sign his schoolwork. Teens forget to make their beds. Mother forgets to wash Dad's favorite shirt for Friday night, and Dad forgets Mother's birthday. Who among us has not forgotten where we placed our keys, glasses, checkbook, etc.? Robert Louis Stevenson wrote, "I have a grand memory for forgetting."

There are things we tend to forget that God does not want us to forget; He wants us to remember. Let's look at one of those things that God wants us always to remember and then consider why.

Gentile Believers were Separated from God and His Program

Paul begins this new paragraph with the words, "Therefore remember" (2:11a), as if to say, "In view of what you once were and now are, don't forget what I am about to write." What is it that Paul desired believers to remember? What follows in Ephesians 2:11-22 are two basic concepts. The first is that Gentile believers were once separated from God and His program. Paul employs several images to communicate that concept.

You were Gentiles For example, he says, "You were once Gentiles in the flesh" (2:11b). Until now, "you" has been used in Ephesians of Gentile believers. This is the first time that Paul calls the recipients Gentiles. The expression "in the flesh" suggests their distinction between external and temporary nature (Robinson).

Paul explains, "Who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands" (2:11c). In the Old Testament, God called Abraham and made a covenant with him to give him the land of Palestine. The sign of the covenant was circumcision (Gen. 15:7-21; 17:1-27). God set apart Abraham and his descendants, that is, the Jews, to, among other things, be His chosen channel of blessing to the nations of the world (Gen. 12:3).

Over the years, the sign of the covenant, circumcision, began to be viewed by the Jews as proof of a relationship with God. Of course, they missed the point. It was not circumcision but faith that related a person to God (Gen. 15:6; Gal. 3:6-9; Rom. 2:28-29). Be that as it may, those who were called "the circumcision," that is, the Jews, called all Gentiles "the uncircumcision," meaning they were separated from God. This physical difference, implying to the Jews a spiritual difference, also became a social boundary and barrier between themselves and the uncircumcised Gentiles. Uncircumcised Gentiles, then, were separated from God, His program, and His people.

You were without Christ Paul says, "that at that time you were without Christ" (2:12a). "Without Christ" does not mean that individuals were separated from Christ (although that is true of Gentiles and, for that matter, many Jews), but that Gentiles as a group had no Messiah (Toussaint). Being without a Messiah implies being without redemption or access to God (Hodge), but the primary idea is that they had no future expectation of a Messiah.

You were Aliens Furthermore, these Gentile believers, when they were unbelievers, were “being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise” (2:12b). As Gentiles, they were alienated, estranged from the company and community God promised to bless with forgiveness and future hope (Westcott). God not only promised, He made formal binding covenants with Israel. Notice that Paul says “covenants” (plural) and “promise” (singular). There were several covenants in the Old Testament, including the Abrahamic, Davidic, and New Covenant. There was only one promise, the promise of a Messiah (Toussaint). While some Gentiles were admitted into Judaism as proselytes, Gentiles as a whole were excluded. They were strangers to these covenants, which promised so much.

You were without Hope Paul concludes, “having no hope and without God in the world” (2:12c). Therefore, Gentiles had no hope, no expectation for the future. The Greek construction seems to imply that they *felt* hopeless (Pentecost; Toussaint). Whether they felt it or not, they did not expect a Messiah or a Messianic age. Although they had gods by the hundreds and thousands, they were without God in the world. Before these Gentile believers came to Christ, they were separated from God and His program. They had no relationship with God, no meaning in their existence, and no direction in their lives; no hope, no expectation for the future.

A man described his visit as a college student to the psychiatric ward with a group of students to observe various types of mental illness. One man in the unit was called “No Hope Carter.” He was a victim of venereal disease, going through the final stages when the brain is affected. He had been told by the doctors that there was no known cure. The disease would eventually affect his mind and end in death. Gradually, his brain deteriorated and he became more and more despondent. The visitor, a college student, wrote, “When I saw him in his small barred room, about two weeks before he died, he was pacing up and down in mental agony. His eyes stared blankly and his face was drawn and ashen. Over and over, he muttered those two forlorn and fateful words: ‘No hope! No hope! No hope!’ He said nothing else and no one could pierce the veil of darkness that enveloped him” (*Our Daily Bread*, 5/10/1977).

God wants us as believers to remember that we were once separated from Him and His program and, thus, without hope in the world. Like the Gentile pagans in the ancient world, we may have many gods but no real hope. Apart from Jesus Christ, any expectation of the future in eternity with God is a figment of the imagination.

Jews and Gentiles are Reconciled in One Body

Ephesians 2:11-22 naturally falls into two parts. Ephesians 2:11 says, “You once were,” whereas Ephesians 2:13 states, “But now, in Christ Jesus you.” The first two verses of this section describe what Gentile believers were like before they were in Christ, and verses 13-22 discuss what Gentile believers are like now that they are in Him. These are the two concepts Paul desires they remember, namely: 1) Gentile believers were once separated from God and from the Jews; 2) in Christ, Gentile believers are made near to God and are united to Jews in one new body.

Made Near Paul announces, “But now in Christ Jesus, you who were once far off have been made near by the blood of Christ” (2:13). The imagery comes from the Old Testament. God dwelt in the Tabernacle and later in the Temple. Israel approached Him only by the shedding of the blood of a sacrificial animal. In that sense, they were “near.” In their view, Gentiles were “far off.” When the Jews received a proselyte, they said they were “making him near” (Hodge). Geographical measurement came to symbolize moral distance (Pentecost). Using that imagery, Paul explains

that Gentile believers were once “far off,” but now in Christ are made near His blood, which was shed as a sacrifice for sin (Jn. 1:29).

A more familiar illustration to the modern mind is the reconciliation of an estranged father and son. Suppose the son rebelled against the father’s rules and ran away. They were separated, even far off. From the father’s point of view, the son would be far off. Now, if a third party made it possible for the runaway rebel to return, the two separated, divided people would be near, united. Likewise, because Christ died for our sins to bring us near to God, we are reconciled to God when we trust in Christ.

United in one Body Being brought near to God has another interesting ramification. Paul goes on to explain (see “for,” in verse 14) that “For He Himself is our peace” (2:14a). This statement is popularly understood to mean that Jesus Christ is our peace with God. While that is true (Rom. 5:1), that is not Paul’s meaning here; at least, that does not exhaust Paul’s meaning. By “our,” Paul is not referring to the individual believer in God. He has Gentile and Jewish believers in mind, as is obvious from the remainder of verses 14 and 15 (esp. “to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace,” in 2:15). Christ is the peace between Jewish believers and Gentile believers.

What! How can that be? There is great division and friction between Jews and Christians.

Christ is our peace because He “has made both one” (2:14b). This is the key to the passage and, to a degree, the point of the book. The “both one” is a reference to “one body” (2:16), which is the church (1:22-23). In the church, Christ is peace for believing Jews and believing Gentiles.

Christ “has broken down the middle wall of division between us” (2:14c). Various interpretations have been suggested for “the middle wall of division.” Part of the problem is that this expression is the only occurrence in the New Testament. One view claims that this refers to the literal wall in the Temple between the court of the Gentiles and the court of the Jews. Gentiles were not allowed to go beyond that wall in the Temple (Robinson; Toussaint). The problem with that interpretation is that the wall was still standing when Paul wrote this letter. Others contend that this is a reference to the veil in the Temple, which hung between the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies (Alford), but that separated the Jews from God, not the Gentiles from the Jews. Some say it is the Mosaic Law (Pentecost), but the Law was not a wall. Perhaps, the best explanation is that Paul did not have any particular literal wall in mind but is only alluding to the spiritual enmity between Jews and Gentiles in a graphic way (Hoehner, BKC). Christ destroyed the enmity—at least between Jewish and Gentile believers (2:15).

Paul explains how Christ established peace between Jewish and Gentile believers in one body. He says, “Having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace” (2:15). The cause of the enmity between believing Jews and believing Gentiles was “the law of commandments contained in ordinances,” which is the Law in all of its forms (Hodge). It is not part of the Law but all of the Law (Pentecost). “This law, moral, and ceremonial, its Decalogue, its ordinances, its rites, was entirely done away in and by the death of Christ (Alford).

If the Law had been allowed to stand, the animosity between Jewish believers and Gentile believers would have flourished. The former group would have been seeking to help keep the Law and would have been insisting that the Gentile believers do the same. The latter group would have either been indifferent or would have resisted the rules, regulations, and rituals of the Law. Christ abolished the Law by His death on the cross (“in His flesh” in 2:15). The word “abolished” means “to make idle or inactive, to render inoperative or invalid, to abrogate, abolish.” Hodge explains

that Christ, by His death, has freed us from the Law, not by sovereignly setting it aside, but by rendering it no longer binding by satisfying its demands.

The purpose (“so as” in Greek introduces a purpose clause) of Christ abolishing and abrogating the Law was so He could “create in Himself one new man from the two” (2:15). This “one new man” is the same as “both one” (2:14) and “one body” (2:16). This one new man is the church (1:22-23). The union of believing Jews and believing Gentiles in one new entity resulted in “making peace.” As Hoehner points out, “In the church, Gentiles do not become Jews nor do Jews become Gentiles. Instead, believing Jews and Gentiles become Christians, a whole new single entity” (Hoehner, BKC).

Chrysostom, the silver-tongued orator/preacher of the fourth century, said, “It was as if God took a statue of lead and a statue of silver, melted them down into one and made a statue of gold. The Gentiles were the statue of lead, the Jews were the statue of silver, and the church is the statue of gold.”

Reconciled in one Body The second purpose Christ had in destroying the enmity (2:15) was “that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity” (2:16). The reconciliation in Ephesians 2:14 was between Jewish and Gentile believers. Here, it is between believers, Jewish or non-Jewish and God (Pentecost). Christ died on the cross to put to death the enmity between God and man (Col. 1:20-21). He was put to death, yet He put to death the enmity. Thus, having dealt the death blow to sin, Christ could now reconcile Jew and Gentile to God “in one body,” that is, the church (1:22-23).

Having accomplished the work of making peace (2:15), Christ preached peace. Selecting words from Isaiah 52:7 and Isaiah 52:19 (Robinson), Paul put it like this: “And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near” (2:17). When did Christ preach peace? He did not do it during His earthly ministry; at least, He did not go to those who were afar off, that is, the Gentiles (Toussaint). Therefore, this must be what He said after the ascension through the apostles (Acts 1:1; 2 Cor. 5:18-21; Pentecost; Toussaint). There is no doubt that this is what Paul had in mind because the peace that was preached was on the basis of Christ’s death. At any rate, peace is preached to those who are afar off, that is, Gentiles (2:13), and to those who are near, namely the Jews.

Access As a result of the preaching of peace, “through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father” (2:18). Both Jews and Gentiles have access to the Father through the Son by the Spirit. The work of the Trinity provides access to God the Father. The word “access” was used of a priest’s entrance into the presence of God.

Hoehner summarizes Ephesians 2:14-18: “In four ways in 2:14-18, Paul emphasizes that the two (Jew and Gentile) have been united: (1) ‘the two’ ... are made ‘one’ (v. 14), (2) ‘one new man’ is created ‘out of the two’ (v. 15), (3) ‘in this one body ... both’ ... are reconciled (v. 16), and (4) ‘both’ ... ‘have access ... by one Spirit’ (v. 18). Nothing could be clearer than the fact that this new union replaces the enmity” (Hoehner, BKC).

Years ago, the Prince of Wales visited the capital city of India. A barrier had been set up to keep back the masses of people who wanted to catch a glimpse of the prince. When the prince arrived, he shook hands with the political dignitaries. Then, looking over their heads to the crowd, he requested that the barriers be taken down. They were quickly removed and all the people, regardless of social rank, had free access to the heir of the British Empire. Sometime later, when the prince returned to that district again, 10,000 outcasts waited under a banner that read, “Prince of the Outcasts.” Likewise, Jesus Christ is the Prince of the outcasts. He has taken down the barrier.

God wants believers to remember that they were brought near to Him and to others in one new body.

Gentile Believers are Part of God's Program

The conclusion (“therefore” in verse 19) is given in Ephesians 2:19-22. Using three different figures, Paul explains that Gentile believers are no longer separated but are now part and parcel of God's program. Paul compares the unity of Jewish and Gentile believers in the church to 1) a city, 2) a family, and 3) a building.

Fellow Citizens They are fellow citizens with the saints. Paul says, “Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints” (2:19a). Earlier, he had said that these Gentile believers were once “strangers” and “aliens” from God's people and God's program (2:12). Now, “in Christ” (2:13), they were no longer “strangers” (2:19, “strangers” is the same Greek word here as in 2:12). Neither are they “foreigners” (2:19). There is a difference between the Greek words translated “strangers” and “foreigners.” The latter, by payment of a tax, had certain limited rights. The difference was similar to that of a visiting foreigner to America and a resident alien. Both were noncitizens (Robinson). Believers are no longer noncitizens; they are fellow citizens with the saints.

Family Members Paul adds, “And members of the household of God (2:19b). In other words, believers, whether Jews or Gentiles, are members of the family of God. They are housemates together in God's household. Christians are not just guests in God's house; they are members of the family, God's children, and housemates.

Some see the expression “members of the household of God” as meaning that Gentiles have become part of the company of the redeemed of all ages, that is, that they are Abraham's seed (Gal. 3:29; see Calvin). Even if that is the interpretation of the phrase, which is doubtful, it does not mean that the church inherits all the blessings promised to Israel, and, therefore, there is no distinction between Israel and the church. There is a sense in which believers are Abraham's seed and partakers of part of the blessing of the Abrahamic covenant (Gal. 3:29), but that does not mean that the church fulfills *all* the provisions of the Abrahamic covenant. This verse only says Gentile believers are the household of God, not the Israel of God. (The Israel of God in Galatians 6:16 refers to believing Jews.) Besides, Gentile believers are also part of the church, which did not exist in the Old Testament (2:20, 22).

Hoehner puts it like this: “They became part of the company of the redeemed of all ages, beginning with Adam. However, this does not mean that the church inherits the blessings promised to Israel. There are three reasons for this: 1) in the context, Paul was discussing the ‘one new man’ (v. 15), the ‘one body’ (v. 16). This does not mean that Gentiles were incorporated into Israel, but that believing Jews and Gentiles were incorporated into one new ‘humanity.’ 2) Paul specifically stated that Gentiles were incorporated ‘with God's people’ and are in ‘God's household’ (v. 19); He did not use the word ‘Israel.’ If Paul meant that the church became ‘Israel,’ he would have named both groups as he did in verse 11. 3) Paul explained that this new relationship is ‘built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus Himself as the chief cornerstone’ (2:20). This began on the day of Pentecost, not in the Old Testament. True, Gentile believers became part of the redeemed of all ages (v. 19), but their being incorporated with Jewish believers into ‘one new man’ distinctly began when the church came into being at Pentecost” (Hoehner, BKC).

Fellow Members in the Church Gentile believers are not only fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God; they are also members of the church described here as a building, a holy temple, a building in which God dwells. Paul says, “Having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets” (2:20a). The apostles and New Testament prophets (3:5; Hodge) are the foundation of the church in that they came first and their preaching laid the foundation for the church (Pentecost). This proves that the church was not in the Old Testament.

“Jesus Christ Himself [is] the chief cornerstone” (2:20b). In ancient building practices, the entire building was lined up with the chief cornerstone. Every part of the building had to be lined up with it (Hoehner, BKC). The apostles’ and prophets’ foundation must be properly aligned with Christ, and so must every other part.

Paul continues the use of this figure: “In whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord” (2:21). Christ is not only the cornerstone, He is the building, or at least the whole building is dependent upon Him for growth (Hodge). The Greek word translated “joined together” denotes a skillful fitting of the various parts of the building. It is not haphazardly thrown together. Jewish believers and Gentile believers are being skillfully fitted into the building, which is a Temple. The imagery breaks down at this point, for Paul says this building “grows.” Buildings do not grow, but the church does. It is a living, growing organism.

The goal of this temple is to be a dwelling place for God. Paul says, “In whom you also are being built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit” (2:22). In the Old Testament, God’s glory dwelt in the Tabernacle and later the Temple. In the New Testament, the Holy Spirit dwells in each individual believer (Jn. 14:17). Therefore, each believer is a “temple” (1 Cor. 6:19). This passage, however, is not referring to a building or individuals but to the corporate body of believers. The Lord inhabits the church in the person of the Holy Spirit.

Overjoyed at the acceptance she found in a church, a young lady who had been saved out of drug addiction said, “I thank the Lord every day for His forgiveness and for His mercy in delivering me from the habit that was killing me, but I also want to tell you that I’m grateful I finally found a family. I came from a broken home and never had the love of the father or mother, but you have given me everything I missed” (*Our Daily Bread*, 7/7/1976).

Summary: Remember that Gentile believers were once separated from God and His program and are now not only reconciled to Him but are, along with Jewish believers, united into one new body, which is the very habitation of God.

Believers need to remember the pit from which they were dug. We walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the par the air, and conducted ourselves in the desires of our flesh (2:2-3). We were without Christ (2:12), aliens from God and His program (2:12) and without hope (2:12). Remembering the pit from which we were dug will remind them to praise God. The Psalmist said, “I waited patiently for the Lord; and He inclined to me, and heard my cry. He also brought me out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my steps. He has put a new song in my mouth—praise to our God” (Ps. 40:1-3).

Believers need to remember the position in which they have been placed. We have been chosen (1:4), predestinated (1:5), redeemed (1:7), forgiven (1:7), and sealed by the Holy Spirit (1:13). We not only have an inheritance (1:11, 14), we are His inheritance (1:18). Instead of being far off, we have been brought near (2:13), then united in one body with all of the believers (2:14) have been reconciled to God and all other believers (2:16), and have access to God (2:18). We are fellow citizens (2:19), family members of the household of God (2:19), and fellow members of the body of Christ (2:20-22).

When Henry George was fighting to be elected mayor of New York City, he was called to address a mass meeting of working men. The chairman of the meeting introduced him as the friend of the working man, but when Mr. George rose to his feet, he emphatically declared, "I am not the friend of the working man!" Instantly, a strange silence and bewilderment fell over the crowd. Then he went on to say, "I am the friend of man—man simply as man, regardless of any accidental or superfluous distinction of race, creed, color, class, function, or employment." In a similar fashion, Jesus Christ has reconciled Jewish and Gentile saints to God and to one another. He is the Savior of both.

Years ago, an American tourist in Paris purchased an inexpensive necklace at a trinket shop. When he cleared customs in New York, he was required to pay a significant duty for it, which aroused his curiosity. He had it appraised, hoping to sell it for whatever he could. After looking at the object under a powerful magnifying glass, one jeweler said, "I'll give you \$25,000 for it." Greatly surprised, the man decided to have it examined by another expert. When he did, he was offered \$10,000 more for it. "What do you see that is so valuable about this little necklace?" asked the owner. "Look through that glass," replied the jeweler. There before his eyes was an inscription that read, "From Napoleon Bonaparte to Josephine." That necklace was extremely valuable because of who once owned it and because of what was inside. If you have trusted Jesus Christ, you are valuable indeed because of who owns you and what He has put inside.

DON'T BE DISCOURAGED

Discouragement is part of life. The college student gets discouraged when the one class that she needs is either not offered or is full. A mother with young children once said to me, “The house, the car, and the kids keep me financially and emotionally broke. The man who has tried for months to find a job gets discouraged.

Discouragement can be part of the ministry. Pastors get discouraged when the church doesn't grow. Church members who work hard in the church get discouraged when so few help. Just as a church begins to grow, something will happen to prevent it. Something will hinder the work: the lack of finances, government regulations, a key leader moving away or getting sick, a conflict breaking out, people who should respond don't, etc. If you are in God's work, sooner or later, you will face a discouraging situation. If you are successful, you must know how to handle it. Consider the circumstances in Paul's life and learn how to handle discouragement.

God Gave Paul a Revelation of the Church

Paul starts to Pray Paul began his thought by saying, “For this reason” (3:1a), that is, because of your great privilege in being part of this new body. After writing about the fact that Gentiles are now not only a part of God's program but a part of a new body that includes Jews and Gentiles, Paul apparently started to return to the prayer, which he interrupted at the end of chapter 1. That is obviously what's going on because he began a sentence (3:1), but before he finished it, he interrupted himself and commenced another sentence on another subject. Then, he repeats the first sentence he began in verse 1 (3:14) and prays. So apparently, he started to pray in Ephesians 3:1 and postponed it to say something else first and resumed it in Ephesians 3:14 (Hodge; Pentecost). What made him change his mind in the middle of a sentence?

God gave Paul a Revelation He continues, “I, Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles” (3:1b). “I, Paul” is an emphatic introduction of his personal name (Robinson). The word “I” would have been sufficient to refer to himself. He had already told them who the author was (1:1). He does this, however, because he wishes to emphasize that he is “the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles.” His preaching of the gospel, which allowed Gentiles into the new body, led to his imprisonment (Hodge). Notice he recognized he was the prisoner of the Lord, not Rome.

At this point, Paul felt that they would feel bad for him, even be discouraged, because the great apostle of the Gentiles was in jail. Possibly, he also wanted to explain his relationship to the new body further, which he discussed in Ephesians 2:11-22. No doubt both of these motives were involved. At any rate, Paul interrupted his train of thought and talked about his relationship to the new body (3:2-13), which is designed to prevent discouragement among his readers concerning him (3:14).

The Revelation had been Hidden Paul commences his “digression” (Toussaint) with, “If indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you” (3:2). “If” in the Greek text is a first-class condition, meaning it could be translated “since” or “in as much as.” The words “for you” refer to them as Gentiles (Hodge). There is no question that they had heard that God had graciously given him a special stewardship of grace. After all, he ministered at Ephesus for three years!

Paul explains that this economy of grace was a revelation given to him. He says, “How that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I wrote before in a few words, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ)” (3:3-4). The Greek word translated “mystery” means “secret.” From a study of the word “mystery,” Ryrie concludes that in the Old Testament, it was something unknown until revealed, and, in the New Testament, it is something secret and something deep (Ryrie, “The Mystery in Ephesians 3,” pp. 25-26). Simply put, God revealed a secret to Paul (Hodge). Paul says he wrote to them concerning the sacred secret, which is undoubtedly a reference to Ephesians 2:11-22 (Pentecost; Toussaint). When they read and contemplated those words, they would understand Paul’s knowledge and insight of Christ’s secret (Pentecost).

This sacred secret was special in that it had not been revealed to previous generations. Paul made a point of that: “Which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets” (3:5). This verse seems to be clear. The divine secret, which had not been made known, has now been revealed by the Holy Spirit, not just to Paul, but to the apostles and prophets.

However, the little word “as” has sparked a great debate. Some say it is a simple comparative and interpret it to mean that the mystery was *partially* revealed in the Old Testament and is now *fully* revealed in the New Testament (Westcott; Hodge; Covenant theologians). Others insist that the word “as” can be used in other ways and that this secret was not revealed in the Old Testament (Pentecost; Toussaint; dispensationalist). The question is, “Was the secret revealed at all in the Old Testament?”

The answer is “No.” The word “as” can be used in other ways than as a comparative. Besides, even if the word “as” in this verse is comparative, it does not mean that there is a comparison between a “little” and a “lot.” It could be a comparison between none and some, as to say to a blind man that the sun does not shine in the night *as* in the day (Pentecost). In other words, the comparison may be a contrast. It is one thing to say, “I am not as good a baseball player as you are.” It is quite another to say, “I am not a baseball player as you are.” In this passage, there is no doubt that this secret was not revealed in the Old Testament. Paul says it was “hidden” (3:9). It has been “revealed,” which means “to uncover, unveil,” to him and other apostles and prophets (3:3, 5), and that this revelation was “now” (3:5). In the parallel passage in Colossians 1:26, there is no “as.” “This statement there is unequivocal—the mystery was not known *at all* in the Old Testament times” (Ryrie, “The Mystery in Ephesians 3,” p. 29, italics added).

What is this secret which was not revealed at all in the Old Testament but has been revealed to Paul and the apostles, which Paul wrote to the Ephesians? Paul has already written about it (3:3-4; 2:15-16), but he states it again.

The Revelation concerned the Church In defining this sacred secret, Paul says, “That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel” (3:6). The divine secret, revealed for the first time in the New Testament, is that the Gentiles would be fellow heirs with the Jews and, through the gospel, partakers of God’s promise *in one body* (Pentecost; Toussaint). The key is the phrase “in one body.” The Greek text uses three compound nouns to emphasize togetherness. Literally, it says, “heirs together, sharers together, in one body together.” *The New American Standard* translation captures the thought well. It says, “That the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body and fellow partakers of the promises in Christ through the gospel.”

The Old Testament prophesied that Gentiles would be included in God’s program (Gen. 12:3; Amos 9:11-12; etc.), but the impression was that Gentiles would be allowed to be partakers of the

blessings by becoming part of God’s program for Israel. It never entered any human mind that the Jews and Gentiles would be together on equal footing in a new body called the church (Hodge). Gentiles did not become Jews, or Jews become Gentiles. Both became the church. A cat did not become a dog, or a dog did become a cat; both became a horse. The church did not exist, nor was it revealed in the Old Testament.

The church is the body of Christ (1:22-23). The only way to get into the church is to trust Christ, at which time the Holy Spirit baptizes you into the body of Christ (Gal. 3:26-27; 1 Cor. 12:13), but the baptism of the Holy Spirit which places us into the body of Christ, which is the church, did not start until Pentecost (*cf.* Acts 1:5 where the spiritual baptism is still future, with “from the beginning” in Acts 11:15-16, which means the beginning of the spiritual baptism was in Acts 2). Therefore, the church did not start until Pentecost and did not exist in the Old Testament. Paul is saying in this passage that it was not even hinted at in the Old Testament; it was hidden (3:9). It was revealed to Paul and the other New Testament apostles and prophets by the Holy Spirit.

Paul began to pray but interrupted his thought to say that God had revealed the truth of the church to him and the others. Why did God reveal all of this to Paul?

God made Paul a Minister of that Revelation

Ephesians 3:2-6 describes the mystery God revealed to Paul; verses 7 to 12 discuss the ministry God graciously granted to him. Paul says, “Of which I became a minister” (3:7a). As these verses explain, Paul’s ministry was to fulfill two functions.

To Preach the Gospel First, he was to preach the gospel. Verse 6 ends with the word “gospel” and verse 7 says, “of which I became a minister.” Paul was, first and foremost, a minister of the gospel.

His gospel ministry was “according to the gift of the grace of God given to me” (3:7b). Salvation is by grace and so is service. Paul’s ministry was not something he sought; it was something God gave him as a gift of grace (Barnes).

He also says his gospel ministry was “by the effective working of His power” (3:7c). God’s grace gave him his ministry and God’s power sustained it (Wescott). That does not mean that Paul did not put forth any effort. He did—to the point of exhaustion (Col. 1:29a). It does mean that his effort would have been fruitless had God not exercised His power in the process (Col. 1:29b).

Paul was amazed that such a privilege was his. He was overwhelmed by the work of God’s grace and power in his life. He adds, “To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ” (3:8). He considered himself not just the least of the saints but less than the least. Yet, he had the privilege to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ. The Greek word translated “unsearchable” means “untraceable.” He, who was less than the least, had the privilege of preaching, which is beyond being fathomed. In a sense, a believer can comprehend the riches of God’s grace (1:7, 18); yet, in another sense, the riches of grace can never be fully comprehended.

Paul was a minister of the gospel and, in a sense, so is every believer. All who have been reconciled are ministers of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18-20). Not all believers are apostles and not all have the gift of evangelism, but all are to preach, that is, proclaim the gospel (Mk. 16:15; Acts 8:1-4).

Howard E. Butt, Jr., a millionaire, said, “God doesn’t issue a special call to pastors and leave everyone else uncalled. Every Christian should think of himself as having a divine call to make

Christian witnessing a full-time career.” L. C. Hester, of Whitehouse, Texas, is a plumber. He packs a New Testament with his tools and is known as the “witnessing plumber.” A minister said of him, “That witnessing plumber has won hundreds to Christ since he became a Christian. Many will listen to a working man who will not listen to a preacher.”

Under the Law, if the Gentiles sought the knowledge of God, they had to travel to Palestine. The Queen of Sheba had to journey from the ends of the earth to hear Solomon’s wisdom, but now Jesus Christ has commanded that the gospel be taken to the ends of the world. The gospel, committed to Paul, was as wide as the world.

To make Known the Mystery The second function of Paul’s ministry was to make known the divine secret God revealed to him. It says, “And to make all people see what is the fellowship of the mystery” (3:9a). The Greek word translated “see” means “to give light” and is here used figuratively of enlightening, illuminating. A teaching ministry sheds light on truth so people can “see it” and understand it. Paul was to teach their participation in the mystery, which is the truth concerning the church (3:6). His instruction was not just for perception but also for participation (fellowship). They were to be involved in God’s program called the church.

Having mentioned the mystery again, Paul pauses to say several things about it. For example, this secret was hidden in ages past: “which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ” (3:9b). The God who created all things, and, thus, has the right to do with all things as it pleases Him (Toussaint), chose to hide the truth of the church until He revealed it to the apostles in general and Paul in particular (3:3, 5). The church was not an afterthought, but this part of His program He kept to Himself until He chose to reveal it to the New Testament apostles and prophets.

In his book, *The Interpretation of Prophecy*, Tan says, “The doctrine of the church is also described by Paul as ‘hidden in God’ (3:9). Paul does not say ‘hidden in Scripture,’ otherwise, his readers would be searching for the Christian church in the Old Testament” (Paul Lee Tan, *The Interpretation of Prophecy*, p. 251 fn.).

It was also part of His eternal plan to reveal this secret to everyone through the church itself (Hodge): “to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord” (3:10-11). The secret of Jews and Gentiles in one body, that is, the church, is called the “manifold wisdom of God.” The Greek word translated “manifold” means “many-colored.” All kinds of facets of God’s wisdom are involved in His plan called the church. This variegated wisdom of God is made known by the church “to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places,” that is, everyone (1:21; 6:12). “Good angels see God’s wisdom; bad angels see His power” (Toussaint). As all kinds of angelic authorities witness the church, they must admit that having Jews and Gentiles in one body is wise, all of which was part and parcel of God’s program “which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.” God “accomplished” putting Jews and Gentiles in one body in Christ when Christ died and when He ascended and sent the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

Supralapsarians use Ephesians 3:10 to prove Double Predestination. Ephesians 3:9 ends with the phrase, “God who created all things through Jesus Christ.” Verse 10 begins with the phrase “to the intent that,” which in the Greek text introduces a purpose clause. Supralapsarians contend that verse 10 teaches that the purpose of creation is redemption. Therefore, God decreed redemption, including salvation and damnation, before the decree to create and the decree for the Fall. In other words, the purpose of creation was the salvation of some and the damnation of others. In his commentary on Ephesians, Charles Hodge, a Calvinist theologian, points out this passage is saying

Paul was given the grace to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ so that the manifold wisdom of God might be made known through the church. Hodge concludes, “It is not the design of creation, but the design of the Revelation of the mystery of the redemption of which he is here speaking.” Nowhere does the New Testament teach Supralapsarianism.

Paul’s ministry is to make known the mystery, not just so believers can perceive it, but so they can participate in it and “fellowship” in the mystery (3:9). Part of their participation is to have access and address to the Father. Thus, Paul says, “In whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him” (3:12). Because we have trusted Christ and are in Him, we can boldly, that is, freely without fear, approach God, being fully persuaded that He will hear us. Believers have the unrestricted approach, access, and address to God that a small child has to a loving father (Hodge).

We enjoy revealing secrets. The problem is that to reveal a human secret is a betrayal of a confidence. Here is a secret you can tell; it will not be a betrayal but a benefit.

Therefore, We should not be Discouraged

Paul concludes with, “Therefore, I ask that you do not lose heart at my tribulations for you, which is your glory” (3:13). Because he had taught the very things he has written in this paragraph, he had suffered many tribulations and was, at the moment he was writing, in jail in Rome. The Jews did not like his teachings and persecuted him for it.

Nevertheless, Paul tells them not to be disheartened (Westcott) because of what has happened to him; instead, let it be a ground of glory (Pentecost). In other words, Paul says to the Ephesians, “Don’t be disheartened. If you understand the grace given to me, you will not be discouraged because of what has happened to me, but you will realize that my troubles and tribulations are for your gain, good, and glory. Because I have preached the revelation God gave me, you have access to God. Granted, I have suffered for that message, but don’t let that be a ground of discouragement. Let it be a ground of glory.”

Summary: Since God gave Paul a revelation of the mystery of the church and made him a minister to preach it, no one should be discouraged because of what happened to him.

This passage contains several important concepts we need to underscore in our thinking and lives.

When you are tempted to be discouraged, accept reality. Paul faced the fact he was a prisoner (3:1). The children of Israel were finally delivered out of Egypt. Then, they found themselves between the Red Sea and the Egyptian army. Nehemiah was granted permission to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the wall around it when opposition rose from without and conflict rose from within. That’s enough to discourage anyone. Do not be surprised when you come upon a discouraging situation.

When you are tempted to be discouraged, look at life from the spiritual point of view. Paul said he was a prisoner *of the Lord!* He looked at the situation from a spiritual perspective. The Lord allowed this. The Lord was also working in his life, not to solve his immediate problem, but He was working and revealing truth to Paul.

The truth of the church, that is, Jews and Gentiles being in one body, was hidden in the Old Testament and was only revealed in the New Testament. Some say the church began with Adam or Abraham and continues to this day. While it is true that there has always been a family of God throughout the ages, and that entrance into that family has always been by grace through faith (Gal.

3:6), there is a difference in what was before New Testament times and the church. The church is new (2:15). For the first time, Jews and Gentiles are in one body (2:14, 16; 3:6). The truth of the church was hidden in God before the New Testament times (3:9) and was not revealed until the apostles (3:5).

The Lord revealed spiritual truth to Paul and put him in a place where he could minister to others. In this passage, Paul defines his ministry as consisting of two functions: evangelism (3:7-8) and enlightenment (3:9). That's the ministry, introducing people to Jesus Christ and instructing them in God's eternal truth. Paul was doing that even though he was in prison. He evangelized the palace guards (Phil. 1:12-13) and ministered to others by writing letters. While in prison, he wrote four letters (Eph., Phil., Col., and Phlm.). When you realize what God is doing, you'll not be discouraged. Discouragement comes when a person focuses on the physical and the temporal. The Ephesians could have been discouraged because Paul, the great apostle and leader, was in prison, but Paul, the prisoner, says, "Don't lose heart because of me. God has revealed His eternal program to me and is using me to propagate it. In other words, don't look at the physical; focus on the spiritual. Don't just consider the temporal circumstances; remember the eternal concepts. God is at work and I am part of His eternal program."

As compared to what typically happens in a Wednesday service, we have had exceptional attendance. Normally, Wednesday night attendance is about 20% of Sunday morning attendance, and we have had 30% and better attendance. Recently, our Wednesday night attendance has gotten smaller and smaller. It is enough to be discouraging. I have not been discouraged because lately, while the attendance was not doing well, I have seen the Wednesday night service result in a lady coming to the Lord and people being ministered to in deeply significant ways. If I look at the attendance, I could be discouraged. If I look at what the Lord is doing, I am encouraged.

I PRAY YOU WILL BE STRENGTHENED

As believers in Jesus Christ, we pray. We pray for ourselves and each other. Have you ever thought about the prayer requests we get? I have been to several thousand services where believers prayed for prayer requests. We pray for prayer requests every Sunday morning. After listening to all those prayer requests, I can tell you that virtually all of them are about physical things, such as health, sickness, money, etc. Those requests are proper, but is there something else we should pray for? In Ephesians 1, Paul prayed for spiritual understanding. Every Sunday morning, I pray for that. Is there something else for which we should pray? The answer is yes. It is in Ephesians 3. In this prayer, Paul explains what believers should *experience* beyond knowledge to make it in the spiritual life.

The Petition: to be Strengthened

Their Position Paul begins his prayer by saying, “For this reason, I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (3:14). The expression “for this reason” is repeated from verse 1, where Paul began to pray and then broke off that prayer to elaborate on his message and ministry. Since this passage resumes the thought begun in verse 1, the connection is to Ephesians 2, not Ephesians 3:1-13 (Hodge; Toussaint). In Ephesians 2:11-22, Paul explained that Jewish and Gentile believers were in one new body with access to God the Father (2:15-16, 18). For that reason—because of their position—Paul bowed his knee, not just his head, to pray for them.

Concerning the Father to whom he prayed, Paul says, “From whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named” (3:15). Notice that the whole family of the Father is either in heaven or on earth. There is no in-between, no other place, such as purgatory or soul sleep (Toussaint). On the other hand, this tells us that the whole family is not yet in one place. Someone asked a Christian in Texas, “How many children do you have?” He replied, “I have two in the land of the living and two others still here with me in the land of the dying.”

His Petition The single petition in this prayer is “That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man” (3:16). This prayer is for power. As in Ephesians 1:19, Paul piles one word onto another to emphasize the power he desires the believer to experience. “Strengthened with might” means “to wax strong with power.” This power is to be in the inner man through the Holy Spirit. The standard by which Paul desires that this prayer be answered is the “riches of His glory.” Paul has spoken before in Ephesians of the riches of God’s grace (1:7; 2:7) and mercy (2:4), and His glory (1:18). He has also referred to the unsearchable riches in Christ.” Here, he speaks of the riches of His glory, meaning everything in God the Father that renders Him glorious. It is “according to,” not “out of” God’s glorious riches that Paul requests that God answer this prayer (Phil. 4:19).

If an extremely wealthy man, like Bill Gates or Warren Buffett, gave you something “out of” His riches, he might give you \$10, \$100, or even \$1000. He might also give you ten cents. If one of those men gave you something “according to” his riches, he would have to give you an exceedingly large gift. Paul’s prayer is not that God would give out of His glorious wealth, but according to it.

The result of this prayer is that the inner man might be empowered by the Holy Spirit “that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith” (3:17a). The Greek word translated “dwell” means

“to settle down and to be at home.” Paul is not referring to the initial indwelling of Christ at the moment of regeneration. The idea is not just that Christ should indwell but dwell deep down (the Greek word “dwell” has a prefix which intensifies the concept; Toussaint), that is, that Christ might be the center, the dominant factor, in the believer’s life. There is a difference between being in a house and dwelling, that is, “feeling comfortable” in that house.

The believer’s part is faith. As believers live by faith, that is, as they believe God’s Word and trust Him for the enablement to do what God says in His Word, they are strengthened through the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ becomes more “at home” in him (Gal. 2:20; 4:19; 5:6).

Jesus spoke of this concept in the Upper Room discourse. John recorded the conversation between Jesus and one of His disciples: “He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.” Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, “Lord, how is it that You will manifest Yourself to us, and not to the world?” Jesus answered and said to him, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father’s who sent Me” (Jn. 14:21-24). According to Christ, believers who love the Lord and keep His commandments will experience the Lord being “at home” in their life (Jn. 14:23). God will manifest Himself to them (Jn. 14:21). Such believers will have a personal realization of the presence of Christ. He will also have inner strength (3:16).

A congressman once voted to favor a measure he felt was wrong. He did so for expediency, even though his better judgment and the dictates of his conscience told him he was making a mistake. Later, a friend voiced a keen disappointment at the position he had taken. The lawmaker responded, “It really was not right for me to support that bill, but you have no idea how much pressure was brought to bear upon us.” “Pressure?” said the friend, “But congressman, where were your inside braces?” Believers who are walking in faith, who love the Lord, and who are obeying His Word have inner strength; they have inner braces.

The Purpose: To Comprehend and to be Filled

Paul gives the purpose for his petition. Actually, there are two purposes. One is stated in verse 17 and the other in verse 19. Both begin with the phrase “that you.”

To Comprehend the Love of Christ The first purpose is “That you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge” (3:17b-19a). The first part of this purpose statement is a repetition of the request given in Ephesians 3:17a. “Rooted” and “grounded” are in the perfect tense and should be translated “having been rooted and grounded.” For Christ to dwell in the believers’ inner man is for them to be rooted and grounded in love.

To communicate his point, Paul mixes metaphors from biology and architecture. Believers are to be rooted like a plant and grounded (Greek: “to lay the foundation”) like a building in love. They are to be a well-rooted tree and a well-founded building regarding that Christian virtue (Toussaint). Both of these figures convey the concept of being fixed, firmly established.

The purpose is that, being established in love, believers might be able to comprehend with all the saints what the width, length, depth, and height are to know the love of Christ, which passes knowledge. In other words, the purpose is that believers may comprehend the love of Christ.

Believers are to comprehend the width, length, depth, and height of the love of Christ. The width of His love is broad enough to include Jews and Gentiles in one body (2:1-7; 13-17;

Pentecost; Toussaint). The length of His love is from eternity to eternity (1:4; 2:7; 3:11; Pentecost; Toussaint). The depth of His love extends to the depth of depravity where God's grace saves sinners (2:1-3; 11, 12; Pentecost; Toussaint). The height of His love extends to the heavenlies, where God's grace places saved sinners (1:3; 2:4-7).

This is the love Paul desires that believers know. Notice the paradoxical way he says it: "To know the love of Christ which passes knowledge." How can that be? The love of Christ is beyond the knowledge of the natural man and even the immature saint. It is as believers grow in love that they comprehend love.

What child understands the extent of his parent's love? None. Not until the child becomes a parent does he or she understand that kind of love. Likewise, believers don't understand God's love until they grow in love. D. L. Moody used to say, "Columbus discovered America, but what did he know about its great lakes, rivers, forests, and the Mississippi River? He died without knowing much about what he had discovered. So many of us have discovered something of the love of God, but there are heights, depths, and lengths of which we do not know" (*Our Daily Bread*, 7/7/1958). How deep have you gone in the unfathomed ocean of God's love?

To Be Filled with the Fullness of God The second purpose of the prayer is: "That you may be filled with all the fullness of God" (3:19b). The way this is translated can be misleading. It sounds as if all the fullness of God can be contained in a believer, which, of course, is impossible. The word "with" in Greek is "unto" and denotes the goal. The idea is that believers may be filled unto the complete fullness of God (Hodge). Phillips paraphrases this verse: "wholly filled and flooded with God Himself." The same thought is expressed in Ephesians 4:13.

Filling a believer with the fullness of God is like drawing a thimbleful of water from a lake. The thimble is filled with the lake, but the lake is not contained in the thimble. The thimble didn't even diminish the lake, yet it has the fullness of the lake in the sense that it contains every ingredient of the lake, namely water. All the essential character of the lake is in the thimble.

In other words, Paul prayed for them to be strengthened in the inner man so Christ may dwell in them and bring them to spiritual maturity. Maturity consists of being full of God.

With what are you filled? Many are filled with themselves, their job, or their interest. You know what people are filled with by listening to them talk.

In 1956, Pepsi-Cola ran an ad campaign that said, "Today's Pepsi-Cola, reduced in calories, is never heavy, never too sweet. It refreshes without filling." Some people's spirituality refreshes them without filling them. They come to church and sing spiritual songs. They fellowship with believers. They are refreshed, but they are not filled with the fullness of God.

Praise God Who is Able

Paul's prayer seems exceedingly difficult. Did he ask too much? (Robinson). He ends with a doxology that answers that very question.

God is Able He says God is "able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think" (3:20a). God is able. He is exceedingly able. He is exceedingly, abundantly able. He is exceedingly, abundantly able beyond all we ask. He is exceedingly, abundantly able above all we can imagine. God is able to do what Paul prayed and more.

The sign in the grocery store window read, "Wanted—a delivery boy." A strong lad called and inquired about the wages, hours, vacation, etc., and asked, "Do you provide a bicycle?" "No," replied the grocer. "Well, said the boy, "I'm not going to carry your heavy groceries all over town. I don't want the job unless you give me a bike." An hour later, another teenager walked in to apply

for the job. He needed the work to help his widowed mother. The grocer looked the young man over and asked, “Don’t you want to know about the wages, hours, and so on?” “No,” said the boy, “I just want a job.” Once more, the grocer asked, “Don’t you want us to provide a bike to deliver the goods?” “No,” replied the lad, “I’ll deliver them on foot. Can I have the job?” The grocer said, “Yes,” and told him, “The last applicant demanded a bike. I didn’t hire him because of his attitude. The truth is we provide a nice new station wagon for delivery.” How typical of our attitude toward God. We demand a bike when the reality is He can do exceedingly above all that we ask or think.

Furthermore, He can do this in us, for Paul adds, “according to the power that works in us” (3:20b). The power of God through the Holy Spirit works in us to bring us to spiritual maturity.

Praise Him Since He is able, then, “To Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen” (3:21). The word “glory” either refers to manifesting God or praising God (Hodge). Praising God would manifest Him. In the Greek text, “by Christ Jesus” is “in Christ Jesus.” God is to be glorified, that is, praised in the church, which is in Christ throughout all eternity for what He can and does do (Rom. 11:36; 2 Tim. 4:18).

According to an ancient oriental legend, the king requested that three architects bring him models for a temple to be built in dedication to the sun. The first brought the king a creation of stone, finely chiseled and richly polished. As the king studied it, he admired it and praised it for its splendid artistry. The second man’s masterpiece was a cathedral made of gold. The king was even more pleased. The third architect presented the king with a model consisting of glass so transparent that it was scarcely visible to the naked eye. The artist pointed out that the crowning virtue of his model was that the sunlight poured unhindered through the crystal-clear walls. It was evident that this was the true and fitting cathedral for the sun, for it revealed and reflected not its glory, but it received and exhibited, in every part, the glorious object in whose honor it was to be dedicated. The king chose the third model as the most fitting and appropriate temple for the sun. Likewise, believers are not to reflect their glory but the glory of Jesus Christ.

Summary: God can strengthen believers so that Christ will dwell in them, so they can comprehend the love of Christ and be filled with God.

Think of it. God is able. God does it, and He does it far above anything we can imagine. The doxology at the end of this prayer, which so emphatically declares that God is able, is also at the end of the first major section of this book. It forms a fitting conclusion for everything Paul has said thus far. God can have us spontaneously and voluntarily praise Him (1:3-14). He can make us understand our calling, His inheritance, and His power in us (1:15-23). He can make us walk in good works (2:1-10). He can reconcile us, not only with Him but with others (2:11-22). He can keep us from being discouraged (3:1-13). He can empower us and fill us with Himself (3:14-21). He can set us apart, rooted, and grounded in love (1:4; 3:17).

Since God can do those kinds of spiritual things in believers, they ought to pray for one another as Paul prayed. Our prayers for each other are often shallow and superficial. Paul’s prayer reached the roots and soared to the heights. Instead of just praying, “Lord, bless ‘em,” or “Lord, heal ‘em,” or “Lord, speak to them,” pray like Paul: “Lord, strengthen them that Christ might dwell in them.”

Dr. J. Vernon McGee said, “Paul lifted the sights of his prayer gun and prayed concerning spiritual matters. I do not believe that he ignored the physical, but he majored in the spiritual. Do you see now what I mean when I say it was an embarrassing experience to place Paul’s prayers alongside mine? Mine fall short. I remain on the level of the physical and in the realm of the material. Paul moved out of the heights and dwelt there in prayer and worship.”

McGee compared the prayer life of a believer to an airplane at an airport. He said, “We go to prayer meetings, so we say. We go down to the end of the runway, and warm up our motors. Then we start down the runway of prayer, just as if we were going someplace. But when we reach the other end of the runway, we’re still on the ground! This does not seem to disturb us, for we go to the hangar of our homes and say that we have been praying at the prayer meeting. Nothing is further from the truth. We never get off the runway; we never get into the air, up yonder where the real prayer is accomplished.... Let us take off! Let us get airborne! Let us lay hold of God for spiritual values and not be satisfied until we are ‘filled with the knowledge of His will,’ and until we have divine power working through us accomplishing God’s will in our lives. There is a spiritual enemy in the heavenlies who seeks to thwart and defeat us. Let us lay hold of God in genuine prayer and not be satisfied until we actually win the battle for spiritual power. May our prayer be, ‘Lord, teach us to pray.’”

WALK WORTHILY

On many occasions, I have stepped onto a sidewalk—that was moving. You have seen them. They're usually in airports. You can choose to walk down a long corridor, or you can choose to step on a moving sidewalk and stand there while the sidewalk carries you down the corridor. It is like riding a conveyor belt. I think the first time I did that, I was living in Dallas. The airport called Love Field had a moving sidewalk. At the end of the ride was a sign: "Begin walking here."

The book of Ephesians has a similar sign. In Ephesians 1-3, Paul writes about the Christian's calling. Beginning in Ephesians 4:1, "Begin walking here." The key concept in Ephesians 4-6 is: walk.

Walk in unity	Ephesians 4:1-16
Walk in righteousness	Ephesians 4:17-32
Walk in love	Ephesians 5:1-7
Walk in light	Ephesians 5:8-14
Walk in wisdom	Ephesians 5:15-21
Walk in submission	Ephesians 5:22-6:9
Walk in strength	Ephesians 6:10-20

"Walk" is a metaphor for living, for conduct. In Ephesians 4:1-6:10, Paul tells Christians how to order their lives. Paul begins by speaking of a worthy walk. What does a worthy walk look like? How does a Christian live a life that is worthy of the Lord? What are the characteristics of such a life?

In a board meeting of a Christian organization, we discussed a worthy appreciation for a man who had given his life to the Lord's service in general and many years to that particular organization. Someone in the room suggested an amount of money and another said, "That's not enough; it's not worthy of what he has done." The board's problem was they did not have enough money to do what they felt was worthy.

Jesus Christ has given His life for us. We need to give our lives to Him, but what kind of life—walk—is worthy of Him? Nothing a believer could ever do could repay Him for what He has done, but what kind of lifestyle best honors Him? The description begins in Ephesians 4:1-3.

Walk with Humility and Meekness

Our Calling Paul begins the last half of the book with the exhortation, "I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to have a walk worthy of the calling with which you were called" (4:1). The word "therefore" indicates that this admonition is based on Ephesians 1-3, with particular reference to the calling of believers (Toussaint). God has called us to Himself and to be part of His church. We were dead (2:1-3), separated from God and His family (2:11-12). God redeemed us (1:7), regenerated us (2:4-6), reconciled us to Himself and other believers (2:13-18), and revealed His eternal plan and purpose to us (1:9, 10; 3:2-6). We are in Christ, in the church, and in the heavenlies. That's our calling.

Our Walk Now God asks us to walk worthy of that calling. Calling should determine Conduct. Paul urges us to do this as a prisoner of the Lord. If he could endure imprisonment for the sake of the Lord's work, we should be able to conduct our lives worthy of the Lord outside of a jail.

How is that done? What are the characteristics of a worthy walk? Technically, the remainder of Ephesians answers that question, but a few general characteristics are given at the beginning of this discussion (Eph. 1-3).

With Humility Paul says, "With all lowliness and gentleness" (4:2a). The Greek word translated "lowliness" means "lowliness of mind, humility." Humility is not the way you speak or act; it is lowliness of *mind*; it is the way you think. It is not being modest; it is a frame of mind that is a realistic view of oneself. Paul starts with humility, not holiness (Toussaint).

Humility is the opposite of pride. Westcott says, "Humility is a thankful sense of dependence upon God as opposed to pride and self-confidence." Hodge says it is the "opposite not only of self-complacency and self-conceit, but also of the self-exultation, and setting oneself up to attract the honor which comes from men." Eadie says it stands at the further extreme from "haughtiness, arrogance, and conceit, which is produced by the right view of ourselves, and our relationship to Christ and to that glory to which we are called."

Perhaps Paul mentions humility here to safeguard believers against high-mindedness in view of the blessings bestowed upon them. Maybe he has in mind the subject of unity, which he is about to discuss (Pentecost). After all, pride promotes division; humility facilitates unity. Whatever the connection, this much is clear: humility honors the Lord. It is living a life worthy of Him. Chrysostom says humility is the foundation of all virtues. McGee calls humility "The flagship of all Christian virtues."

When William Carey, the father of modern missions, was dying on the deck of a ship in Singapore, his friends stood near him, praising him. Overhearing them, he responded, "I do not want you to talk about William Carey; I want you to talk about William Carey's Savior. When I am dead, please put on my tombstone, "A poor, weak, helpless one: on Thy kind arm I fall." Those words are etched in Carey's tombstone in Singapore.

With Meekness In the Greek text, loneliness and gentleness are tied together with one preposition ("with"), suggesting that "meekness" is a phase of "humility" (Eadie). "Gentleness" is the Greek word "meek," which, contrary to popular opinion, is not weakness. It is strength under control. Aristotle said it was the mean between one who is always angry and one who is never angry. The Greeks used the word of soothing medicine, a controlled horse, a soft wind, each of which pictures controlled power. Moses (Num. 12:3) and Christ (Mt. 11:29) are the two outstanding examples of meekness in the Scripture. Neither was weak; both were gentle. This virtue is also vital to unity.

Westcott states, "Meekness is a consideration for others, even under provocation, as opposed to self-assertion." Hodge says it is "softness and gentleness, which when united with strength is one of the loveliest attributes of our nature." He describes meekness as "that unresisting, uncomplaining disposition of mind which enables us to bear without irritation or resentment the faults and injuries of others. It is the disposition of which the lamb, dumb before the shearers, is the symbol and one of the most wonderful virtues of the Son of God. The most exalted of all beings was the gentlest."

Meekness can be seen and in the soft answer, which turns away wrath (Prov. 15:1).

If there is anything that gets to me quickly, it is to do something right and be severely criticized for it as if I had done something wrong. One of the things that has helped me with that is the

concept of meekness. Jesus Christ was meek, an attitude He exhibited in that He was slow to take offense.

Matthew records that Jesus was meek (Mt. 11:29), and in the next chapter tells this story. Jesus Christ was once charged with being of the devil. That, of course, was not true. It was a lie. Imagine how the Son of God must have felt being called the son of Beelzebub. Surely He felt the sting of the accusation, but He did not revile the people who accused Him. He gently and meekly answered them.

Walk with Patience

With Patience Paul says that the worthy walk is to be accomplished **“with longsuffering” (4:2b)**. The Greek word translated “longsuffering” is made up of two words: “long” plus “wrath,” that is, passion or hot temper. This is the opposite of short-tempered; it is long-tempered (Toussaint). Patience is a good translation. It has particular reference to being patient with people.

According to a traditional Hebrew story, Abraham was sitting outside his tent one evening when he saw an old man approaching him, weary from age and his journey. Abraham rushed out, greeted him, and invited him into his tent. He washed the old man’s feet and gave him food and drink. The old man immediately began eating without saying any prayer or blessing. So Abraham asked him, “Don’t you worship God?” The old traveler replied, “I worship fire only and reverence no other god.” When he heard this, Abraham became incensed, grabbed the old man by the shoulders, and threw him out of his tent into the cold night air. When the old man had departed, God called to his friend Abraham and asked where the stranger was. Abraham replied, “I forced him out because he did not worship you.” God answered, “I have suffered him these eighty years although he dishonors Me. Could you not endure him one night?”

With Forbearance At this point in the passage, Paul adds two participial phrases: **“bearing one another in love” (4:2c)** and “endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (4:3). These phrases probably modify all three virtues mentioned in Ephesians 4:1-3, namely humility, meekness, and patience (Hodge), but the first one seems to be a further development of the last virtue, patience. That is the case in Colossians 3:12-13, where “bearing one another” modifies “longsuffering.” The Greek word translated “bearing” means “to hold up, to bear with, endure.” It also means “to bear with, as in “to listen to” (A-S). Saying it means “to restrain oneself,” Hodge says it is restraining oneself about each other in love.

Thus, patience bears with people in love. Forbearance implies that the other person is being particularly difficult. Westcott comments on this passage, “Forbearing one another in the case of real grievances.” Eadie says something similar: “To hold oneself up until the provocation is passed.” Erdman agrees: “This (i.e., longsuffering) is to be expressed in action by mutual forbearance, which indicates the ability to continue to love, even when conscious of faults which displease and offend.”

In at least one place in the New Testament, the word “forbearance” seems to mean “to listen to” (Acts 18:14). Instead of verbal combat, the believer needs vital communion.

Love is the sphere in which it is possible to patiently forbear people. Love suffers long (1 Cor. 13:4). It also bears all things (1 Cor. 13:7). F. F. Bruce has said, “Mutual patience and forbearance are not graces which come readily or naturally, but those who have learned to appreciate gratefully God’s patience and forbearance with them will desire to show the same attitude to others. Paul is, in effect, urging his readers to cultivate the graces that were seen in perfection in Christ and to love one another as He had loved them.”

Dr. Louis Talbot tells of a lady who was a member of his brother's church. He met her while visiting his brother in St. Louis. For eighteen years, she had lived with the demands of a drunkard husband. One evening, her husband came home in a fit of temper because he had fallen in the mud while under the influence of liquor. When he entered the house, he removed his boots and threw them toward his wife, demanding that she polish them, which she promptly did "as unto the Lord." She returned them to her husband so well-shined that he could almost see his face in them. As Dr. Talbot told the story, he said what the drunken husband saw in those shining shoes was the face of the Lord because of the meekness and forbearance of his wife. The man trusted Christ.

Walk in Unity

Unity Exist The second participial phrase is "endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (4:3). This may be a still further elaboration on patience, or even of forbearance, or it may refer to the three main virtues of the passage: humility, meekness, and patience (Hodge). However, because it is connected to the rest of the passage, it is plain that Paul is exhorting his readers to walk in unity. The "unity of the Spirit" is the unity of which the Holy Spirit is the author (Hodge). The Holy Spirit has already produced unity. Jews and Gentiles, two very diverse groups, have been reconciled to God and each other in one new body (2:15-16). Unity has been established; now, it must be maintained. It can be promoted or disturbed (Hodge).

Unity must be Maintained Paul urges believers to "endeavor to keep" the unity that already exists. The Greek word translated "endeavor" means "to make haste, hence, to be zealous or eager, to give diligence." Clearly, Paul is urging that effort and energy be put forth to keep what has been established. The word "keep" means "to watch over, guard, keep, preserve." Believers do not manufacture unity; they guard it. Believers cannot create unity in the church; God has already done that. Believers can only destroy it. They can either maintain unity or mess it up.

The axiom of Rupertus Meldenius, a Lutheran theologian, set down in his treatise *Paraenesis Votive Pro Pace Ecclesiae* (1626)—so often quoted by Richard Baxter that it is frequently taken to be his own—was, "Let there be unity in things necessary, in things unnecessary liberty, in all things charity."

How does a believer maintain unity? The last phrase in verse 3 says, "in the bond of peace," which means "the bond which is peace" (Hodge; Toussaint). As Hoehner (BKC) puts it: "Concern for peace will mean that Christians will lovingly tolerate each other, even when they have differences." "The peace that results from love, humility, meekness, and mutual forbearance is essential to the union and communion of the members of Christ the body" (Hodge). Believers have peace with God (2:16-17) and with each other (2:14-15). So they should seek peace among themselves (4:1; Jas. 3:17). Peace is the tranquility that ought to reign in the church (Eadie).

St. Francis of Assisi prayed:

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

The motto of the Apollo 11 flight was "We come in peace for all mankind." This motto was on the plaque, which was deposited on the face of the moon on the Sea of Tranquility by Neil Armstrong and Budd Aldrich. If believers come in peace, there will be a sea of tranquility.

Summary: A walk worthy of our calling to Christ in the church is characterized by humility, meekness, patience, and seeking to maintain unity through peace.

The opposite of these virtues “pride, irascibility, and patient querulousness—all tend to strife and disruption” (Eadie).

Those who do not know the Lord don’t care about walking with Him or worthy of Him. Pat Kelly, an outfielder for the Baltimore Orioles, told his manager that he had learned to walk with God. The manager replied, “I’d rather you have walked with the bases loaded.”

If you desire to walk worthy of the Lord, this passage tells you how to do it. Everything in it is the opposite of a heady, high-minded, haughty, harsh, hostile, hateful lifestyle. It is the antithesis of the attitude of a world that says, “Me first, me above others, me ahead of the pack.”

Jesus Christ humbled Himself (Phil. 2:8), meekly ministered (Mt. 11:29), and patiently endured His adversities and the adversary of His trial and crucifixion. Paul exhorts the Philippians to be like-minded (Phil. 2:5). He says, “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself” (Phil. 2:3), and still further, “being of one accord, of one mind” (Phil. 2:2). Jesus was humble, meek, and patient. Believers should adopt the same attitude so we can live a life worthy of Him and live a life of harmony and unity in the church.

Do not exalt yourself. The renowned English pulpit orator Joseph Parker told the story of a little watch dissatisfied with being restricted to a lady’s pocket. It envied the position of Big Ben, the great clock in the tower of London’s parliament building. One day, as the watch and the lady passed over Westminster Bridge, the tiny timepiece exclaimed, “I wish I could be where Big Ben is! I could serve many people instead of just one. The owner of the watch said, “You shall have your opportunity.” A slender thread drew the watch up the side of the parliament tower. However, when it reached the top, it was completely lost from view. Parker ended the story by saying, “Its elevation had become its annihilation.” When Christians elevate themselves over one another, they annihilate the unity the Holy Spirit has created for our peace.

With humility, meekness, patience, and forbearance, serve people. It had been a long day on Capitol Hill for Senator John Stennis. He was looking forward to a bit of relaxation when he got home. After parking the car, he began to walk toward his front door. Then it happened. Two people came out of the darkness, robbed him, and shot him twice. News of the shooting of Senator Stennis, the chairman of the powerful Armed Forces Committee, shocked Washington and the nation. Senator Stennis was on the operating table at Walter Reed Hospital for nearly seven hours.

Less than two hours later, another politician was driving home when he heard about the shooting. He turned his car around and went directly to the hospital. In the hospital, he noticed that the staff was swamped and could not keep up with the incoming calls about the Senator’s condition. He spotted an unattended switchboard, sat down, and voluntarily went to work. He continued taking calls until daylight. Sometime during that next day, he stood up, stretched, put on his overcoat, and just before leaving, he introduced himself quietly to the other operator, “I’m Mark Hatfield. Happy to help out.” Then, Senator Mark Hatfield unobtrusively walked out.

WALK IN UNITY

Division is one of the damning diseases of the body of Christ. It begins with the small germ of a difference of opinion and, if it spreads, can lead to the death of a church. The number of disease-causing germs is countless. Christians and churches have divided over doctrine, polity, personality, money, ordinances, and even the color to paint a wall. Howard Hendricks once told of a church in the South that split over how to fry chicken!

The disease of division drains the body of Christ of its strength, leaving it sick instead of strong. Sometimes, the sickness is mild and temporary. In those cases, the church is ultimately restored to health and strength. Unfortunately, this disease can get serious, rendering the body weak, ineffective, and unproductive. At that stage, the body needs caring for instead of caring for others. It can be terminal!

The prognosis for the future doesn't look promising. The body is already riddled with this disease and it is spreading. In a pluralistic society, this is going to become more and more of a problem. With so much diversity, how can believers in a local church walk in unity? How do they produce it? How do they maintain it? How do they prevent the disease of division? In Ephesians 4:4-16, Paul discusses walking in unity. We know what divides us; what unites us?

There is Unity in the Body of Christ

Paul begins Ephesians 4 with an exhortation to walk worthy of our calling. Part of such a worthy walk is endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (4:3). He does not tell them to find unity or to produce unity; he urges them to maintain it. That means unity is already there. What is this unity like? Paul explains in verses 4-6. **"There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (4:4-5).** In the next verse, he adds, "one God."

One Body For example, there is one body (4:4). This refers to the universal church (1:23; 2:16; 3:6; Hodge; Toussaint). The Holy Spirit baptizes all who trust Christ into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13). He did not begin the baptism of the Holy Spirit until the day of Pentecost (*cf.* "from the beginning" in Acts 1:5 and Acts 11:15-16; also see the note on Eph. 3:6). Since the body of Christ, the universal church, and did not begin until Pentecost, this is a reference to all saved people since that day.

One Spirit There is one Spirit (4:4). The one Spirit, of course, is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit dwells in each believer and in the corporate church (2:22). One Spirit has placed all believers since Pentecost into one body and indwelt that body.

One Hope There is one hope (4:4). Paul says, "Just as you were called in one hope of your calling" (4:4). The calling is the call to salvation (1:4, 18; 4:1; Toussaint). Because believers have been called in the past, they have hope for the future (1:18; 2:7). The Holy Spirit who dwells within each believer guarantees this future inheritance (1:14). Unbelievers have multiple hopes that are never realized. A believer has one hope that will be realized at the coming of the Lord (1 Thess. 4:13-18; 1 Jn. 3:2-3).

One Lord There is one Lord (4:5). This refers, of course, to Jesus Christ, who is described in this book as the head of the body (1:22-23; Hodge; Toussaint) and is, therefore, the One who unites the body (Pentecost).

One Faith There is one faith (4:5). The word “faith” is used in the New Testament of a body of truth believed by Christians (Acts 6:7; 1 Tim. 3:9, 4:1; Jude 3). It is also used of the trust an individual places in Christ to be saved (Eph. 2:8). The reference here could be to the body of truth (Hodge), but it is probably the latter (Pentecost) since there is no article in the Greek text (Toussaint). One faith in one Lord unites all believers (Robinson).

One Baptism There is one baptism (4:5). To which baptism does Paul refer? It cannot be water baptism because there is more than one water baptism (see baptisms in the plural in Heb. 6:2; Acts 19:3, 5). Thus, the baptism referred to here must be spiritual baptism (1 Cor. 12:13; Pentecost; Toussaint). Today, water baptism divides Christians; spiritual baptism unites them. Eadie says one baptism is a result of one faith in one Lord and, at the same time, the one mode of initiation by one Spirit into one body.

One God There is one God (4:6). Paul says, “One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (4:6). The four-fold “all” is a reference to believers, not humanity. God is not the Father of all people; He is the Father of all who believe. Believers are His children (Gal. 3:26). At the end of the list, Paul clarifies that he is talking about believers by saying, “you.” God is the Father of all believers; He is sovereign *over* them, operates *through* them, and dwells *in* them.

The Trinity is an integral part of this list. Instead of the usual order of Father, Son and, Holy Spirit, this list begins with the Holy Spirit and ends with the Father. Paul reverses the normal order because he is discussing the “unity” of the Spirit (4:3). The same order is in 1 Corinthians 12:4-6, where Paul discusses the gifts of the Spirit.

These seven elements indicate that there is unity in the body of Christ. All who have the one faith and the one Lord have been baptized by one Spirit into one body and now have one God and Father and one hope. All believers are united because of these realities; they are all members of the body of Christ through faith in Jesus Christ.

Unity exists! Believers do not make it or manufacture it; they maintain it. To do that, they must remember that what unites them is their common faith in Jesus Christ, which makes them members of His body. Ephesians 6:24 says, “Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.” President Trump said in his first State of the Union address to Congress, “We are one people with one destiny. We all bleed the same blood. We all salute the same flag. And we are all made by the same God.”

I only have one brother and no sisters. My brother is one of my best friends, and I love him dearly. I’ve known people with large families and heard them say things like: “I’ve got the strangest family. I’ve got the weirdest brother in the world. My sister is odd. I don’t agree with my sister at all; she and I argue all the time.” I’ve also heard these same people say, “But he’s my brother.” That’s the way it is in the body of Christ. As a Christian, I have some strange relatives, and some with whom I disagree, some with whom it is challenging to live, but we are united by virtue of being in the same family. The Father wants us to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace as much as is possible.

There is Diversity in that each has a Different Gift

Every Believer Has a Gift Ephesians 4:4-6 emphasizes the unity of the body of Christ; verses 7-10 explain that there is diversity. Paul first states the concept (4:7) and then supports it with a quotation from the Psalms (4:8-10).

Paul says, “But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift” (4:7). All believers have the same Spirit, Lord, God, and Father, the same faith, hope, baptism, and body, but each one has a different gift. Actually, Paul does not say, “Each one has a different gift;” he says, “Each one has a different ‘grace.’” He adds that this particular favor is “according to the measure of Christ’s gift,” which means that God has given each believer a gift and the grace to exercise it. Each believer, then, is to function in Christ’s body by God’s enablement in proportion to the spiritual ability given to him or her. God has given every believer a gift, not just pastors, preachers, or professional Christian workers. This gift was not bestowed because of merit or asking; it was sovereignty given. It is a spiritual ability that differs from a natural ability, such as an artistic or athletic ability or musical or mechanical skill. Various spiritual gifts are listed in the New Testament (Eph. 4:11; Rom. 12:4-6; 1 Cor. 12:4-6).

God gives believers grace to exercise their gift. His grace is enablement to perform the task of the gift.

Christ Ascended to Grant Gifts To support his claim that the Lord has given gifts to believers, Paul quotes Psalm 68:18. He says, “When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men” (4:8). The problem is that Psalm 68:18 says, “You received gifts,” whereas Paul says, “He gave gifts.” Some argue that the Hebrew word translated “received” in Psalm 68:18 means “to receive to give” (Gen. 15:9; 18:5; 27:13; Ex. 27:20; 1 Sam. 20:21; etc.; Hodge; Pentecost; Toussaint). In Psalm 68, God is pictured as a mighty military conqueror who has descended from heaven, conquered Israel’s enemies and now has ascended back to heaven, leading His conquered captives and laden with the spoils of war. In ancient times, the victor shared the spoils of war with those on his side (Hodge). Thus, God, the conquering King, can be said to give gifts to men.

Paul’s application of Psalm 68:18 is, “Now this, ‘He ascended’—what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things” (4:9, 10). His point is an ascent implies a descent. Christ first descended “into the lower parts of the earth.” Then He ascended to fill all things, including filling the church with gifts (1:23).

The problem is the meaning of “the lower parts of the earth.” Hodge lists four possibilities: 1) the earth (Isa. 44:23), 2) the grave (Ps. 63:9), 3) the womb (Ps. 139:15), 4) Hades (Ez. 32:24). The proof that the correct explanation is that Christ descended to the earth is that Paul is quoting Psalm 68. In Psalm 68, God descended to the earth. Therefore, Paul says Christ came to earth, not hell (Hodge; Toussaint; see NIV).

There is unity, but unity is not uniformity. The church as a body. The human body has unity, but not every part is the same. The unity of the church is not the unity of a pile of sand with all the grains the same. Nor is it the unity of a zoo with different animals locked in cages. It is the unity of a body where every part is different, but every part fits and functions in the body. You have a gift. You may not feel that you can do much, but if you are a believer in Jesus Christ, God has given you some ability to serve spiritually. You should use that ability for His glory.

A talented concert pianist was sent to the front lines in World War I. In a fierce battle, he was badly wounded. To save his life, the doctors had to amputate his right arm. Though devastated for a while, he finally determined he would not allow that to destroy his future. After recovering, he went from composer to composer, asking for only compositions for the left hand. No one was willing to do such a thing until he met Maurice Ravel, the brilliant French composer of *Bolero*. In response to the young man’s request, he composed the *Concerto in D Major for Left Hand*. Audiences everywhere were stirred by the pianist’s rendition of this beautiful music. If a man can

play the piano with one left hand, you can serve the Lord with at least the one ability He has given you.

The Purpose of the Gifts is Spiritual Maturity

A List In Ephesians 4:11-16, Paul reveals the purpose of these gifts. He begins the discussion by listing four gifts: “And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers” (4:11). In verse 7, Paul spoke of God giving gifts to men. Here, he speaks of God giving men to the church.

He gave some to be apostles. The Greek word translated “apostle” means “one sent on a mission with authority.” In the New Testament, it is used of the twelve (Mt. 10:1-2). Although Paul was not one of the original twelve, he claimed the office of apostleship by virtue of his commission by the risen Christ (1 Cor. 9:1). Others were also called apostles, such as James (Gal. 1:19) and Barnabas.

God gave some to be prophets. A prophet in the Bible receives a revelation from God and makes it known to others (Num. 12:6; Eph. 3:5). The revelation may (Acts 11:28; Rev. 22:6) or may not (Acts 13:1; 1 Tim. 1:18) have a predictive element.

In Ephesians 2:20, Paul said that the apostles and prophets were the foundation, a figure that suggests these gifts do not exist today. *The Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, edited by Cole and Brown, says, “In Ephesians 2:20, the prophets formed part of the ‘foundation’ of the church. This image suggests that the period of the foundation of the church is over, i.e., the prophetic office is a thing of the past. The apostles are here, the New Testament counterparts of the Old Testament prophets. Together, they constitute the foundation, ‘Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone’” (DNTT, vol. 3, p. 84). Hoehner says, “Since the apostles and the prophets were foundational, they did not exist after the first generation of believers” (Hoehner, BKC).

God gave some to be evangelists. The Greek word translated “evangelist” means “one who announces the gospel.” While others (2 Tim. 4:5) and perhaps all (Mk. 16:15; Acts 8:1-4) are to do that, evangelists have a *special ability* in communicating the gospel to non-Christians. The apostles, prophets, and evangelists build on it by winning people to Christ. The fact that believers may not possess this gift does not excuse them from evangelism. Not having the gift of giving does not excuse them from sharing their finances.

God gave some pastors and teachers. In the Greek text, these two are inseparably linked together, indicating that these are two characteristics of the same person. (Both are governed by one article; the word “the” occurs before “pastors” but not before “teachers.” This is indicated in the English translation by the word “some” not repeated before “teachers.” Furthermore, the word “and” between “pastors” and “teachers” is different than the other “ands” in this verse.) The Greek word translated “pastor” means “shepherd.” Shepherds exercise oversight over the flock; they provide for and protect it, guide and guard it (Robinson). A teacher, of course, gives instruction. In this case, the teacher instructs others in the Word of God (2 Tim. 3:16). These two functions are united in one man. The pastor/teacher leads by feeding and he feeds by teaching the Word of God.

M. R. DeHaan was a medical doctor who became a Bible teacher with a national radio broadcast. He said, “Being a physician, I found it fitting these three gifts are parable to the practice of medicine. The evangelist is the spiritual obstetrician; the pastor is the spiritual pediatrician; and the teacher is the spiritual dietitian.” He went on to say, “of course, we admit that these three functions exist to a certain degree in every physician’s activity—especially those we call general

practitioners. The doctor of fifty years ago was all three in one. Today, however, the trend is toward more specialization” (*Our Daily Bread*, 9/6/1970).

The Immediate Purpose Having mentioned four speaking gifts (1 Pet. 4:11), Paul now turns his attention to the purpose of the gifts. He first gives the immediate purpose, “for the equipping of the saints” (4:12a). Gifted evangelists and pastor/teachers, are to equip the saints. The Greek word “equip” is full and fascinating. The masculine noun occurs only here in the New Testament. The verb, which appears thirteen times, means “to mend or repair, to furnish completely, complete, equip, prepare.” It is found in secular Greek for the setting of a bone related to its root meaning of putting something in order, restoring it to its former condition. It is used in the New Testament to repair nets (Mt. 4:21; Mk 1:19) and restore a fallen brother (Gal. 6:1). The meaning here is of furnishing, completing, preparing, and equipping a ship for a journey. Training is the idea (Lk. 6:40).

Gifted men are to equip saints by ministering the Word to them. Paul told Timothy that all Scripture was inspired and profitable to “thoroughly equip” (1 Tim. 3:16-17). Therefore, he should minister it to people (2 Tim. 4:1-2). Calvin said, “He could not exalt more highly the ministry of the Word than by attributing to it this effect. For what higher work can there be to build up the church so that it may reach its perfection? They, therefore, are insane who neglecting this means hope to be perfect in Christ, as is the case with fanatics, who pretend to secret revelations of the Spirit, and the proud, who contend themselves with the private reading of the Scriptures and imagine that they have no need the ministry of the church” (Calvin, cited by Hodge). Hodge adds, “If Christ has appointed this ministry of the edification of the body, it is vain to expect that end to be accomplished in any other way.”

The Intermediate Purpose Next, Paul discusses the intermediate purpose. He says gifted men equip saints “for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (4:12b). All believers have a gift (4:7). They are to be equipped to use that gift to serve others in the body of Christ so they can be built up. If you are a believer, you are in the ministry. You have a gift and should be working. What ability has God given you? Do you have the ability to be nice to someone? Do you have the ability to comfort those in sorrow or to cheer people who are sick? Has God given you a nugget of wisdom that someone else needs? Do you know how to give counsel to someone? There is a smorgasbord of needs and opportunities. There is something you can do. You don’t need to wait for a special invitation.

Some will say, “I’ve worked for years; I’m tired. How long do I have to work? The answer is “Till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (4:13). The Greek word translated “come” is used in Acts of travelers arriving at their destination (Robinson). The destination of all believers is coming into unity and the “final knowledge of Christ” (Phil. 3:10). That is further defined as “the perfect man,” that is, the mature man. This is not so much a reference to individual maturity, though that’s included, as it is the maturity of the whole body of Christ (Pentecost). The mature man is further described as having the measure of the stature (Greek: “maturity”) of the fullness of Christ, that is, complete conformity of all believers to Christ.

Christ is the measure. In his biography of Abraham Lincoln called *Abraham Lincoln, the War Years*, Carl Sandberg says that when Lincoln traveled from Springfield to Washington for his inauguration, people were impressed with how tall he was. Many men stepped up to the train platform and stood back to back with him to compare their height with his. All failed to measure up. When we measure ourselves as compared to Christ, we all fall short. Nevertheless, we must work until all believers are Christ-like (Hodge).

The Ultimate Purpose In Ephesians 4:14-16, Paul states the ultimate purpose of gifted men equipping saints for their ministry. He states it first negatively (4:14), then positively (4:15-16).

He says “that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness by which they lie in wait to deceive” (4:14). The ultimate purpose of all ministry, stated negatively, is that believers should not be immature infants who are easily swayed and deceived. Religious quacks use trickery in cunning craftiness to deceive immature Christians. The Greek word translated “trickery” means “dice playing.” It is used here figuratively of trickery or slight: “cunning, craftiness” in clever deception. Wiersbe says, “The cultists do not try to win souls to Christ. They do not establish rescue missions in slum areas of our cities because they have no good news for the man on skid row. Instead, these false teachers try to capture immature Christians and, for this reason, most of the membership of false cults come from local churches, particularly churches that do not feed their people the word of God.”

Immature believers, lured by the tricks and clever deceptions of religious counterfeits, are unstable. They are tossed to and fro and carried about (Greek: to swing around ... to be carried off course) like a wave of the sea during a storm by every new wind that blows into town. They are human tumbleweeds.

A janitor once described to a friend his frustration with his job. After listening intently, his friend asked, “How in the world do you manage when you get so many contrary orders?” “Well,” replied the janitor, “I just put my mind in neutral and let them push me around.” That is an apt description of immature believers.

Gifted men are given to the church to equip saints to minister to one another to prevent that. Unfortunately, too many believers are not under the ministry of the Word so that they can reach spiritual maturity. They are like mentally disabled children whose bodies can grow to be like adults but whose minds stay at the level of a two-year-old. Likewise, some of God’s children have been members of His family for twenty, thirty, and forty years, but spiritually, they’ve only developed to the stage of a two-year-old.

The ultimate purpose of all maturity, stated positively, is “but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things, into Him who is the head—Christ” (4:15). In short, the ultimate aim is spiritual maturity. The twin conditions for growth toward maturity are truth and love. Technically, the Greek text does not say “speaking the truth in love.” It says, “Truthing in love,” which includes the concept of maintaining the truth in both speech and life (Westcott; Toussaint; Robinson agrees, but adds that the only other place in the New Testament where this word is used, Galatians 4:16, does, however, include speaking). The question is, “Do you want the truth?” All say, “Yes,” but the practical reality is that some settle for deception (4:14) and don’t grow. When the truth about spiritual realities is sought in the spirit of love, a person grows in all areas to be like Christ, the head of the church (1:23). Speaking the truth in love means expressing the truth. If you can say it in a poem, say your poem. If you can sing it in a song, sing your song. If you can show it in a deed, perform it. Before long, it will become manifest in your lifestyle.

There is one more verse in this paragraph and it sounds complex and even confusing. It says, “From whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love” (4:16). Paul is using the figure of the human body to illustrate the body in Christ. Every part of the body is connected to the head—Christ. As each joint fulfills its function, the body grows in love. Hearing that, one man prayed, “Lord, help me to run a ‘good joint.’” Paul mentions

love three times in this passage (4:2, 15-16). He ends with love. The ultimate in Christ-like maturity is love.

Christians are to be thermostats and not thermometers. A thermometer responds to the temperature in a room. When the room is cool, the mercury in it drops. When the temperature in the room is warm, it rises. A thermostat, on the other hand, controls the temperature in the room. When it gets too cold, it puts more heat into the room. Believers are not to be tossed about by the conditions in their environment. They are to speak the truth in love and thus help regulate the environment.

Summary: The unity already in the body of Christ is to be maintained by believers exercising their gift to bring all believers to spiritual maturity.

This passage is packed with truth, like a bus packed with people sitting in every seat and standing in every aisle. It teaches, among other things, that 1) There is unity in the body of Christ. 2) Yet there is diversity in that each member has a different gift. 3) The purpose of the gifts is to develop spiritual maturity in all. Perhaps the question that should be asked above all others in this passage is, “How do believers walk in unity?”

First, every church ought to have a pastor/teacher who teaches the Word of God. Technically, it is not the job of the pastor/teacher to visit the sick, attend to the needs of the poor, or counsel the troubled. His job is to study and preach (Acts 6:1-4). It is not that those ministries are inferior; they are not. They interfere with what God gifted the pastor/teacher to do.

Every believer in every local church should insist that there be a pastor/teacher in the pulpit. Do not settle for anything else. Do not settle for just an evangelist, entertainer, great visionary, counselor, or colorful character. The pastor/teacher may have some of that, but he must first and foremost be a man of God and a teacher of God’s Word who cares about the flock.

Second, all believers ought to be ministering in the church. All believers have a gift and should exercise it in a church. Service outside the church has its place, but the institution God started is the church, and He put you in it with a gift and grace to function in it.

You can do something, so do it. You can park cars, bake pies, visit the sick, make phone calls, or listen to someone hurting. A good listener is harder to find than a good speaker.

Third, all believers in every church should work toward the spiritual maturity of every believer. Keep your eye on the goal. The ultimate goal is maturity. If all believers worked toward that end, there will be unity.

There is a great deal of diversity in a football team. We think of football players as big and mean, but the truth is that some must be lean and fast. A few are actually small, at least by comparison. That’s only the beginning of the differences. They have different talents, I. Q.’s, backgrounds, ideas, philosophies, theories of playing the game, etc. With all that diversity, how do they ever maintain any unity? Simple. They’re all members of the same team and they all have one goal—to win the game. Likewise, believers should walk in unity by remembering that all are members of the same body working toward the same goal, namely, maturity.

A young man once asked a highly respected and successful businessman who was retiring to give him advice. The businessman replied, “Belong to something bigger than yourself; work with others toward a common goal; do your part; take pride in doing your job well; work hard to make your ideas become a reality; and build something of lasting value” (*Our Daily Bread*, 110/5/1980).

WALK IN RIGHTEOUSNESS—THE PRINCIPLE

Righteousness has received a great deal of bad press. When we think of a righteous person, we think of a bore, a stick-in-the-mud, a stuffed shirt, a strict disciplinarian. What does it mean to walk in righteousness? Paul answers that in Ephesians 4:17-32. The first half of that extended passage lays out the concept and principle (4:17-24), and the last half delves into the particulars (4:25-32). Consider the principle, which is given negatively and then positively.

Do not walk like Unbelievers in Unrighteousness

Their Condition Paul begins, “This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk” (4:17a). “To testify” is to solemnly affirm as a witness under oath in a court of law. Thus, Paul not only says this, he solemnly affirms it to emphasize that believers should not live like unbelievers. How do unbelievers, here called “the rest of the Gentiles,” live? Piling one phrase upon another, Paul describes their spiritual condition, the cause of that condition, and the consequences of it.

The spiritual condition of unbelievers is that they walk “in the futility of their mind” (4:17b). The Greek word translated “futility” means “empty, vain.” Hoehner (BKC) says it suggests “Being void of useful aim or goal.” The Greek word rendered “mind” means “mind, understanding, reason.” Some suggest that it includes more than just the mind. Hodge says it consists of reason, understanding, conscience, and affection. Eadie agrees: “It is the region of the thought, will, and susceptibility—the mind with its emotional capacities.” Thus, the sphere in which the unbelievers walk is emptiness, and futility on the inside of their being. They are void of a useful goal in their mind. In the words of Robinson, “They have no ruling purpose to guide them.” Thoreau said, “We have improved means to unimproved ends” (Thoreau, cited by Wiersbe, p. 108).

The Cause The next phrase seems to explain further (Hodge), “Having their understanding darkened” (4:18a). Unbelievers are empty and don’t know where they are going because they are in intellectual and spiritual darkness. People think they are enlightened when, in reality, they are in darkness.

All of this is true because they are in a state of “being alienated from the life of God” (4:18b). This statement is reminiscent of Ephesians 2:12, where the word “alienated” occurs. The life of God is the divine spiritual life (Robinson), which comes from Him.

These three statements are related to each other. The last one is the most basic description of the spiritual condition of unbelievers. Having been alienated from divine spiritual life, their understanding was darkened. After all, God is light. To be separated from Him automatically means one is in the dark. Being in the dark, the unbelievers don’t know where they are or where they are going. They are empty. They live in vanity and futility.

What is the cause of such a condition? Paul answers that in the next two phrases. He says, “Because of the ignorance that is in them” (4:18c). He is referring, of course, to their ignorance of God (1 Pet. 1:14). People are void of the life of God because they are ignorant of the truth of God. They must hear the “word of truth, the gospel of your salvation” (1:13) to trust Christ and know God. Being ignorant of the gospel, they are ignorant of God.

The second phrase, which explains the cause of such a condition, is, “Because of the hardening of their heart” (4:18d). The word “hardening” means “to form a callus, to petrify.” Unbelievers are

not only ignorant, they are insensitive to the things of God. As Paul has explained, unbelievers are spiritually dead (2:1).

The Consequences There are consequences to people being without spiritual life and light (Hodge). Paul says, “Who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to licentiousness” (4:19a). “Being past feeling” describes being past pain, being so cold and callous to God that they no longer feel the pain of conscience (1 Tim. 4:2). They no longer respond to the stimulus of conscience (Pentecost). They have ceased to care (Robinson). They give themselves (Greek: “deliver themselves, hand themselves over to”) licentiousness, which is wanton excess.

Their purpose was “to work all uncleanness with greediness” (4:19b). (The word “to” in 4:19 indicates a purpose clause in the Greek text.). They didn’t just fall into impurity, they worked at it. As Westcott says, “They made a business (Acts 19:24ff) of impurity; not simply yielding to passion, but seeking out deliberately the means of sexual gratification.” They did it “with greediness,” which is more accurately translated “covetousness” (Col. 3:5). This is living in selfishness (Westcott) with a disregard for others (Robinson); all that matters is self-gratification.

Dr. Talbot said he saw heifers branded when he lived in Australia. He says, “The heifers were first bound to the ground, then a red hot figure was placed on the body of each heifer.... After the brand had been placed, they were free and ran away, licking their wounds. Had you gone three weeks later to one of those heifers and made a cut with a knife on the branded place, it wouldn’t have pained her. The heat paralyzed the nerves in that part, so the heifers were “past feeling.”

Remember seeing the dentist and having him give you a shot of Novocain? Your lip, your gum, and your jaw were past feeling. Like the scared lamb and the deadened jaw, sinners are past feeling because they have given themselves to sin.

In these verses, Paul says that believers are not to walk like unbelievers, which implies that it is possible for a believer to do just that. Some deny that Christians can live like non-Christians. That forces them to say that when professing Christians live in sin, they are not Christians at all. That is not the attitude of the apostle Paul (1 Cor. 3:1-3).

Walk like a Believer in Righteousness

You Did Not Learn Well If believers are not to live like the rest of the Gentiles, that is, the way they used to live, how are they to conduct their lives? Paul explains in Ephesians 4:20-24. He begins by saying, “But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus” (4:20-21). Paul is *not* referring to their conversion (Robinson). In their past, but after their conversion, they were taught. Whatever they were taught, they didn’t learn to live like selfish, self-indulgent, sinful unbelievers.

When Paul says, “If indeed you have heard ... and have been taught,” he is not implying doubt as if they had not heard or been taught. The “if” in the Greek text is a first-class condition, which assumes the statement is true. Robinson says, “This construction is used here and gives emphasis.” They, indeed, after their conversion, heard Christ taught and they were taught. The English translation says “by Him;” the Greek text reads “in Him,” another indication that they were taught as believers when “in Him” they were taught the truth as it is “in Jesus.” They were not taught “by Him; the sphere of their instruction was “in Him” (Robinson).

Paul says, “You didn’t learn that to be like Christ was to live like unbelievers. Instead, you were taught how to live in Christ. What had they been taught about how to live the Christian life?

Put off For one thing, they learned to put off the old life. Paul states it like this: “That you put off concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful

lusts” (4:22). In the Greek text, “you” is emphatic. This is something *you* are to do, namely, put off the old man. “Put off” was used of removing a garment, like taking off a coat. It is used here figuratively to remove, renounce, or stop something (Hodge). “Put away,” Paul says, “your former way of living,” here called the old man. This old man is growing corrupt (present tense) according to deceitful lusts. Their desires are deceitful because they promise satisfaction, but they don’t deliver.

Many have suggested that Lazarus’ grave clothes are a picture of what Paul is teaching in this passage. John 11 records the death and burial of Lazarus, the friend of Christ. He was wrapped in grave clothes and laid in a tomb. Christ came and cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come forth!” Then John says, “And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth” (Jn. 11:44). Imagine! He was alive but still bound with grave clothes. These needed to be removed so he could be totally free. Likewise, Paul says, “You are alive to God, so put off the grave clothes of the old life.”

Renew Your Mind The second lesson they learned was, “And be renewed in the spirit of your mind” (4:23). The phrase “the spirit of your mind” may include more than the mental faculty (4:17). The word translated “mind” here is the same as the one used in verse 17. As an unbeliever, the mind was empty, void, and futile (4:17). The understanding was darkened (4:18). The intellect was ignorant (4:18). It was devoid of light and truth.

The truth of the gospel (1:13) and the light of the gospel (2 Cor. 4:4) has now shined in their minds, but there is still darkness, lots of darkness. The understanding needs more light and truth, which comes from exposure to the Word of God, which is a light to my feet (Ps. 119:105), and the truth (Jn. 17:17). We need the Word (Jas.1:21; 1 Pet. 1:1-2).

You need your mind renewed, not some emotional experience. In an article in *Naomi’s Table*, entitled “Pleased Don’t Get Soaked,” a lady named Amy wrote, “The ‘Soaking Prayer’ is one of many Contemplative prayer practices that isn’t found in the Bible. It is designed to empty your mind and was developed by the Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship, now known as Catch the Fire Toronto. This group also gave rise to the ‘Toronto Blessing’ and many aberrant practices such as holy laughter, making animal sounds, and being drunk or paralyzed in the Spirit.

“In an article titled, ‘Soaking: The Key to Intimacy with God,’ writer Gary Oates recently wrote more on the supernatural realm we can experience, which is the goal of the Soaking Prayer. ‘During our soaking times, we position ourselves to receive impressions, nudges, quiet whispers, pictures, angelic visitations, and supernatural revelations. Here is a partial list of what to expect: dreams, visions, trances, out-of-body experiences, angelic visitations, being transported in the Spirit. Experiencing the true, intimate Presence of the living God will radically change your life. People describe His manifest Presence in different ways. To some, it is heat, electricity, or shaking. To others, it is lightness, peace, or weeping. Experiencing the manifest Presence is not the goal but the gateway to the supernatural realm. It’s the beginning. We go into the spirit realm where we can see Him, hear His voice, walk with Him, and be empowered by Him. This week, a newly-produced video is making the rounds that offers a ‘How-To’ tutorial to help Christians get into a trance state to hear God’s voice.’

“Ladies, the Bible says we are to avoid sorcery, mysticism, divination, and the like. Soaking prayer, listening prayer, and other mystical exercises are part of the ‘contemplative prayer’ and contemplative spirituality, which cannot be found anywhere in God’s Word. What does the Bible say about biblical prayer? It is simply talking to God with His will in mind (1 John 5:14). A biblically praying believer already understands that God’s presence is always with him (Psalm 139:7; Matthew 28:20; 1 Corinthians 6:19; 1 Thessalonians 4:8; 2 Timothy 1:14).”

Put on The third truth they learned was, “And that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in righteousness and true holiness” (4:24). They learned to put on the new man. “Put on,” like “put off” in verse 22, was used of clothing oneself. Here, it is being used figuratively for the new spiritual self that needs to be constantly adorned. The old self grows corrupt according to its deceitful desire (4:22). The new self is, in contrast, created according to God (4:24), that is, it is patterned after God’s image. This divine image, after which the new nature is formed, is in the sphere of “righteousness and true holiness” (4:24; Greek: “in righteousness and holiness which is of truth”). We have the capacity to “put on” and “walk in” righteousness, holiness, and truth!

Summary: Do not walk like unbelievers in unrighteousness, but walk like the new person you are in righteousness.

In other words, this passage exhorts believers not to live like non-Christians but to live righteous, godly lives. Furthermore, it spells out the principles of how to live such a life. The first and most fundamental principle of living a righteous life is to put off the old and put on the new. This is the principle of replacement. The old must be put off and replaced by the new. It is insufficient to stop some vice; a virtue must replace it.

Beyond that, two other principles here are vital to a life of righteousness. Westcott says, “Two things are required for the positive formation of the Christian character, the continuous progressive renewal of our highest faculty, and the decisive acceptance of the new man.” If you are to walk in righteousness, you must continually renew your mind. If you are to continually renew your mind, you must constantly saturate it with the Scriptures. Your own sinful nature, sinful experiences, and sin-saturated environment constantly bombard your mind. You hear so much from yourself and others about the wrong thing to think and do that you begin believing it. To combat those forces, you must control what you constantly meditate on in your mind.

The issue is not so much what you hear or what you think about what you hear. Some say you should never read philosophy or anti-Christian material or see a wrong movie, TV program, or video. They have missed the point. Jesus said it is not what goes in the man that defiles him but what comes out.

If you are to walk in righteousness, there is one more principle you must master. You must decisively decide to do what is right. *You* must put off. *You* must put on. Granted, you need the grace and power of God, but you are involved in the process. You must make up your mind to do what is right, and you must do it.

A Christian executive related how he arrived home every evening full of the day’s problems. He tried the suggestion of leaving his worries on a “worry tree” in the front yard, but it didn’t work. Then, one day, it dawned on him that rather than emptying his mind of worries, he needed to fill his mind with thoughts of his family.

His drive home was about five miles. He picked out conspicuous landmarks along the way and associated them with specific family members. As he passed each one, he tried to imagine what his family member would have been doing each day, what particular concerns he would have, and what he would like to discuss with him that evening. When he walked up the front path to his home, his mind was full of his family. He was able to relate to them instead of worrying about his business.

The principle of walking in righteousness is that believers must decide to renew their minds constantly and they must replace the old with the new.

WALK IN RIGHTEOUSNESS—SPEAK THE TRUTH

A lady and her husband came to see me to offer their help. Their “help” was a long list of suggestions for improving various things, including my preaching. In fact, my preaching seemed to be a major area of concern, and they wanted to be helpful. To be more specific, what she had in mind was that I was not specific enough in naming sins. That surprised me because, as I told her, I preach verse by verse. So when the Bible gets specific, I’m forced to be as specific as the Bible. She clarified to me that that wasn’t what she had in mind. According to her, I should be speaking against such particular things as TV, video, rock music, and cocaine.

They got my attention. One of the wife’s “helpful” suggestions was that I be more specific. Now, that got my attention because I taught speech and homiletics, and I know that one of the hallmarks of a good speaker is that he is specific. Needless to say, I didn’t agree with all she had to say, but she was right about one thing: I need to be specific. I agree with that concept. The question is, how specific? What specific things need to be mentioned?

Instead of me giving you my list, let me give you Paul’s list. In Ephesians 4, he says, “Do not walk as unbelievers” (4:17-19), and he gives the general principle: “Put off the old; put on the new” (4:20-24). Then, he gets specific. He provides five particular exhortations. Each consists of 1) a negative commandment, 2) a positive commandment, and 3) a reason for the positive command.

Stop Lying

The Connection For the first specific, Paul says, “Therefore, putting away lying” (4:25a). The word “therefore” indicates that this statement is based on something previously stated. Since believers are to “put off” the old man (4:22) and “put on” the new (4:20), they should, as a specific application of that, stop lying and speak the truth. The phrase “put away” in verse 25 is the same Greek word that is translated “put off” in verse 22.

The Definition A lie is that which is contrary to fact, spoken with the intent to deceive. Satan is a liar and the father of lies (Jn. 8:44). When people lie, they follow in the footsteps of Satan.

Most of us do not tell outright lies, but we do “shade” the truth. We don’t tell the whole story, or we slant the telling of it. A fable about a race between the United States and the Soviet Union illustrates the point. Both governments commissioned their best designers and craftsmen to produce the fastest automobile possible. Finally, the day of the race arrived. The American car won by inches. This was rather hard for the Russians to swallow, so the story goes, *Pravda* carried the following report: “Russia and the United States competed in a long-awaited race yesterday afternoon. Both cars broke all former speed records. The Soviets came in second and the Americans finished next to last.”

Do not Lie to Others It has been suggested that apart from anger, one of the first sins we detect in children is the tendency to stretch the truth. Before using profanity or stealing, they come up with flimsy excuses that are simply falsehoods. It has been said that “A typical 4-year-old stretches the truth once every two hours, while 6-year-olds will tell a whopper every 90 minutes [source: Bronson]” (Tom Scheve, “How Lying Works.” <http://people.howstuffworks.com/lying.htm>).

One young fellow said to his father, “I told a fib today. The teacher asked me where I was born and it seemed to sissy to say ‘the Woman’s Hospital,’ so I said ‘Yankee Stadium’” (*Our Daily*

Bread, 12/8/1972). Children learn to lie by watching their parents. Mom calls her boss, claiming to be sick when she's not, and Dad says Mom's dress doesn't make her look fat when it does.

It is not just children who lie. One author said, "All men have a tendency to be dishonest" (*Our Daily Bread*, 7/18/1964). Another said "white lies" are "one of the most common evils of our day" (*Our Daily Bread*, 7/13/1970).

The Bible teaches we lie because we are sinners. Psychologists say lies are told for many different reasons. "Lies are told for some of the following reasons:

- To conceal misdeeds and stay out of trouble.... These lies are told to avoid responsibility and repercussions.
- To preserve reputation. A recovering drug addict may lie about time spent in a treatment facility, especially to a potential employer or romantic prospect. A lie like this is told to avoid shame or embarrassment.
- To avoid hurting someone's feelings. Children learn early on to be polite, not to point out physical flaws, and to say 'thank you' even after they receive something they don't like. These 'white lies' are distinguished from other types because they carry no ill will or bad intentions.
- To increase stature and reputation. Some lies are told without any obvious external stimulus, such as a demand for an answer to a specific question. This type of lie is often narcissistic, told to make the liar seem more accomplished, skilled, or gifted to gain favor in the eyes of others.
- To manipulate. These lies aren't evasive or defensive but rather aggressive and malicious in nature. Such lies are told to gain wealth, love, favor, or other assets by damaging another's reputation or spreading harmful untruths.
- To control information. Indirect lying is withholding or concealing important facts instead of airing a falsehood. This is often seen as a more acceptable form of lying since a person doesn't actively construct lies but only sits tightly on the truth. A missing piece of information can completely alter the understanding of an event, leading American courts to demand not only the truth but 'the whole truth.'

Lies are told by just about everybody in some form or fashion. Some personality types, however, are more likely to lie than others:

- Pathological liars are generally sociopathic, lack a clear sense of right and wrong, and show an absence of remorse when harming others. Sociopaths tell some of the best lies since they don't feel bad about doing so and don't show signs of guilt or worry. They lie for self-gain. Their lies veer toward manipulation.
- Compulsive liars lie as the first option, even when there's no reason or advantage for doing so. Childhood experiences, such as living in an abusive environment where lying might be necessary for survival or emotional well-being, are often responsible for compulsive lying.
- Narcissists lie to gain undeserved glory and esteem in the eyes of others.
- Borderline personalities experience wild mood swings and out-of-control behaviors, like drug abuse, gambling, or promiscuous sex. This type may tell lies in an effort to deal with the fallout from these behaviors.

- Histrionic personalities desperately crave love and attention and will tell lies that, though not accurate, may reflect the emotional truth of the situation. “I’m so sick I could die” and “If you leave me, I’ll kill myself” are two examples of lies told by this type [source: Goleman].

(Tom Scheve, “How Lying Works.” <http://people.howstuffworks.com/lying.htm>)

People lie by telling half-truths. In his book *Eternity Shut in a Spam*, William Marshall tells the story of a night watchman who was a witness in court. He had been on duty at a railroad crossing on the night of an accident. The train had struck a car, resulting in serious injury to the occupants of the car. No one saw the crash except the watchman. He testified that he had swung his lantern to warn the driver. The court found his testimony convincing and placed the responsibility for the accident on the motorist. The watchman’s friend immediately began to praise him for his faithfulness in waving the lamp. Greatly relieved by the verdict, the watchman whispered to himself, and I was always afraid that they would ask me if the lantern was left. To clear his name, the watchman deliberately lied by telling half of the truth. His words were true, his intent was deceit (*Our Daily Bread*, 7/20/1981).

The Consequence It is serious because it prevents spiritual growth and invites divine displeasure. In the book of Acts, a couple lied and died (Acts 5:1-11). The truth is, lying is no joke. It is serious stuff. “A little girl came very early one morning to her mother, saying, “Which is worse, Mama, to tell a lie or to steal?” The Mother replied that both were so sinful she could not tell which was worse. “Well, Mama,” replied the little one, “I’ve been thinking a good deal about it, and I think it’s ever so much worse to lie than to steal.” “Why, my child?” asked the mother. “Well, you see, Mama, it’s like this,” said the girl. “If you steal a thing, you can take it back unless you’ve eaten it, and if you’ve eaten it, you can pay for it, but a lie is forever.” Smart girl.

I wonder what would happen if the Lord began to make some people as sick as they say they are on Sunday morning or as poor as they claim to be when asked to give. If all liars died on the spot, all of us would be dead!

Speak the Truth

Speak the Truth It is not sufficient to stop lying. Paul commands, “Each one speak the truth with his neighbor” (4:25b), which is a quote from Zechariah 8:16. In this context, “neighbor” is a reference to Christians, as is evident from the next clause.

In Love We are to speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15). It is possible to speak the truth in a harsh and harmful way that hurts and does not help. It is possible to speak the truth with grace.

About the Gospel Speak the truth of the Gospel. The expression “the truth of the gospel” appears in the New Testament four times (Gal. 2:5, 14; Eph. 1:13; Col. 1:5). We are saved because of the truth of the gospel (Eph. 1:13; Col. 1:5), and we should stand up for the truth of the gospel (Gal. 2:5, 14).

The Reason

Our Relationship to Others The reason for not lying but speaking the truth is “for we are members of one another” (4:25; also 4:4, 16). Believers are members of the same body, the body of Christ. “It is as unthinkable for one Christian to lie to another as it would be for a nerve in the

body to deliberately send a false message to the brain, or for the eye to deceive the rest of the body when danger is approaching” (MacDonald).

Our Relationship to the Lord At this point in the passage, Paul does not mention our relationship to the Lord as being a reason for not lying and speaking the truth, but later in the passage, he does use our relationship with the Lord as the motivation for why we should walk in righteousness. In verse 30, he says do not grieve the Holy Spirit.

We should speak the truth because we are related to the One who is the truth. Jesus said He was the truth (Jn. 14:6). Even His enemies acknowledged that He is true and taught the truth (Mt. 22:16). In other words, He was completely honest.

Summary: Believers should live a righteous life by not lying and speaking the truth because of their relationship with others and the Lord.

This list of particulars is revealing. Like similar lists elsewhere in the New Testament, it reveals that some people go too far in their list of sins to be removed from a believer’s life. Things like movies and makeup are not here. Christians have their lists of the “filthy five,” the “sinful seven,” the “terrible ten,” and the “dirty dozen.” It’s amazing; their lists are not in the Bible!

As pointed out, we should not lie but speak the truth because of our relationship with others and the Lord. We should also not lie and speak the truth because of our relationship with ourselves! “Those who tell “white lies” soon go “colorblind!”

When we lie, we lose. Jesus said, “But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give an account of it in the day of judgment” (Mt. 12:36). When we lie, we lose, now and at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

An older man boarded a train, occupied the best seat, and tried to reserve another one for himself by placing his luggage on it. Looking for a seat, a teenage boy asked if the seat containing the luggage was occupied. The older man said it was reserved for a friend who had put his suitcase there. Paying no attention to what the older man said, the teenager picked up the suitcase, sat down, put the luggage on his lap, and said, “All right, I’ll stay here until he comes.” In vain, the man looked daggers at the teenage boy. The friend, of course, did not appear. The man was lying. Shortly, the train began to move. As it glided past the platform, the teenager tossed the suitcase out the window, saying, “Apparently, your friend missed the train. We mustn’t let him lose his luggage too!” The man lied and he lost his luggage. When we lie, we lose.

That sounds like a cute story someone made up, but apparently, it actually happened. The man who originally told the story, E. J. Hardy, said, “I shall never forget to my dying day the horrified expression on the old gentleman’s countenance” (*Our Daily Bread*, 7/18/1964). Whether or not that story is true, this is true. When we lie, we lose—at the Judgment Seat of Christ!

WALK IN RIGHTEOUSNESS—BE ANGER

Going through Ephesians, I have asked several times, “Do you want to grow?” What does that look like? The first items mentioned in Ephesians are righteousness (4:24) and truth (4:25). What does righteousness look like? In Ephesians, Paul says don’t lie, don’t steal, and be kind. Those characteristics of righteousness are self-evident. What if I were to tell you that one aspect of being righteous is being angry? Suppose I told you that God commands you to be angry and that anger is part of being righteous. Many would probably think I was kidding. I’m not. The Bible commands us to be angry. What

Be Angry

The Command The next specific deals with anger. Paul commands, “Be angry” (4:26a). This is a quotation from Psalms 4:4. David counsels his enemies to be angry. The Hebrew word translated “anger” means “to be agitated, quiver, quake, be perturbed.” Not all anger is sinful. Psalms 4:4 and Ephesians 4:26 command people to “be angry.”

There are two kinds of anger, evident from the fact that one is commanded (4:26) and the other is condemned (4:31). What is the difference? Aristotle wrote, “Anyone can become angry, but to be angry with the right person at the right degree at the right time for the right purpose and in the right way—that is not easy.” The anger in verse 26 is generally called “righteous indignation.” The anger to be avoided stems from pride and selfishness. It is often called “self-righteous indignation.” “I am upset because I did not get my way.”

The Illustrations An examination of people in the Bible who got angry illustrates what righteous indignation is. Moses’ burning zeal against idolatry is a case in point (Ex. 32:22: “So Aaron said, ‘Do not let the anger of my lord become hot. You know the people, that they *are set* on evil’”) and so is Jonathan’s fierce anger over Saul’s jealous plan to kill David (1 Sam. 20:34: “So Jonathan arose from the table in fierce anger, and ate no food the second day of the month, for he was grieved for David because his father had treated him shamefully”). Nehemiah was right in being angry at the unjust oppression that resulted in innocent children being harmed (Neh. 5:6: “And I became very angry when I heard their outcry and these words”). Was not Elihu correct in being irritated at the injustice of Job’s three friends condemning him (Job 32:2: “Then the wrath of Elihu, the son of Barachel the Buzite, of the family of Ram, was aroused against Job; his wrath was aroused because he justified himself rather than God”)? And was not Jeremiah correct in becoming angry when Israel spurned God’s Word (Jer. 6)?

Paul got angry at idolatry (Acts 17:16: “Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols”). Jesus got angry at hypocrisy (Mk. 3:5; “And when He had looked around at them with anger, being grieved by the hardness of their hearts, He said to the man, ‘Stretch out your hand.’ And he stretched *it* out, and his hand was restored as whole as the other”). He also got angry when God’s house was desecrated (Jn. 2:17: “Then His disciples remembered that it was written, ‘ZEAL FOR YOUR HOUSE HAS EATEN ME UP’”). These are clear-cut cases in the Bible of justifiable anger. A believer ought to be righteously indignant at sin. If Moses, Nehemiah, and Christ can justly be angry, so can we.

In looking at that list, it seems that people in the Bible got angry at sins against God (Moses; Jeremiah; Paul) and sins against people (Jonathan; Elihu; Nehemiah). If these kinds of things do not make you angry, there is something wrong with your spiritual life.

Mrs. Sibert was driving down the street in Detroit, Michigan, when she saw two muggers at a bus stop rifling the pockets of a man who had his hands in the air. Immediately, she began honking her horn. That brought a blast from a twelve-gauge shotgun. Undaunted, she sped through dark, narrow streets in pursuit of the thugs. A half-hour later, the wild chase ended as the fugitives crashed into a parked vehicle and were apprehended by police. Mrs. Sibert told a reporter afterward, "I said to myself, 'I'm not going to let them get away with that.' I just think of how that poor victim felt after being held up, and I guess I just got mad."

In his *Summa Theologiae*, Thomas Aquinas quotes the *Opus Imperfectum in Matthaeum*, "He who is angry without cause, shall be in danger; but he who is angry with cause, shall not be in danger: for without anger, teaching will be useless, judgments unstable, crimes unchecked." He concludes, "to be angry is therefore not always an evil."

Do not Allow Righteous Anger to become Sin

The Command There is justifiable anger, but there is a danger even in righteous indignation. While not all anger is sin, it can become sinful. Paul adds, "Do not sin" (4:26b). How does one sin by becoming angry? There are several answers to that.

The Illustration The anger at sin can cause one to sin by striking out at the sinner. When Moses saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, "he looked this way and that way, and when he saw no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand" (Ex. 2:12). According to the 2013 FBI, "uniform crime reports the overwhelming majority of murders committed in the United States are due to unchecked anger (see article <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/get-psyched/201309/anger-management-what-works-and-what-doesnt>).

Do not let the Sun go down on Righteous Anger

The Command Paul adds, "Do not let the sun go down on your wrath" (4:26c). The Greek word translated "wrath" is the Greek word for anger, plus an added prefix. The new word created by this combination means "irritation," implying a less permanent state than anger. Don't let the sun go down on your irritation is the idea. Even if the irritation or anger is justifiable, it is not to be harbored. To do so is to allow justifiable anger to become sin.

Married couples should practice this principle to keep the communication lines open and preserve their marriage. As Phyllis Diller said, "Never go to bed mad; stay up and fight!"

The Illustrations One morning, a little boy got into a fight with his older brother. As a result, he refused to talk to his brother all day. When bedtime came, his mother wanted to see her two sons make-up before they went to sleep. So she said to the younger boy, "Don't you think you should forgive your brother before you go to sleep? Remember, the Bible says, 'Do not let the sun go down on your wrath.'" The little boy looked perplexed. He thought for a few moments and then said to his mother, "But Mommy, how can I keep the sun from going down?" He had no intention of getting rid of his grudge (*Our Daily Bread*, 3/17/1987).

Two believers had a hot dispute and parted in a rage. Remembering t, "Let not the sun go down on your wrath," one decided to make things right. He went to see the Christian with whom he had

had the dispute. When he knocked on the door, his offended friend opened it and was surprised to see him. Before he could speak, the man standing at his door said, “The sun is almost down!” That did it. The response was, “Come in, brother, come in.” Once inside, they were reconciled. The point is, “Simmer down before sundown” (*Our Daily Bread*, 7/19/1974).

Do not give place to the Devil

The Command The reason believers should never put their head on their pillow with anger in their heart is what Paul says next, “nor give place to the devil” (4:27). Anger is like a fire. It may be as small as a spark, yet if it becomes a flame, it could cause an explosion called wrath. If the fire “rages” out of control, it can do great damage, which is called “malice” or murder (Mt. 5:21-26). When Satan sees a spark of anger that is not extinguished with the water of forgiveness, he fans it and adds fuel to the fire. Paul warns us not to give the devil that kind of opportunity. Don’t assist him; resist him. You must control your anger lest it gets out of control and controls you.

The Solution A Bible college professor gave these instructions to his students who were about to take their last exam in his doctrines class: “Write for thirty minutes on the Holy Spirit. Then spend the last half hour telling what you know about the devil.” One of the young men became so engaged in the first part of the test that he forgot all about the time. When the hour was up, he was still writing on the person and work of the Holy Spirit. Before turning in his paper, he hastily scribbled these words at the bottom of the page: “I had no time for the devil.”

Summary: Believers should get angry at sins against God and against people, but they should not harbor that anger because Satan can use it to make them sin.

So, how do you deal with anger? Thomas Jefferson said, “When angry, count to ten before you speak; if very angry, a hundred.” Mark Twain said, “When angry, count to four; when very angry, swear.” Swearing does not solve anger, but counting might give people time to reflect on the consequences of their actions and possibly avoid impulsive, destructive acts they will regret later.

“In an article entitled “Anger Management: What Works and What Doesn’t,” psychologist Brad J. Bushman wrote, “There are three possible approaches to deal with anger: (1) stuff it, (2) express it, and (3) get rid of it....”

“Stuff it.... This approach can prompt people to stuff their anger deep inside and repress it.... Several studies have shown that stuffing anger inside can have negative health consequences, such as increasing the risk of illnesses such as heart disease.... “Express it.... Catharsis theory, which can be traced back through Sigmund Freud to Aristotle, is elegant and appealing. Unfortunately, scientific evidence shows that venting one’s anger only makes things worse. Venting harms the self and others. Expressing anger is also linked to a higher risk of heart disease, just like stuffing it inside. However, expressing anger has another drawback—it increases aggression against

“One variation of venting is intense physical exercise. When angry, some people go running or try some other form of physical exercise such as kickboxing. Research shows that although physical exercise is good for your heart, it is not good for reducing anger. The reason physical exercise doesn’t work is that it increases rather than decreases physiological arousal, such as heart rate and blood pressure. When people become angry, their physiological arousal increases. (It is possible, however, that prolonged exercise will eventually reduce anger if it continues until the person is extremely tired—because then the arousal is finally dispersed and people feel too exhausted to aggress.)

“To use another analogy, venting anger is like using gasoline to put out a fire: It just feeds the flame. Venting keeps arousal levels high and keeps aggressive thoughts and angry feelings alive. Maybe you have heard of the joke, ‘How do you get to Carnegie Hall?’ The answer is: ‘Practice! Practice! Practice!’ My question to you is: ‘How do you become an angry, aggressive person?’ The answer is the same: ‘Practice! Practice! Practice!’ Venting is just practicing how to behave more aggressively, such as by hitting, kicking, screaming, and shouting.

“Get rid of it. The third approach to deal with anger is to try to get rid of it.... All emotions, including anger, consist of bodily states (such as physiological arousal) and mental meanings. To get rid of anger, you can work on either of those. Anger can be reduced by getting rid of the arousal state, such as by relaxing (e.g., breathing deeply, listening to calming music) or by counting to ten (or one hundred) before acting. Mental tactics can also reduce anger, such as by reframing the problem or conflict. For example, rather than being angered by a friend’s rude comment, one might reinterpret the comment as a sign of the friend’s exhaustion rather than as a personal attack. Distracting oneself and turning one’s attention to other, more pleasant topics also works because angry people tend to ruminate about what made them angry. Recent research has shown that taking a more distant and detached perspective—like a fly on a wall—can also reduce anger and aggression. In addition, certain behaviors can help get rid of anger. For example, petting a puppy, watching a comedy, making love, or performing a good deed can help, because those acts are incompatible with anger and, therefore, they make the angry state impossible to sustain.

“Summary. “A pressure cooker is often used as a metaphor for anger, where anger builds up inside a person like steam inside a pressure cooker. Using this analogy, there are three ways to deal with the buildup of steam. One way is to keep the pressure inside the cooker until it explodes. A second way is to reduce the pressure by periodically siphoning off some of the steam, as described using common terms such as ‘venting’ and ‘blowing off steam.’ The third (and best) way is to lower the flame and reduce the heat! Rather than stuff anger inside or expressing it outwardly, get rid of it. Stuffing anger harms the self. Expressing anger harms the self and others” (edited version; see the complete article at <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/get-psyched/201309/anger-management-what-works-and-what-doesnt>).

In the context of Ephesians, the solution to anger would be to replace it. For example, Paul says not to lie; tell the truth. In the case of anger, perhaps the answer is to replace it with action. Candace was born in Pasadena in 1946. After college, she married Steve Lightner. The couple had three children: Cari, Serena (twin daughters), and Travis. On May 3, 1980, her 13-year-old daughter Cari was hit by a car while walking to a church carnival with a friend. She was struck with such force that she was knocked out of her shoes and thrown 125 feet. Cari died not long after the accident. The driver that hit Cari never stopped, and it was later learned that he had been drunk at the time of the accident. This wasn’t his first drunk driving accident. He had been arrested a short time earlier for another incident related to drunk driving.

After police officers told her that the driver likely would receive little punishment for killing Cari, Lightner became enraged. She decided to channel her anger and grief into fighting drunk driving. Four days after Cari’s death, Lightner started up a grassroots organization to advocate for stiffer penalties for drunk driving. She quit her job and used her savings to fund Mothers Against Drunk Drivers (later known as Mothers Against Drunk Driving). Before starting MADD, Lightner had been uninvolved in social reform or politics. “I wasn’t even registered to vote,” she explained to People magazine. One of the group’s most significant accomplishments from this time was the national law that raised the legal drinking age to 21.

WALK IN RIGHTEOUSNESS—WORK TO GIVE

Teaching the Bible as I do, book by book and verse by verse, I often find myself teaching things I would never have thought to teach. I also find myself teaching obvious things. I had a conversation with a fellow trying to figure out what to teach next. During the conversation, he said I want to say something they've never heard before and I thought to myself, "Isn't the issue to teach what God says whether or not the people have heard it before? Maybe they need to hear it again." Today, because I am preaching through a book verse by verse, I find that I will say something that you've heard before, but my job is to tell you what this book says, whether you've heard it before or not. Maybe, just maybe, you need to hear it again. What is it we've all heard that we're about to hear again? I have three things to say. You have heard all three many times.

Do Not Steal

In Paul's Day Paul urges, "Let him who stole steal no longer" (4:28a). Stealing was particularly a problem of the slaves. They were usually not well cared for and were always in need. Paul urged Titus to admonish slaves not to pilfer (Titus 2:10).

In Our Day When I hear the word "steal," I immediately think of shoplifting—a current national problem. The 2016 National Retail Security Survey, conducted by the National Retail Federation and Dr. Richard Hollinger of the University of Florida, shows that shrinkage (theft, including shoplifting and employee stealing) cost retailers \$45.2 billion in 2015. That's 1.38% of total sales, and for the second year in a row, shoplifting "has surpassed employee theft as the greatest cause of inventory shrink," according to the study. The NRSS found that the average loss per shoplifting incident was \$377, a nearly \$60 increase from 2014. The cost of employees stealing dropped from \$1,546.83 to \$1,233.77 yearly.

Among Believers The problem of stealing was not limited to the slaves in Paul's day or the general population in our day. The word "steal" in this verse is a present participle, meaning that this is not a past problem but a present problem and possibly a habitual problem. People, including believers, are guilty of taking a full wage for halfhearted work, patting an expense account, keeping an overpayment, and cheating on their income tax.

"It seems that for a lot of people, 'polite theft' has become a simple matter of self-protection. By brooding on the idea that they deserve more out of life than they are getting, they pad expense accounts, insurance claims, and income tax deductions. They salve their conscience with the rumor that allowances for a few shrewd self-preserving tip-offs are built into the system. One study showed that a third of all hotel and motel guests steal during their stay. Other reports indicate that 50% to 90% of business thefts result from employees who go home with more than their paychecks. They are a greater problem than dishonest customers or organized crime. Common practice doesn't allow the Christian to do the same" (*Our Daily Bread*, 8/24/1978).

If we were to say this positively instead of negatively, we would say, "Honesty is the best policy." One author said, "When I was young, I worked with my father during the summer. Each morning, we would stop to pick up the early edition of the local newspaper. One day, when we got to work, my father discovered he had mistakenly taken two papers. He thought of paying for it the following morning, but thinking for a moment, he said, 'No, I had better go back with this paper. Someone may lose out on the morning news, and I do not want the store owner, who is not a

Christian, to think I am dishonest.” So my father immediately returned the extra newspaper. About a week later, a robbery occurred in that same store, and the owner remembered that only two people had come into the building at the time of the theft—my dad and another man. At once, he eliminated my father. “That man is honest,” he said. “He came all the way back here one day just to return a newspaper he got by mistake. The other customer must be that thief.” The policeman soon apprehended the culprit” (*Our Daily Bread*, 4/12/1986).

Work

Made to Work In contrast to stealing, believers should “labor, working with his hands, what is good” (4:28a). The word “labor” refers to hard work. The Greek word translated “working” means “to grow weary,” hence “to work with effort, to toil.” God designed humans to work. God put Adam in a garden and told him to attend it. He also created women to work. When He created Eve, He did not say He created a companion for Adam; He said He created a *helper* for Adam, which means she was to help him tend the garden.

Why Work: To Not Work Many people today consider work a necessary evil. Many more work to get out of work. One day, a fisherman was lying on a beautiful beach with his fishing pole propped up in the sand and his solitary line cast out into the sparkling blue surf. He was enjoying the warmth of the afternoon sun and the prospect of catching a fish. About that time, a businessman (a workaholic) came walking down the beach, trying to relieve some of the stress of his workday. He noticed the fisherman sitting on the beach and decided to find out why this fisherman was fishing instead of working harder to make a living for himself and his family. “You aren’t going to catch many fish that way,” said the businessman to the fisherman. “You should be working rather than lying on the beach!”

The fisherman looked up at the businessman, smiled, and replied, “And what will my reward be?” “Well, you can get bigger nets and catch more fish!” was the businessman’s answer. “And then what will my reward be?” asked the fisherman, still smiling. The businessman replied, “You will make money and you’ll be able to buy a boat, which will result in larger fish catches!” “And then what will my reward be?” asked the fisherman again.

The businessman was getting slightly irritated with the fisherman’s questions. “You can buy a bigger boat and hire some people to work for you!” he said. “And then what will my reward be?” repeated the fisherman. The businessman was getting angry. “Don’t you understand? You can build up a fleet of fishing boats, sail all over the world, and let all your employees catch fish for you!” Once again, the fisherman asked, “And then what will my reward be?”

The businessman was red with rage and shouted at the fisherman, “Don’t you understand that you can become so rich that you will never have to work for your living again! You can spend all the rest of your days sitting on this beach, looking at the sunset. You won’t have a care in the world!” The fisherman, still smiling, looked up and said, “And what do you think I’m doing right now?”

Why Work: To Eat Bible says if a person doesn’t work, he doesn’t eat (2 Thess. 3:10)?

Why Work: To Provide for Your Family We work to provide for our family (1 Tim. 5:8).

How to Work According to the Scripture, we are to work as unto the Lord, not as unto people, which is called eye service. Paul said, “Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, but not with eye service as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart fearing God. And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of inheritance for you serve the Lord Christ” (Col. 3:22-25).

A retired friend became interested in the construction of an addition to a shopping mall. Observing the activity regularly, he was especially impressed by the conscientious operator of a large piece of equipment. The day finally came when my friend had a chance to tell this man how much he'd enjoyed watching his scrupulous work. Looking astonished, the operator replied, "You're not the supervisor?" (Howard A. Stein in *Reader's Digest*).

Give

Why Work: To Give "that he may have something to give him who has need" (4:28b). As in the other admonitions, Paul gives a reason for why this should be done. Why should a believer work? Here it might be expected that Paul would say that one should work to care for himself or not be tempted to steal. Instead, he says "that he may have something to give to him who has need." The reason for work is not simply to supply one's own needs but also to give to others. Westcott says, "The inspiration of labor is not personal gain, but the fullness of service." Honest labor could become a selfish thing.

If we steal, we hurt others, so we are to work to be able to help others. Stealing is using another's labor to satisfy one's own desires. Working should be using one's own labor to supply another's needs.

How to Give The Lord is concerned about how we give. Paul teaches that we are to give "as a matter of generosity and not as a grudging obligation" (2 Cor. 9:5). He adds, "So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly, or of necessity, for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9:7). By the way, Paul adds, "He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully" (2 Cor. 9:6) and "God is able to make all grace abound toward you that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work" (2 Cor. 9:8).

Summary: Part of walking in righteousness is not stealing but working to be able to give to others.

Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). When you get a piece of the pie, you eat it and that's the end of that. When you give a piece of pie, there is satisfaction that lasts a long time. Jesus told a parable about a man who hoarded great wealth, and before he could enjoy it, He died. Jesus said, "So is he who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God" (Lk. 12:21).

Reminders: give to those who have a need and you do not have to be rich to give.

A small group of boys discussed what they wanted to be when they grew up. Most mentioned professions include doctors, lawyers, policemen, and firemen. One, however, said that he wanted to be a philanthropist. When one of the other kids asked him why, he replied, "Because they have all the money."

One dictionary defines a philanthropist as "one who makes an active effort to promote human welfare" and another as "one who loves and seeks to benefit mankind." Notice that the *amount* of money you have or the amount of money you give is not part of the definition. Simply having a lot of money doesn't make you a philanthropist. A poor person can "love to seek and benefit others" out of limited resources. In fact, a poor person who gives with the right heart attitude is more of a philanthropist than a person with great wealth who is a miser and gives grudgingly, although the charitable gift of the rich philanthropist is more.

Real righteousness is giving with the right heart attitude.

WALK IN RIGHTEOUSNESS—SPEAK TO EDIFY

Eulogies at funerals often say the deceased person was “a good man.” That probably means that the individual was not a criminal but a hard-working, moral person. While the Bible speaks of a person being “good,” it more often speaks of people being righteous or unrighteous. What is the biblical concept of being righteous? The list is long. In Ephesians 4, Paul gives a shortlist. He mentions such things as lying and stealing. Those are things we would expect to be on a list describing righteousness. Several times in that passage, Paul mentions speech. What does he have to say about that? Obviously, we should speak the truth (4:25). Is there something else we should know about our speech to live a righteous life?

Do not Tear Down

Paul exhorts, “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth” (4:29a). This injunction is not about lying. That has already been covered (4:25). What is said may be “the truth,” which does more harm than good. The issue, as seen from the last half of the verse, is not truth but grace.

About Harmful Speech The Greek word translated “corrupt” means “bad, worthless, rotten.” Hodge points out that it means “putrid,” but figuratively, as it is here, it means “offensive and injurious.” The text says “out of your mouth” but applies to Facebook, texting, and email. This includes cussing, thoughtless, insensitive words, gossip, and putdowns. Couples get into arguments and say insensitive, unkind, and hurtful things. One spouse says to the other, “You’re stupid.” The father says to his son, “You’re a loser.” Sometimes, it’s not just the words used; it is the tone of voice.

“Harsh words hurt.... Jibes, jests, and jokes can cut to the core. Sarcasm and sometimes silliness can pierce the heart. This is especially the case when the words are from the lips of a friend or one we love when heated by sudden passion. The utterance of the moment can embitter the future of a lifetime” (Wardlaw on Prov. 12:18).

Be Slow to Speak To help prevent saying the wrong thing at the wrong time, be slow to speak (Jas. 1:19). Solomon said that many years ago. “In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is wise” (Prov. 10:19). “Incessant conversation often leads to exaggeration, breaking of confidences, and associated sins” (MacDonald). By contrast, the wise restrain their words. Jerome said, “Let us first learn not to speak, that afterward, we may open our mouths to speak wisely.” The point is those who do not control their speech often sin with what they say, but the wise practice self-control in what they say.

“The heart of the righteous studies how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours forth evil” (Prov. 15:18). The righteous think before they speak. “A righteous person weighs his answers before giving them rather than blurting out the first thing that comes to his mind” (Buzzell). The point is the righteous think before they speak, but when the wicked, who have hearts full of evil, speak, they pour out evil. Bridges’ comments are insightful: “Consideration is an important part of the Christian’s character.” Think twice before you speak once. Many stumble by speaking from the impulse of the moment rather than from “a well-balanced and considered judgment.”

“Whoever guards his mouth and tongue keeps his soul from troubles” (Prov. 21:23). In the Hebrew text, the word translated “guards” is the same as the one rendered “keeps.” Those who

guard what they say *guard* themselves from trouble. To say the same thing another way, not controlling what you say gets you into trouble. The point is that those who control their speech so that they know when to be silent and what to say when they do speak keep themselves from trouble.

“Do you see a man hasty in his words? *There is* more hope for a fool than for him”(Prov. 29:20). Some have no self-control over their tongue. They speak before they think (MacDonald). There is more hope for fools than for people who cannot control their tongues. The book of Proverbs does not hold out much hope for fools. For example, it says, “A fool’s mouth *is* his destruction, and his lips *are* the snare of his soul” (18:7; see also 17:10). In other words, the words of fools ensnare them, eventually resulting in their destruction. There is more hope for fools headed to destruction than for people who cannot control their tongue! (Buzzell). The point is, when you see people with no self-control over their tongue, remember there is more hope for fools than for them (and there is not much hope for fools).

Guard your Heart Jesus said, “Those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart” (Mt. 15:18). My brother and I were playing pool in a bowling alley. The fellows at the next table were cursing and taking the Lord’s name in vain, which upset my brother. He said, “If they keep that up, I will tell them that they should not be talking like that.” I said, “Their problem is not their mouth but their heart.”

Build Up

The Command Rather than tear down with your speech, build up. Paul put it like this: “**but what is good for necessary edification**” (4:29b). The Greek word translated “edification” means “to build up.” What comes out of the believer’s mouth should be good, not bad; wholesome, not worthless; redemptive, not rotten, as the need may be or as necessary on that occasion. Someone has said, “Either keep silent or give that which is better than silence.”

“Pleasant words *are like* a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the bones” (Prov. 16:24). “Words of comfort, sympathy, or encouragement are medicinal” (Bridges). “Appropriately spoken words that encourage, soothe, or commend can be most pleasant and even uplifting to the point of helping a person feel better physically” (Buzzell). “Gentle, kind words, by soothing the mind, give the body health” (JFB). The point is that pleasant words are sweet to the soul and healing to the bones of the hearers.

“There is one who speaks like the piercings of a sword, but the tongue of the wise *promotes* health” (Prov. 12:18). Thoughtless words are like a sword that *wounds* others, but the words of the wise *heal*. The words of the wise can calm and comfort. What they say can be a means of support and encouragement. Their words “soothe the sorrowful, comforts the afflicted, cheers the drooping and despondent in spirit, promote peace and concord, justice and piety, personal and social happiness” (Wardlaw). Thoughtless words wound; wise words heal. This ancient proverb puts the lie to the modern proverb: “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words cannot hurt me.” As someone has said, “Words break no bones, but they do break hearts.”

“A wholesome tongue *is* a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit” (Prov. 15:4). The wholesome tongue has been explained as one that is “gentle” (Delitzsch), “gracious” (MacDonald). Such words sustain life. “Gracious speech refreshes, soothes, and revives” (MacDonald). In other words, “Words can encourage.” They can bring “healing that contributes to a person’s emotional health,” being a “source of strength and growth” (Buzzell). The point is gentle, soothing words refresh, but malicious words wound, depress and break one’s morale. “When there is grace in the heart, there will be *healing in the tongue*” (Bridges, italics his).

“A man has joy by the answer of his mouth, and a word *spoken* in due season, how good *it is!*” (Prov. 15:23). People who give helpful answers at the appropriate time experience personal joy and benefit others. “There is genuine satisfaction in giving an honest, helpful answer at just the right time to meet a particular need” (MacDonald). “Saying the right thing at the right time delights not only the hearer but also the one who says them” (Buzzell). The point is to say the right thing at the right time, which satisfies the speaker and benefits the hearer.

“The tongue of the righteous *is* choice silver; the heart of the wicked *is* worth little” (Prov. 10:20). What the righteous say is of great value, but what the wicked think and, therefore, what they say is of little or no value. What people are is reflected in what they say (see the contrast between “heart” and “tongue”). Sterling character produces sterling speech (MacDonald). Like a valuable piece of silver, what the righteous say is of great value, but what the wicked think is worthless.

To sum up: “Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit” (Prov. 18:21). What is spoken has the power of life and death. The point is that everyone, particularly those who are talkative, has the power of life and death in what they say, and they will reap the consequences of their speech. In court, the words of a witness can determine whether a defendant lives or dies (Buzzell). In ordinary conversation, what is said can be helpful or harmful. With words, people can save others by exhorting them or destroy others by abusing them (Bridges).

Does it tear down or build up? Does it injure or inspire?

The Reason “that it may impart grace to the hearers” (4:29c). Those who have been recipients of grace (1:6-7; 2:5, 8) should minister grace, that is, the favor of pleasure and profit to others (Hodge). Having received grace (2:8), we should give grace.

My wife explains how she learned to speak graciously. She says, “When I was in High School, I had a part-time job at the San Marino Pharmacy. In those days, the girls who worked at the pharmacy wore white uniforms like a nurse’s uniform, complete with white nurse’s shoes. It was an afterschool job and on this particular day, I was scheduled to work on a day my father was off work. I rushed in after school, dropped off my school books on the dining room table even though I was headed to my room! There, I changed my school clothes to my white uniform before heading off to the pharmacy for my shift. As I was about to walk out the door, my father greeted me and asked if I was leaving for work. I quickly answered, “Yes,” and it was at that moment I learned valuable life lessons.

“With a loving and kind voice and demeanor, without judgment, he asked me if I had a moment because he would like to polish my shoes for me. I remember glancing down and seeing scuffed and less-than-pristine or professional-looking shoes. As I was taking them off, he told me that I had an important job at the pharmacy, That I was a pretty girl, and that he wanted me to look my best. I learned two important lessons that day, which still impact me today. One, and the lesser of the two lessons, is to present myself appropriately, including having my shoes polished. More importantly, my father could have scolded me and lectured me on how inappropriate I was for heading out the door to work with my shoes looking terrible, but instead, he was kind and gracious and served me.”

Do Not Grieve the Holy Spirit

The Command The next verse says, “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God” (4:30a). The “and” connects this command to the one in verse 29. Speaking that tears down, does not build up, does not minister grace grieves the Holy Spirit. That which grieves another grieves the Holy Spirit,

which implies that the Holy Spirit is a person. Such speaking wounds His love and offends His holiness (Hodge). He is the One who enlightens us and empowers us. When He is grieved, He cannot do His work of enlightening us and empowering us.

The Assurance “by whom you are sealed for the day of redemption” (4:30b). The Holy Spirit sealed us (1:13), and even though we grieve Him, the seal is not broken, for He has sealed us for the day when Christ returns to redeem our bodies.

Summary: Walking in righteousness includes not saying things that hurt but saying things that help so as not to grieve the Holy Spirit.

Watch your words. A lady with a serious throat ailment was told by her doctor to take medication and not talk for six months. With a husband and six children to care for, it seemed an impossible order, but somehow she managed to comply. When she needed the youngsters, she blew a whistle. Instructions became written memos, and questions were answered on paper she placed around the house. After six months and her recovery, her first comments were quite revealing. She said that the children had become quieter. Then remarked, “I don’t think I’ll ever holler again like I used to.” When asked about the notes, she replied, “You’d be surprised how many hastily written notes were crumbled up and thrown into the wastepaper basket before I gave them to someone to read. Seeing my words before anyone heard them had an effect I don’t think I could ever forget.” I suspect that if we saw our words before we sent them flying out of our mouths, we would not speak many of them.

WALK IN RIGHTEOUSNESS—BE KIND

As a result of a conversation with a lady from another church, I listened to a sermon given by her pastor. In that sermon, he said as believers, we should be growing. Then he asked, “Have you grown in the last year? Or are you at the same spiritual level this year as last? As I listened to him, I wanted him to give me specifics or an example. He never did. Paul preached that message and he gave specifics.

Put away Various Sins

Paul groups five vicious sins together and exhorts believers to get rid of them: “Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice” (4:31). “Put away” here is not the same Greek word as the one used in verse 25. In this verse, it simply means “to remove.”

Bitterness Bitterness is resentment, the hard-hearted attitude that does not want reconciliation (Robinson). My brother tells of when he was a pastor in a rural church and a fifty-five-year-old lady came to see him. She told him three stories about her mother. When she was five years old, she asked her mother if she could go out and play and her mother said, “No.” When she was twelve years old, she asked her mother if she could ride her horse and her mother said, “No.” When she graduated from high school, she had an opportunity to teach, and her mother said, “No.” She told each of these three stories in great detail. It took her an hour to cover all three. My brother listened patiently and, when the lady was finished, said, “It seems to me that you’re angry at your mother.” The lady stood up, slammed her fist on the desk, screamed, “I am not angry at my mother,” and walked out of the office. She was not only angry, but she was also bitter. She harbored anger toward her mother until it became resentment.

Wrath Wrath is hot temper, passion. It is an outburst of anger (Pentecost). When you blow your top, you are exposing your brains or a lack of them. You can’t get rid of your anger by losing it. A lady rationalized her angry outburst by saying, “There is nothing wrong with losing my temper. I blow up and then it’s all over.” Billy Sunday replied, “So does a shotgun, but look at the damage it leaves behind.”

Anger Anger is a deep-seated, settled feeling of hostility (Pentecost). An ancient proverb says, “Anger is a wind that blows out the light of the mind.” The damage that anger causes the angry person is graphically illustrated by a legend concerning the fighting fish of Thailand. According to the legend, if two fighting fish were put into jars side-by-side, it would not take long before an aggressive action began. One fish would see the other, flash its colors, and puff himself up. Then, throwing himself against the glass, he would seek to destroy the other fish. According to the story, the aggressor usually got the worst of it because of the damage he did to his own body.

Clamor Clamor is loud, boisterous talking. Notice that this verse is between anger and evil speaking, perhaps indicating that it is an expression of anger and leads to evil speaking (Robinson).

Slander Evil speaking is slander, saying that which is not true and damaging another’s reputation.

Malice Malice is a desire to injure. “All” means every kind of malice is to be removed. In an episode of a comedy show in the early days of television, a character appeared in a heavy coat on a hot summer day. When asked why he wore such a heavy coat on a hot summer day, he explained

that he was hiding two sticks of dynamite under the coat. He would get even with the fellow who had been annoying by jabbing him in the chest whenever he talked. He said, “When he thumbs me this time, I’m going to blast his finger off.” He was unaware of what the dynamite would do to him (*Our Daily Bread*, 5/3/1990).

There seems to be a progression in this list. If not checked and removed, what begins with resentment ends in malice. These sins are like weeds in a garden. It starts with a small seed. At that point, we think, “No big deal.” A little resentment, a minor irritation, is tolerated. But if that seed is not removed, it will grow until it is a plant. And if the weed is not pulled, it will multiply until it has taken over the garden. Gardeners are well advised to remove weeds when they are seeds.

Put on Godly Virtues

Kindness “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ also forgave you” (4:32). In place of the five vicious sins, Paul commands the believer to put on three godly virtues. The Greek word translated “kind” means “to be good, gracious, useful, serviceable.” A lady who lived in a nursing home for years said one day, a friend who was going to the country to buy some strawberries invited her to go along. They stopped at several places, browsing fruit and vegetable stands. Later, the elderly lady wrote, “It would be difficult for anyone to understand the thrill of just buying a tomato! It took so little but did so much to make me happy.”

Tenderhearted “Tenderhearted” is being compassionate, especially toward those suffering. Don’t be hard-hearted (see bitterness in verse 31); be tenderhearted. The sins mentioned in verse 31 harden the heart. The first step in becoming softhearted is eliminating the sins that make you hard-hearted. The ultimate step is forgiving one another.

Forgiving The Greek word translated “forgiving” means: 1) to show favor, kindness, 2) to give freely; 3) to grant forgiveness, forgive freely. This word includes more than forgiveness; it means “to deal graciously with.” The motive that should constrain us to treat others graciously, including forgiving them, is that God has dealt graciously with and forgiven us.

M. R. DeHaan once wrote, “How spiritual are you? Is it possible to measure spirituality? Certainly, we can’t judge the spirituality of Christians by their prayers. Too much praying is done for its effect on the ‘listeners’ instead of the ‘Listener.’ Nor can we gauge spirituality but the loudness of one’s testimony or the ‘Amens’ and ‘Hallelujahs,’ which too often or more of a disturbance than an encouragement. Even the liberality of one’s giving is not an infallible test of spirituality, for it to maybe for personal recognition or easing one’s conscience. The more we examine this matter of the reality of spirituality, the more convinced we are that probably the surest test is the grace of “forgiveness.” Is it hard for you to forgive the offending and even an offensive brother? Spirituality comes by looking at Jesus and following His example. The more we become like HIM, the easier it will be for us to forgive another. When we think of how much He has forgiven US—we should be willing to turn to forgive others as God for Christ’s sake has forgiven us” (DeHaan, *Our Daily Bread*, 3/1/1961).

Forgive because and as you have been forgiven. An employee caught embezzling was summoned to the office of the firm’s senior partner. He expected the dismissal and possible criminal charges that could send them to prison. In the office, he was asked if he was guilty. He replied that he had no defense. The employer said, “I shall not charge you with a crime. If I take you back, can I trust you?” The employee gave assurances that he had learned his lesson. The employer said, “You are the second person who has fallen and has been pardoned in this business;

I was the first. The mercy and forgiveness you are receiving, I received. It is only the grace of God that can keep us both.”

Summary: Believers should put away sins such as bitterness, wrath, and anger and put kindness and forgiveness in their place.

This catalog reveals that some saint’s list of sins does not go far enough. Believers know murder and adultery are also to be put away. But this catalog doesn’t mention those sins. It deals with sins of attitude and speech. The problem is that too many believers never put these sins on their list.

Believers should do all of this because they are members of the same body and, thus, should give to each other and build each other up. Besides, they should not give place to the devil or grieve the Holy Spirit but be like God by being kind, tenderhearted, and gracious.

This list would prevent and solve a lot of problems. A lady called a Pastor, begging him to come right away because her husband had threatened to leave her. As he told the story, she said, “Please come over, please, and straighten this out!” The pastor goes on to explain, “They had been feuding for days. I asked her if she was a Christian and she said “yes.” Is your husband a Christian? The reply was “yes, and he’s listening on the extension phone.” So the pastor said, “Well if you are both Christians, you can settle your trouble immediately. I’m not coming over until after you have read together Ephesians 4:32. That is God’s solution. Try it first and if that doesn’t work, call me and I’ll come over. But you must believe Ephesians 4:32 and do it. If it fails, call me.” The pastor concluded, “I am still waiting for the call” (M. R. DeHaan, *Our Daily Bread*, 5/28/1959).

The key to all of this is forgiveness, which leads to kindness. Kenneth Williams was a convicted murderer. He was sentenced to life in prison for killing a 19-year-old cheerleader. Then he escaped. While on the run, he killed 24-year-old Michael Greenwood in a car wreck. On top of that, he was sentenced to death for killing Cecil Boren. He was executed by lethal injection in Arkansas on April 27, 2017. He had a 21-year-old daughter he had not seen in 17 years and a 3-year-old granddaughter he had never met. Stacey, the wife of Michael Greenwood, one of Williams’ victims, forgave Williams for killing her husband. Then, she paid to fly William’s daughter and granddaughter from Washington State to Arkansas so they could see him before his execution. Stacy and her family picked up Jasmine and her child from the airport and drove them to the prison.

WALK IN LOVE

The whole world is in love with love. Psychologists say that one of humans' greatest needs is to be loved and love. Poets eulogize it; novelists dramatize it; moviemakers capitalize on it; couples experience it; religion teaches it; everyone seeks it; no one is against it; the Bible says love is the greatest. Yet, as popular as it is, love is not properly perceived, is not practiced, and is often perverted. What some think is love isn't. What some call love isn't. What is this thing called love? Why should we practice it?

Many passages in the Bible discuss love. Some are well-known, such as 1 Corinthians 13 and the conversation between the lawyer and Christ. Others are not as well known but can be helpful. One little-known passage is Ephesians 5:1-7. In Ephesians 4, 5, and 6, Paul instructs believers on living in light of their calling. In chapter 4, he tells them to walk worthily (4:1-3), to walk in unity (4:4-16), and to walk in righteousness (4:17-32). In Ephesians 5:1-7, he says, "Walk in love."

Walk in Love and Self-Sacrifice

Imitate Your Father "Therefore be followers of God as dear children" (5:1). God has been gracious; He has forgiven us (4:32). Therefore, as His children we should be followers. The Greek word translated "followers" means "imitators." The children of God are to be imitators of God. God's children are further described as "dear," which is more accurately translated as "loving." God is love (1 Jn. 4:8). As one born from Him, believers should imitate Him, who is their heavenly Father and live a life of love. In short, be like your loving Father. Walk like Him (5:2).

Richard DeHaan, the son of M. R. DeHaan, who for many years was the teacher on the Radio Bible Class, was told by a funeral director, "I watched you as you came down the corridor and couldn't help but notice how much you walk like your dad." In writing about the incident later, Richard DeHaan said that as much as he appreciated the comment, what would have pleased him more was if someone had said he walked like his father spiritually. That should be the attitude of all God's children concerning their heavenly Father.

Live a Life of Self-Sacrifice What does it mean to imitate our heavenly Father by walking in love? What is love? Is there an example to follow? Paul answers those questions in the next verse: "And walk in love, as Christ also loved us and gave Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma" (5:2). Hoehner (BKC) contends that "and" should be translated "that is" to convey the idea that this statement explains how a believer is to imitate God, namely by walking in love. The Greek word translated "love" means to do what is best for the person loved. The example is that Christ loved us and gave Himself for us (Pentecost). Thus, this is a self-sacrificing lifestyle. Such a lifestyle is acceptable and pleasing to God as Christ's sacrifice was an offering that was a sweet-smelling aroma. The idea of a sweet-smelling offering is taken from Leviticus 1-3 and means one that is acceptable and pleasing to God.

When believers sacrifice their time, money, effort, comfort, or convenience to serve others, it is like a sweet-smelling perfume to God. Everything has its own distinct odor. Humans may not be able to detect it with their limited sense of smell, but it is there. A dog can detect the scent of a rabbit or a bird. Bees can detect intruders from another hive by their different odors. Ants will follow the trail of another ant for long distances merely by the scent. Well, spiritual Christians should have a scent. As someone has said, they should "smell like Jesus."

Years ago, Dave Simmons wrote a book entitled *Dad, The Family Coach*. In it, he tells of taking his kids to the mall. He writes, “I took Helen (eight years old) and Brandon (five years old) to the Cloverleaf Mall in Hattiesburg to do a little shopping. As we drove up, we spotted a Peterbilt eighteen-wheeler parked with a big sign that said, ‘Petting Zoo.’ The kids jumped up in a rush and asked, ‘Daddy, Daddy. Can we go? Please. Please. Can we go?’ ‘Sure,’ I said, flipping them both a quarter before walking into Sears. They bolted away, and I felt free to look for a scroll saw. A petting zoo consists of a portable fence erected in the mall with about six inches of sawdust and a hundred little furry baby animals of all kinds. Kids pay their money and stay in the enclosure enraptured with the squirmy little critters while their moms and dads shop.

“A few minutes later, I turned around and saw Helen walking behind me. I was shocked to see she preferred the hardware department to the petting zoo. Recognizing my error, I bent down and asked her what was wrong. She looked up at me with those giant, limpid brown eyes and said sadly, ‘Well, Daddy, it cost fifty cents. So I gave Brandon my quarter.’ Then she said the most beautiful thing I ever heard. She repeated the family motto. The family motto is in ‘Love is Action!’ She had given Brandon her quarter, and no one loves cuddly furry creatures more than Helen... She had heard and seen ‘Love is Action, [in our family] and now she had incorporated it into her little lifestyle. It had become part of her.

“What do you think I did? Well, not what you might think. As soon as I finished my errands, I took Helen to the petting zoo. We stood by the fence and watched Brandon go crazy, petting and feeding the animals. Helen stood with her hands and chin resting on the fence and just watched Brandon. I had fifty cents burning a hole in my pocket; I never offered it to Helen, and she never asked for it. Because she knew the whole family motto, it’s not ‘Love is Action.’ It’s ‘Love is SACRIFICIAL Action!’ Love always pays a price. Love always costs something. Love is expensive. When you love, benefits accrue to another’s account. Love is for you, not for me. Love gives; it doesn’t grab. Helen gave her quarter to Brandon and wanted to follow through with her lesson. She knew she had to taste the sacrifice. She wanted to experience that total family motto. Love is sacrificial action” (Simmons, pp. 123-124).

Do not Walk in Lust and Self-Indulgence

In Actions and Attitude To further clarify, Paul contrasts the kind of life believers should live with the kind of life they should not lead. He says, “But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for the saints” (5:3). Believers are to imitate their heavenly Father and live a life of love and self-sacrifice, not a life of lust and self-indulgence (Wescott). Ephesians 5:3 mentions three sins of lust and self-indulgence. Fornication is a general term for all unlawful sexual immorality. Instead of sacrificing their desire for another, fornicators sacrifice another for themselves. Fornication is diametrically opposed to love. By “all uncleanness,” Paul means all kinds of impurity. Fornication is the act; uncleanness includes attitudes. Wallowing in pornography is perhaps an example. Covetousness, the desire for more, may seem out of place next to fornication and uncleanness, but these are similar sins; all three desire to satisfy one’s appetite by taking what does not belong to him or her. Covetousness may be the worst of all, for Paul calls it a form of idolatry (Col. 3:5), a sin which takes the place of God Himself. Such sins, says Paul, should not be among saints, people set apart for God who is love.

In Speech and Humor Paul continues, “neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks” (5:4). Like the sins named in verse 3, these are

the opposite of love. A person can practice lust and indulge in habits of speech and humor, as well as actions and attitude.

Technically, “filthiness” can refer to shameless talk or conduct, but it is probably limited to speech in this context. It is a base speech that brings shame and disgrace. Trench says that the Greek Fathers, who most modern expositors follow, have understood it to mean “obscene discourse,” but he claims it includes all foul-mouthed abusiveness of every kind. He points out that Plutarch included “every license of the ungoverned tongue employing itself in the abuse of others.” Like the other words in this passage, he concludes that this word is an “outbreak of a loveless spirit toward our neighbor “ (Trench, p. 121). Base, lude, language is definitely included. Believers in Christ and the heavenlies ought to rise above bathroom gutter talk. Those whose hearts have been cleansed by the blood of Christ ought not to have filthy speech.

In the Greek text, “foolish talking” and “coarse jesting” are linked together. Perhaps they are related. Foolish talk is the frivolous, senseless, foolish talk of a fool (Hodge). A Greek professor once suggested to me that ethnic jokes come under the category of foolish talk.

Course jesting is offensive humor. The Greek word translated “coarse jesting means “the extremes of buffoonery, boorishness, coarse jesting, buffoonery.” The *English* word “boorishness” means “uncouth, rudeness of manner due to insensitiveness to others’ feelings and unwillingness to be agreeable.” Hodge claims this Greek word means “flippant, sarcastical, sacrilegious jesting.” Not all sarcasm is coarse jesting, but there is a cutting sarcasm designed to hurt that is. In fact, the English word “sarcasm” comes from a Greek word, which means “to tear the flesh like dogs, bite the lip in rage, speak bitterly” (Webster). In *Beyond Laughter*, Martin Grotjahn said, “The wit ... is an angry man in search of a victim.” Shakespeare said, “He jests at scars that never felt a wound” (*Romeo and Juliet*, II, II, 1). Harmful humor of any kind has no place in the life of love.

Such speech and humor are not fitting. Twice in this passage, Paul says there are actions and attitudes, habits of speech, and humor that are not fitting. Both sexual immorality (5:3) and inappropriate use of the tongue (5:4) are said to be unbecoming a believer (5:4). It is like saying that the inappropriate use of the tongue is as bad as sexual immorality. To participate in these kinds of activities would be like a delivered alcoholic wallpapering his bedroom with beer bottle labels. It just wouldn’t be fitting; it would be out of character.

Believers whose hearts and minds are filled with grace and love will have a grateful attitude and a thankful speech. Since the passage is about what is said to other people, giving thanks, at least, includes others. Do not put people down with humor; build them up with legitimate thanks.

Because You’ll be Disinherited and Disciplined

Disinherited At this point in the passage, Paul gives the reason why believers should not live a life of lust and self-indulgence in action and attitude (4:4-5). He says, “For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God” (5:5). The same sins listed in verse 3 are repeated in verse 5, only this time the covetous man is further described as an idolater, as he is in Colossians 3:5. Covetous people are idolaters because they put something in place of God. Apparently, the sins of verse 4 are not included in this warning.

What does Ephesians 5:5 mean? The most common interpretation is Paul warns them to abstain from such sins because those who practice them are not part of God’s kingdom. According to this view, “inheriting the kingdom” is synonymous with entering the kingdom. The problem with that view is that Paul readily acknowledges that believers commit such sins (5:3-4). Furthermore, if

that is the correct interpretation of the passage, Paul is saying, “Walk in love, not fornication, uncleanness or covetousness because if you do those things, you are not saved.” Ultimately, salvation depends on continuance, which is salvation by faith *plus works*. Another possibility is that there is a difference between entering and inheriting the kingdom. The Levites of the Old Testament entered the land but did not inherit any of it (Joshua). According to this interpretation, inheriting the kingdom is a reward in the Millennial Kingdom by ruling and reigning with Christ.

Disciplined Paul further warns, “Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience” (5:6). Believers should not be deceived into thinking this warning is an empty threat. God’s wrath comes upon the sons of disobedience, that is, on the unregenerate (2:2).

Paul concludes, “Therefore do not be partakers with them” (5:7). In other words, do not be partakers of the sins of unbelievers because God judges sin and He is no respecter of persons. If a Christian practices such sin, God will be angry with Him, just as He is angry with the unbeliever who lives such a lifestyle.

Summary: Believers are to live a life of love and self-sacrifice, and not a life of lust and self-indulgence in actions, attitudes, speech, or humor, because a life of love fits a child of a loving heavenly Father and a life of lust, is worthy of disinheritance and discipline.

Like the paragraphs before, this one contains two great truths, one negative and one positive. A reason supports each truth.

The negative truth is: “Do not live a selfish, self-serving life.” This passage mentions four ways it can be done: 1) by committing sexual immorality, 2) by coveting material things, 3) by constantly speaking stupid things, and 4) by coarse jesting. The fornicator, the materialist, the habitually frivolous speaker, and the comedian who goes too far are only thinking of themselves. Such sins (and keep in mind that frivolous speech is listed with fornication) are worthy of God’s displeasure to the point of disinheritance.

Suppose a wealthy man spent his life and a great deal of his fortune to stop the spread of pornography. Imagine also that this wealthy industrialist had a son whom he loved dearly, that he spent a great deal of time with as a boy, and that he sent him to the finest university he could find. Then he discovered that as an adult, his son spent all of his life reading pornography books and magazines and watching pornographic films. Would not the father be justified in being angry to the point of disinheriting him? He would still be his son; he would just be a poor excuse of a son of that kind of father.

The positive truth of this passage is: “Live a life of self-sacrificing service.” In contrast to a selfish, self-serving life, Paul urges the believer to live a life of self-sacrificing service. Instead of your body, possessions, speech, and humor serving only you and your interests, use them to serve others. If you have an attitude of gratitude (see “giving thanks” in verse 4), you’ll serve. Believers should live such a life because Christ loved them and died for them (5:2), because they are children of God (5:1), and because it pleases God (5:2). Although this passage does not say so, it implies that the believer should live a loving life to be richly inherited (2 Pet. 1:5-11).

If Abraham Lincoln were your father, would it be too much to ask you to vote for the abolition of slavery? If Emily Post were your mother, would it be proper to ask you to set the table correctly for guests? If your father were Winston Churchill, would it be fair to ask you to root for the English in the war? Well, your Father is a loving heavenly Father. Guess what He asks of you?

WALK IN THE LIGHT

To demonstrate the effectiveness of their weight loss program, companies show before and after pictures in their ads. The New Testament employs several symbols to describe the before and after of conversion: 1) death/life, 2) slavery/redemption, 3) enemies/reconciliation, and 4) far/near. In Ephesians 5, Paul uses the symbols of light and darkness. In essence, he tells the believer to walk in the light. What does he mean by that?

Exhibit the Light

You Are Light Paul says, “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord” (5:8a). Paul does not say, “You were in the dark,” but “You were darkness.” The issue is not *where* we were but *what* we were. Darkness is a symbol of sin. “God is light and in Him is no darkness at all” (1 Jn. 1:5). There may also be the idea of ignorance in this symbol. Before we were believers, we were darkness, that is, we were sinful and ignorant. We did not know where we had come from, where we were, or where we were going.

In Christ, we, who were darkness, are now light. God is light (1 Jn. 1:5). Christ is light (Jn. 8:2). Those in Christ are also light (5:8; Mt. 5:14). As darkness symbolizes sin, so light depicts righteousness. The believer is declared righteous in Christ (Rom. 5:1). There may also be the concept of truth or knowledge in the symbol of light (5:9).

Hodge says, “As light stands for knowledge and as knowledge, in the scriptural sense of the word, produces holiness, and holiness happiness; so *darkness* stands for ignorance, such ignorance inevitably produces sin and sin misery. Therefore, “you were darkness” means you were ignorant, polluted, and wretched. *But now you are light in the Lord*, i.e., in virtue of union with the Lord, you are enlightened, sanctified, and blessed” (Hodge, italics his).

Walk in the Light Since you are “light in the Lord,” Paul exhorts, “Walk as children of light” (5:8b). Believers should live as becoming “those who had been enlightened to see the evil of sin and the beauty of virtue” (Barnes). To walk as children of light means to walk in a way consistent with *what* you are. Paul gives the details in the next verse.

“(for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness and truth)” (5:9). The word “for” indicates that this statement explains the one just before it. Some Greek texts have “light” in the place of “Spirit,” but the majority of manuscripts read “Spirit.” The Holy Spirit produces the fruit of all kinds and forms of goodness, righteousness, and truth.

The Greek word translated “goodness” only occurs in the writings of Paul and he only uses it four times (5:8; Rom. 15:14; Gal. 5:22; 2 Thess. 1:11). The concept is of goodness that is for the good and the advantage of him who comes in contact with it. Hodge says, “It is benevolence and benefit ... that quality which adapts a thing to the end for which it was designed and renders it serviceable. Hence, we speak of a good time, a good soil, and a good man.” A beam of light from a laser can drill a hole through a diamond. A concentrated and amplified ray of light can melt a steel plate in a fraction of a second. Light helps doctors operate, the artist paints, and the secretary types.

There is an element of kindness and generosity in this word. To walk as children of light is to be useful. When she picked up her kids from school on a hot day, a lady I know would take a bottle of cold water to the crossing guard. I heard of a businessman who was having a difficult time

financially when someone gave him \$100. He bought lunch for himself at Chick-fil-A, gave the hundred dollars to the cashier, and said, “Pay for everybody’s bill until the hundred dollars runs out.” When my friend Dave passed away, his widow needed the TV table put together, and when she couldn’t find anyone to put it together, I did it.

Righteousness is conformity to the divine will in purpose, thought, and action. Robinson says that goodness represents the kindlier and righteousness represents the sterner element in the ideal character. A righteous person could evict a widow for not paying her rent and would be righteous in doing so. Goodness, however, would pay the bill for her.

Believers walking in the Spirit and producing the fruit of the Spirit will have both goodness and righteousness. At times, their tenderness will be apparent, and at other times, they will appear to be tough. They will not compromise what is right but will always seek to be gentle and gracious.

The word “truth” means 1) “the reality lying at the base of an appearance” and 2) truthfulness, not just in the verbal sense, but in the sense of sincerity and integrity of character. To walk as a child of light is to be committed to truth. Such a person wants to know the truth about the Word of God and himself. Some are more interested in protecting their point of view or prejudice than they are in knowing the truth. They would rather protect themselves than know the truth.

Light, by its very nature, reveals the truth. Take anything from a dark or dimly lit room into the bright light of the noonday, and you will see it for what it really is.

Ephesians 5:9 is parenthetical, explaining the fruit of the Spirit in verse 8. Therefore, Ephesians 5:10 is grammatically connected to Ephesians 5:8 (Hodge). Believers are walking as children of light, “finding out what is acceptable to the Lord” (5:10). The Greek word translated “finding out” means “to try, to test, to prove.” It is used primarily for testing metals. The Greek word rendered “acceptable” means “well-pleasing.” Thus, believers are to walk as children of light, examining and determining what is well-pleasing to the Lord. Eadie has said, “Their course of conduct ought to prove that they hated the previous darkness, that they were content with no ambiguous twilight, but lived and acted in the full splendor of the sun of righteousness, hating the secret and unfruitful deeds of darkness referred to in the following context.”

Perhaps this starts with wanting the truth, which produces personal righteousness and useful goodness.

Expose the Darkness

Do not Fellowship with Darkness Being “light in the Lord” and “children of light” (5:8), not only has responsibilities to light but also has duties toward darkness. Paul discusses these next. For example, he says, “And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness” (5:11a). In contrast to the fruit of the Spirit (5:9), is the unfruitful works of darkness (5:11). What does Paul mean by “fellowship” with “works of darkness”? The Greek word translated “fellowship” means “to share with, take part in.” This is another way of saying, “Do not commit these sins.” In Ephesians 5:3-4, Paul said sins like immorality, idolatry, improper speech, and inappropriate humor were not fitting for saints. His conclusion was the exhortation, “Do not be partakers with them” (5:7). Then, to explain that (see the “for” in 5:8), he says, “Though you were once darkness, you are now light” (5:8). So now he says, “Do not participate in these works of darkness,” meaning the sins named in verses 3 and 4.

M. R. DeHaan told of a saloon keeper who sold an old tavern building he had occupied for many years to a local church. The church members removed the bar, added some lights, gave the whole place a fresh coat of paint, and installed some pews. They then opened the doors “for church

services.” Because of an oversight, however, a parrot belonging to the former owner was left behind. So, on Sunday morning, the wise old bird was watching from the rafters. When the minister appeared, he squawked, “New proprietor!” As the choir marched in, he quipped, “New floor show!” But when he looked over the congregation, he was heard to exclaim, “But the same old crowd!”

Expose Darkness Believers have another duty toward darkness, namely, “but rather expose them” (5:11b). The Greek word “expose” means “convict, reprove, rebuke.” Robinson says that this verse means to expose, not reprove. Hodge says it does not mean reprove by admonishing or rebuking but convincing with evidence. Believers are not only to avoid sin; they are to expose it and, maybe under some circumstances, even rebuke it (Pentecost says the word “expose” means “to rebuke with the result that there is conviction”).

Hoehner (BKC) suggests that this only applies to other believers. He says, “Christians, by conducting themselves as ‘children of light,’ expose the “deeds of darkness.” These deeds, however, refer here to the deeds of other believers who are not walking in the light. This is because only God can expose and convict unbelievers’ deeds (1 Cor. 5:12-13). Believers, on the other hand, can expose evil deeds among other Christians within the church. This, the Corinthians failed to do (1 Cor. 5).”

Paul, however, is probably not limiting this to other believers. The very nature of light is to reveal the true character of things and what is right and wrong, wherever it is. By walking in the light, believers are a light that exposes darkness. One man with a clean, white shirt in a room full of men with filthy white shirts unconsciously exposes them. A healthy person unintentionally exposes sick people in a hospital ward.

A well-known professional golfer played in the tournament with President Gerald Ford, a fellow pro, Jack Nicklaus, and Billy Graham. After the round was over, one of the other pros on the tour asked, “Hey, what was it like playing with the president and Billy Graham?” The pro said with disgust, “I didn’t need Billy Graham shoving religion down my throat!” He headed for the practice tee. His friend followed the golfer, and when he pounded out his fury on a bucket of golf balls, he asked, “Was Billy a little tough on you out there?” The pro sighed and said with embarrassment, “No, he didn’t even mention religion.” R. C. Sproul, who told the story in his book *The Holiness of God*, commented, “Astonishingly, Billy Graham had said nothing about God, Jesus, or religion, yet the pros stomped away after the game accusing Billy of trying to ram religion down his throat. What happened? Simply this: the evangelist had so reflected Christ-likeness that his presence made the pro-feel uncomfortable” (*Our Daily Bread*, 5/6/1986).

Why would God want believers to expose darkness? The answer is so it will become light. That is not stated here, but it is implied in the word “expose,” which is used in the ministry of the Holy Spirit, who convicts of sin so people will be saved (Jn. 16:8-11).

The Nature of Light The word “for” at the beginning of verse 12 gives the reason for exposing the deeds of darkness. Paul explains, “For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret, but all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light” (5:12-13). Some sins are so shameful and disgraceful that we blush to even speak of them, but we sometimes have to do it because that is the nature of light. The essence of light is that it reveals; it makes manifest. So, as light, we expose sin.

The phrase “in secret” is not identical to the term “the darkness.” All sins are deeds of darkness, but not all are done in secret. Some are committed openly and publicly. Thus, “in secret” limits evil to vile and filthy sins. Sexual sins are not practiced in public; covetousness is hidden from public view.

Paul concludes with an exhortation to those who are spiritually asleep. “Therefore He says, ‘Awake, you who sleep. Arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light’” (5:14). This verse produces several questions. Is Paul quoting Scripture? The formula, “Therefore He says,” was used in Ephesians 4:8 to introduce a quotation from the Old Testament. The problem is that the words that follow the formula in this verse are not a quotation from any passage in the Old Testament. Several solutions have been suggested: 1) Paul does not mean to quote one passage, but the general sense of several Old Testament verses, such as Isaiah 26:19, 51:17, 60:1, and Malachi 4:2. 2) Paul is quoting an ancient hymn. 3) Paul is quoting some other writing. He is probably either condensing several passages or giving the spirit of one passage. Many assume he is referring to Psalms 60:1 (Hodge).

What does the quotation mean? Death and darkness are the realms of the unbeliever (2:1; 5:8). Paul pictures believers as asleep among the dead. Thus, he exhorts believers to wake up and arise from among the corpses (“from” in the phrase “from the dead” means “from among the dead”). If they do that, Christ will “give them light,” that is, they will be a reflector of light.

In the tropics of central Africa, the natives are sometimes afflicted by a disease known as sleeping sickness. The victim sinks into a fatal, painless lethargy. In one epidemic, between 1901 and 1904, more than 100,000 people died in a single province. The disease is caused by a blood parasite that enters the body by means of a small fly called the Tse Tse fly. This fly transmits the parasite to its victim by biting him. After the bite, three years may elapse before the symptoms develop. Then, it is often too late. The disease causes drowsiness, sleep, and, finally, death. Before they discovered the cause of the disease, the natives of central Africa saw no connection between the bite of the fly and the inevitable death that followed later, so they let the flies bite them, not even taking the trouble to brush them off. Of course, after the cause was discovered, the natives did everything they could to eradicate the fly, including cutting down the jungle around their houses, spraying the breeding places, etc. They did everything possible to create an environment where the fly could not live (*Our Daily Bread*, 11/30/1957). Some Christians have been bitten by a spiritual fly, causing spiritual sleeping sickness. Sin is the sinister culprit. Believers must awake before the fatal fly bites them.

Summary: Believers who are light should exhibit their light and expose the darkness.

Let your light shine. Turn it on. Don’t hide it under a bucket. Wake up! Don’t fall asleep on the job. Do your job—shine!

In other words, you ought to influence others around you. In America, in general, and in Southern California, in particular, the attitude is “live and let live.” The world has peddled the pill of “If you’re sincere” or “If it’s meaningful to you,” it’s okay, and believers have swallowed it.

As a boy, Robert Louis Stevenson was intrigued by the work of an old lamplighter who went about with a ladder and a torch, setting street lights ablaze for the night. One evening, in Edinburgh, as a young lad, Robert stood watching with childish fascination, and his parents exclaimed, “Look! Look! There’s a man out there punching holes in the darkness!” As believers walk in the light, they, too, punch holes in the darkness.

WALK IN WISDOM

Imagine a man risking his honor, his job, and his life in prison by selling a few government secrets to the Soviets for a few shekels. “Stupid,” you say. Imagine a teenager endangering his life, limb, friends, and family by driving 90 mph down a busy boulevard. “Not smart,” you think. Imagine a bag lady living in a flea-bag apartment and wandering the streets, rummaging through garbage cans for food, when she has thousands of dollars stuffed in her mattress. “Foolish,” you respond. Imagine a star athlete on a major sports team throwing his cash and career after a cocaine habit. “Ridiculous!” you exclaim. Before you look down your nose at those, look at your life. Have you ever done anything foolish? Who hasn’t? Some don’t just do foolish things once in a while, they *live* foolish lives. Needless to say, nobody wants to be foolish. We all want to be wise and live a wise life. What is the essence of a wise walk?

Redeem the Time

Walk Carefully In Ephesians 5:8-14, Paul taught that since believers are children of light, they should walk in the light and not only not participate in darkness but expose it. If they are to do that, they must take heed to themselves. Thus, Paul says, “See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise” (5:15). The Greek word translated “then” is the word “therefore.” It connects this statement with the thought in verses 8-14. As light, believers are to affect the darkness. Therefore, they should walk circumspectly. The Greek word translated “wise” means “skill.” A wise walk is a careful, skillful walk.

The Greek word translated “circumspectly” means “with exactness, carefully.” One preacher illustrated walking circumspectly by describing a masonry wall that separated two pieces of property. Sharp objects, such as nails and pieces of glass, were embedded in the top of the wall. The barricade was designed to keep vandals from stealing an orchard owner’s luscious fruit. The next-door neighbor, however, owned a cat filled with curiosity. Bent on seeing what was on the other side of the wall, the cat leaped up and landed on a piece of glass, cutting its paw. The next time, he was wiser. He found an appropriate place to land and walked gingerly along the entire length of the barrier, picking each successive step with his paw with extreme deliberation. The thoughtful, careful walk of the cat along that treacherous pathway is a picture of walking circumspectly. To drive circumspectly would be to keep the speed under the posted limit, always give a signal when turning, turn from the right lane into the right lane, and stop behind the white line. Since the world is full of nails and broken glass, believers must be careful where they walk. They must look where they are going (“see”). Foolish believers are careless concerning their walk. They do not watch where they are going or think about what they are doing. Consequently, they trip, fall, and get hurt.

In Ephesians 5:14, Paul commanded: awake you who sleep. Now he says, don’t walk carelessly as a fool, but carefully as a wise man. In light of verse 14, perhaps an apt illustration is sleepwalking. Don’t walk in your sleep. Wake up. Open your eyes. The way to walk carefully, wide awake, as a wise person is now given.

Redeem the Time For one thing, believers should “redeem the time (5:16a).” Several interpretations of this phrase are possible, depending on the meaning of the word “time” (see Hodge for four possibilities). Basically, it can be understood as simply time and, thus, the

injunction means “make the most of your time.” The Greek word translated “time,” however, denotes a fixed and definite period of time, a seasonable time, an appropriate time. Therefore, the idea is: buy for yourself (the meaning of the middle voice of the word redeem) the opportunity while it lasts. The imagery comes from the marketplace. Watch for a good deal and, when you find it, grab it. Buy the bargain.

An old Chinese adage says, “Opportunity has a forelock, so you can seize it when you meet it. Once it is past, you cannot seize it again.” The English word “opportunity” comes from Latin and means “toward the port.” It suggests a ship taking advantage of the wind and tide to reach the harbor safely.

Who seeks and will not take when once ‘tis offered,
Shall never find it more.
(Shakespeare, Anthony and Cleopatra, II.VII.)

He that will not when he may,
When he will he shall have nay.
(Anatomy of Meloncholy, III.2.5.5,
an Old English proverb from the tenth century.)

One reason for grabbing opportunities is “because the days are evil (5:16b).” Since sin is abundant and abounds, seize every opportunity to take wise steps to do good (Hodge). No less than Voltaire said, “The opportunity for doing mischief is found a hundred times a day and of doing good once a year.” There are more opportunities to do evil than good, so seize every opportunity to do good.

Discern the Will of God

Do not be Unwise At this point, Paul draws another conclusion, but in the process, further develops a wise walk. He says, “Therefore do not be unwise” (5:17a). The word “therefore” connects this with what precedes and draws a conclusion from it. Because the days are evil, believers must not be unwise but understand the will of God.

The Greek word “unwise” means “without reason, senseless, foolish,” expressing “want of mental sanity and sobriety, a wreckless and inconsiderate habit of mind.” From its use in the New Testament, Hodge concludes this word means “one who does not make a right use of his understanding; one who does not see things in their true light or estimate them to their relative importance ... ‘be ye not senseless, indiscriminating between what is true and false, right and wrong, important and unimportant.’”

Being unwise is more than a thinking process. It includes decisions and actions. It is holding on to self-will that is opposed to God’s will. The mother of a young man struggling with God’s will cut some letters out of construction paper and penned a motto on his bedroom wall that read, “Let God.” Partly because of conviction and partly out of anger, he left the room and slammed the door behind him when he saw the sign. When he returned, he discovered that the letter “D” had fallen from the motto and was lying on the floor. The result was the motto read, “Let Go.” If you are to let God, you must let go.

Discern God's Will “But understanding what the will of the Lord is” (5:17b). The Greek word translated “understand” means “perceive.” Believers are to perceive, discern the will of God in every situation. They are to understand the will of God so they can do it.

How does one know, discern, and understand the will of God? The answer, which is not given in this passage, is from the Word of God. Everything you need to know about the will of God is in the Word of God. When people try to discern the will of God apart from the Word of God, they often end up misguided.

I once read of a group of people who unlawfully occupied a house because they believed it was the will of God. One woman in the group claimed that she had a heavenly vision, indicating that the end of the world was near. According to her, God had commanded her and the others to remain in the house to wait for the coming of Christ. So there they sat. In the meantime, the mortgage payment became overdue, and an eviction notice was issued, but it was ignored. “The Lord told us to stay,” they insisted. Federal authorities finally intervened and they were bodily removed from the premises. While they might have sincerely believed that they were in the will of God, they were violating the Word of God that teaches believers to owe no one anything and to obey those who have authority over them (Rom. 13:1-8).

Have a Full Spiritual Life

Do not get Drunk Thus far, the discussion of a wise walk has been in general terms. Abruptly (Westcott), Paul gets specific: “And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation” (5:18a). The Greek word translated “dissipation” means “not saving,” that is, destruction. It means wasteful. In intoxication, there is wastefulness, debauchery, revelry, riot, and ruin, all of which a wise person avoids. It is not wise to get drunk. It is not wonderful; it is a waste. Bars, lounges, and taverns advertise a “Happy Hour.” You may be happy for an hour, but the hangover lasts for hours. That’s not smart; that’s stupid. That’s not fun; that’s folly.

Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions? Who has complaints? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? Those who linger long at the wine. Those who search for mixed wine. Do not look at the wine when it is red, sparkles in the cup, and swirls around smoothly; at the last, it bites like a serpent and stings like a viper. Your eyes will see strange things, and your heart will utter perverse things (Prov. 23:29-33).

Be Filled in Spirit Rather than being drunk, Paul commands believers to “Be filled with the Spirit” (5:18b). Pardon the pun, but this command is *filled* with problems. In the Greek text, the construction of the phrase, “Be filled with the Spirit,” is unusual (Eadie). One commentator says, “There is a certain strangeness about the construction in Greek” (Foulkes). In the Greek text, there is no article before the word “spirit” and the preposition “with” is “in.” Thus, the Greek text reads, “Be filled in Spirit” (see *Young's Literal Translation*). Moreover, “spirit” can refer to the human spirit or the Holy Spirit. What, then, does this command mean?

“Spirit” refers to the Holy Spirit, not the human spirit. The word “spirit” occurs fifteen times in Ephesians. In eleven cases, it refers to the Holy Spirit, but more importantly, the construction “in Spirit” is used in Ephesians of the Holy Spirit (2:18, 2:22; 3:15; and *cf.* 6:18 with Jude 20). Even those who interpret the word “spirit” here as the human spirit concede that the Holy Spirit is part of the process. For example, Lenski, who interprets the word “spirit” in this passage as the human spirit, says, “Our spirit is ever to be filled so that it overflows with spiritual expressions. The fact that these expressions are due to the Holy Spirit is self-evident, for this is the new life in us, which is full of spiritual emotions that presses for utterance. Yes, here, there is a contrast

between base, physical stimulation, and noble spiritual stimulation. The worldling descends to his body; the Christian descends to his spirit” (see also Westcott).

So, what does being filled with the Holy Spirit mean? First, consider what it does not mean. Even though the Greek text reads, “be filled in Spirit,” virtually all English translations render it, “Be filled *with* the Spirit.” It is commonly assumed that this imperative means that believers are to be filled *with* the Holy Spirit, as if the Holy Spirit is the substance with which one is filled, like a glass filled with water. This Greek construction, however, does not mean “Be filled *with* the Spirit” (Hoehner, BKC). If that were what Paul intended, he would have used another Greek construction (Robinson). As F. F. Bruce points out, “The effects of being filled with the Spirit were mockingly misinterpreted on the day of Pentecost as being the result of new wine (Acts 2:13), but neither there nor here is it to be inferred that the Spirit is a substance with which man’s personality can be filled just as his body can be filled with wine. Paul does not say, ‘Become full of the Spirit,’ but ‘Be filled in Spirit.’”

There are two possible meanings of being filled in the Spirit. The Greek construction of this command can mean, “Be filled *by* the Holy Spirit” or “Be filled *in* the Spirit.” Robinson says the sequence of thought appears to be, “Find your fullness through a higher instrument or in a higher sphere,” adding, “It is difficult to distinguish between the fullness which comes through the Spirit and the fullness which consists in being full of the Spirit.”

Some explain the exhortation as be filled *by means* of the Holy Spirit (“Shall we strike with the sword” in Lk. 22:49; Moule, *Idiom Book*, pp. 76-77; Hoehner, BKC). Robinson translates it, “Let your fullness be that which comes through the Holy Spirit.” Bruce says, “Let your fullness be that which the Holy Spirit produces.” If that is the meaning, the content of the filling is not specifically stated, but it may refer to the fullness of the moral excellence and power of God mentioned in Ephesians 1:23 (Hoehner, BKC).

Others insist that the interpretation is being filled in the realm of the Holy Spirit (Oepke, *TDNT*, 2, 1964, pp. 540-41). The idea of a sphere is in Romans 8:9, where Paul says believers are not “in the flesh, but in the Spirit.” What does it mean to be filled in the sphere of the Holy Spirit? In Ephesians 5, Paul does not make the filling of the Spirit the main topic, as if to say that being filled is *the* issue in the spiritual life. The main topic in Ephesians 5 is “walk.” Paul instructs believers to walk in love (5:1-7), walk in light (5:8-14), and walk in wisdom (5:15-21). The filling is associated with walking in wisdom and understanding God’s will. In fact, before Paul mentions being filled, he says, “Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is” (5:17). The sphere of the Holy Spirit, the author of the written Word of God, is the will of God and wisdom.

In the Scripture, the Holy Spirit is repeatedly connected to wisdom. Isaiah wrote, “There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots. The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him, The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, The Spirit of counsel and might, The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD (Isa. 11:1-2). Jesus was said to be filled with wisdom (Lk. 2:40) before it is recorded that He was filled with the Holy Spirit (Lk. 4:1). When a problem arose in the church in Jerusalem, the apostles instructed the believers to “Seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business” (Acts 6:3). They chose Stephen and six others (Acts 6:5). Later the unbelievers to whom he spoke “were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke” (Acts 6:10). In Ephesians 5:18, Paul says, “be filled with the Spirit” and says that one of the results is singing. In Colossians 3:16, He says, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you

richly,” and says one of the results is singing. Since the result of being filled with the Spirit and the Word dwelling in believers richly both result in the same thing, they are the same thing.

Still others combine the concepts of “by” and “in” (Alford; Ellicott; Fee). That view has been criticized as being a “needless refinement” (Salmond), but maybe this unusual phrase was chosen to combine the concepts of both “in” and “by.” From other passages, it is clear that the Holy Spirit empowers believers (3:16).

The Results Following the imperative of verse 18 are five participles, usually taken to be the result of being filled in the realm of the Holy Spirit. Two of these are linked together (“singing” and “making”) so that four participial phrases modify the command of verse 18.

The first result is **“Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” (5:19a)**. The phrase translated “one another” is not a reflective pronoun (“yourselves” in the KJV). It is a reciprocal pronoun, “one another” (NKJV). Here, it should be translated “one another” as it is in 4:32 and Colossians 3:16. Believers who are filled up in the realm of the Holy Spirit will be speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.

What is the difference between psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs? Perhaps Paul does not intend a great distinction between these words but only emphasizes the wide variety of music. There is, however, at least a slight difference. The Greek word translated “psalms” means “a sacred song sung to a musical accompaniment.” Trench says it refers to the Psalter of the Old Testament. Hymns are songs of praise addressed to God (Robinson; Hodge; Hoehner, BKC). Spiritual songs are songs that are spiritual, that is, either composed by spiritual men or having spiritual things as their subject, but either way, it is talking about a spiritual song because in this context, a spiritual man would compose a spiritual song.

The second result is **“Singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord” (5:19b)**. All singing should be from the heart to the Lord. God is not pleased with half-hearted singing that mouths the words. He desires wholehearted hymns from the heart directed to Him.

The third result is **“Giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (5:20)**. The singing was to the Lord; the giving of thanks is to the Father in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Giving thanks is all the time for all things. Does that mean we are to thank God for sin! No! In the context of Ephesians, this is for all blessings (1:3; Hodge). First Peter deals with suffering and it does not contain this concept. Paul’s exhortation does mean that we should express gratitude to God for the abundant blessings and the adversities of life. Paul gloried in his afflictions (2 Cor. 12:9-10). We can give thanks for all things in a sense because all things work together for good (Rom. 8:28).

Spurgeon referred to the bitter things that befall us as “despised blessings, love tokens which come to us from God in black envelopes.” He said they are “benefits which travel to us by way of the cross” and are generally the best “that ever comes from our Father’s country.” An old Scottish prayer book contains an expression of praise that emphasizes the value of trials. It says that through difficulties, our souls are enriched by a fuller experience of God’s love, a more childlike dependence upon His will, and a deeper sympathy for the suffering and sad.

Matthew Henry, the famous commentator, was a godly man who accepted everything in life as coming from the hand of the Lord. One day he experienced the stark reality of being robbed of his wallet. That night he wrote in his diary, “Let me be thankful first because I was never robbed before. Second, although he took my purse, he did not take my life. Third, although he took all I possessed, it was not much. Fourth, it was I who was robbed and not I who robbed.”

The fourth and final result is **“submitting to one another in the fear of God” (5:21)**. The Greek word translated “submit” was a military term that means “to place or rank under, to subject.” Here

it is in the middle voice and, therefore, should be translated “subject yourselves.” This submission is mutual and is to be done in fear of the Lord. The motive for submission is reverence for Christ (Hodge). Paul and Silas were submissive while singing and praising God in prison (Acts 16).

Summary: A wise lifestyle, which consists of carefully considering one’s actions, grabbing every opportunity to do good, and acknowledging the Lord, results in joy, gratitude, and submission.

Don’t be foolish, wasting your life on evil in general and drunkenness in particular. There is an obvious contrast in verse 18 (“but”), but what is it? Is it between spirits and Spirit, that is, between wine and the Holy Spirit? Is it between the body and the spirit, that is, don’t fill the body, fill the spirit? The contrast is not between the wine and the spirit but between the two resultant states. One state leads to disorder and moral wreck, whereas the other leads to an orderly life, resulting in joy in fellowship.

Be wise. Use your life for good in general and the Lord in particular. Be careful. Watch your step. Consider where you walk. Grab every opportunity to be of service. That’s smart. Especially make sure you know the will of God and do it. That’s wisdom.

If you walk wisely instead of foolishly, you will be full of joy, gratitude, and submission. Two teenagers got in their cars and sped off. One carefully followed the traffic code, even being so careful that he watched for the other driver. The other was careless and reckless. Consequently, he ended up in a traffic accident. The first fellow was not only right, but he was wise, as the result demonstrated.

WALK IN WISDOM—WIVES AND HUSBAND

With so many marriages following apart, one of the great needs today is for a model marriage. What couple would you pick as a model for marriage? If you do not have one in mind, what kind of a model would you design?

God supplies that need in Ephesians 5. The subject of the book of Ephesians is our calling in the church. In chapters 1-3, Paul explained that God had chosen believers and called them to Himself into the church. Beginning in chapter 4, he encourages believers to walk worthy of the calling by which they are called. They are to walk in unity, righteousness, love, light, and wisdom. In Ephesians 4:1-5:21, he used the motif of “walk” (4:1, 17; 5:2, 8, 15). Beginning with Ephesians 5:22, he drops that term and does not use it again in this letter. Also, in Ephesians 4:1-5:21, he has spoken to all believers about their lives. In Ephesians 5:22- 6:9, he addresses individuals in terms of their relationships.

What is the connection between Ephesians 4:1-5:21 and Ephesians 5:22-6:9? Some have suggested that the connection is submission because Paul says submitting to one another in verse 21 and wives submit in verse 22. The problem with that view is that Paul does not use the word submit with husbands, parents, or masters. In a sense, Ephesians 5:22-6:9 is a takeoff on wisdom. What Paul tells each of the individuals does not directly deal with submission, but it does relate to divine wisdom. If this is an extension of walking, then it is walking in wisdom at home.

Wives, Submit to Your Husbands

The Command Paul commands: **“Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord” (5:22).** The word translated “submit” is a Greek compound word from the two words “to place” and “under.” It was a military term meaning “to subject, to put in subjection.” It is in the middle voice, meaning “to subject oneself.” This injunction has been attacked as an attack on women. The charge is that it degrades women, making them second-class citizens and implying that they are inferior. Nothing could be further from the truth. In the context of New Testament Christianity, this is not a put-down, nor does it subject women as a class to men as a class in every situation. All believers are to submit to one another (5:21). Submission is the lifestyle of believers. Furthermore, this passage does not teach that all women must submit to all men. Instead, it indicates that each wife must voluntarily submit herself to “her own husband.” She is to put herself under his authority.

The command, then, is for each Christian wife to submit to her husband. She is to do this “as to the Lord,” that is, to regard submission to her husband as part of her submission to the Lord (Hodge). Or, to put the same thing another way, a Christian wife cannot be submissive to the Lord and not be submissive to her own husband (Toussaint).

Standing before a pastor, the bride is asked, “Do you take this man to be your lawfully wedded husband? Do you solemnly promise before God and these witnesses that you will love, honor, and obey him and that forsaking all others for him alone, you will perform unto him all the duties that a wife owes to her husband until God, by death, shall separate you?” She answers, “I do.” The problem is, many brides really mean “Re-do.” The biblical wife is one who is not trying to remake her husband but one who is submitting to her husband.

Why should the wife have to submit to her husband? Why not the husband to the wife, or, at least, why don't they take turns?

The Reason Paul explains the reason why wives are to submit to their husbands: “For the husband is the head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the savior of the body” (5:23). The word “for” indicates Paul is giving a reason for the command of verse 22 (Pentecost). The reason is that God has designated the husband as the head of the wife. Headship is leadership. This “authority” is not rooted in any inherent superiority of the male over the female but rather in the position that God has given to the husband. The model for marriage, then, is the pattern of Christ and the church. Christ is the head of the church (1:22; 5:23), but that does not mean He is a selfish, self-serving dictator. Because of who He is and what He has done, the church gladly submits to Him. Likewise, the husband is the head and savior of the wife, who is “one flesh” with him (5:28-31). He is to provide and protect (Hodge). He is to bless and to benefit, and she is to respond with submission and obedience.

Our problem with this reason for submission is that we get our concept of headship from the business world, where headship is a dictatorship. The head of the corporation sits in the executive chair, high above all those “under” him, and gives orders. The illustration here, however, is of a head of a body. What is the relationship of the head and the body? The head receives impulses from the body. For example, the foot may say to the head, “Hey, head, you need to know that I just landed on a tack—moved it, and the sooner, the better.” The head responds and issues the order for the foot to move, even providing the energy to do so. A proper head provides sensitive, creative leadership.

The Extent Paul continues, “Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything” (5:24). Technically, the Greek text does not say “therefore;” it says, “but,” which is a problem because there does not seem to be a contrast between verses 23 and 24. To retain the adversative force of the word “but,” some have suggested that the thought is that Christ is Savior in a sense, but a husband is not. Actually, there are other usages of the word “but.” Perhaps here, the word “but” is used “to fix the attention on the special point of immediate interest” (Robinson).

What this verse does do is give the extent of submission—in everything. Does that mean there are no exceptions? What if the husband, unlike Christ, asked his wife to do something immoral or illegal? Hodge answers, “She is to be subject . . . in everything. That is, the subjection is not limited to any one sphere or department of the social life but extends to all. The wife is not subject to some things and independent to others, but she is subject to all. This, of course, does not mean that the husband’s authority is unlimited. It teaches its extent, not its degree. It extends over all departments but is limited in all: first, by the nature of the relation, and second, by the higher authority of God. No superior, whether master, parent, husband, or magistrate, can make it obligatory to do what God forbids or not do what God commands. So long as our allegiance to God is preserved, and obedience to man is made part of our obedience to him, we retain our liberty and our integrity.” Suppose a man asked his wife to knowingly sign a dishonest income tax return or join a wife-swapping club. Should she obey? The answer is yes . . . but not her husband! She should obey God.

The issue is rather simple. As a wife, you can pattern your response to your husband after the model of the marriage of the church to Christ, or you can follow the formulas of the world. If you adopt the church/Christ model, you will place yourself under and submit. If you follow the formula of the world, you will place yourself over; you will boss.

What does that mean in practical, everyday terms? Every case will be different because every husband is different. Submitting to some husbands is a delight; it’s challenging to obey others. One wife could biblically submit and handle the checkbook, while another may scripturally submit and not handle the checkbook. Perhaps the critical issue is the attitude of the wife. She can say,

“I’ve had classes on bookkeeping. I’ll keep the checkbook.” Or, she could say, “Let me handle the checkbook.” Or, she could say, “Honey, since I’ve had some experience and you are busy, may I suggest I keep track of the bills and pay them each month?”

The wife can’t be beside the husband, as if they negotiated everything. That would mean that the wife would sometimes be over and sometimes under her husband. That is not the concept.

Many modern American wives react to the biblical concept, thinking it reduces them to being slaves. It doesn’t, but it does make the wife a servant, doesn’t it? As one lady once said to me, “I’d rather be a slave to my husband than to sin.”

Husbands, Love Your Wives

As Christ Loved the Church The model for marriage is not just for wives but also for husbands. In the case of the wife, the model meant submission. Is that true for the husband also? Some have suggested that the mutual submission of verse 21 extends to the husbands and wives. There is a sense in which a husband has to “submit” to his wife to love her, but Paul never applies the word “submit” to the husband. If the idea of submission is here, it is not the mutual submission of verse 21; it is submission to the Lord. Christ was submissive to the Father. Likewise, the husband is submissive to Christ.

How does the model apply to the husband? The husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the church, but what does that mean? Paul explains: “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish” (5:25-27). The word translated “love” is not an emotion; it is a choice whereby one seeks the well-being of another. In Christ’s case, it was sacrificial love. He gave Himself to accomplish several things. Notice that these verses contain three clauses, each beginning with the word “that.” The first one expresses the nearer purpose and the last two the negative and positive aspects of the ultimate purpose (Pentecost).

Christ died that He might sanctify and cleanse the church with the washing of the water by the Word (5:26). In the Greek text, “sanctify” is a verb and “cleanse” is a participle describing something that happens before the sanctifying. The word “washing” only occurs here and in Titus 3:5, where it is used in the phrase “the washing of regeneration,” which means the spiritual washing that takes place at the new birth. Thus, the water here is not literal, as if this refers to the water of baptism (Toussaint). Instead, the water here is figurative of the cleansing at regeneration.

The greatest problem in verse 26 is the last phrase, “by the word.” To what is it connected? Is it connected to “sanctify,” “cleanse,” or the phrase “the washing of water”? Furthermore, what does it mean? Does “the word” in this verse refer to the Word of God? Or is it a reference to the gospel? Or is it a reference to the oath at baptism (Robinson)? Is Paul saying that the purpose of Christ’s death was to cleanse the church with the washing of regeneration by the hearing and heeding of the gospel (1 Pet. 1:23, 25)? Or is he saying that the purpose of Christ’s death was to sanctify the church through the Word of God (Jn. 17:17; Barnes)? Theologically, both are true. The question is, which truth is being taught in this passage? Although the latter could be correct, the word order of the Greek text argues for the former and this phrase is placed last for emphasis (Toussaint).

The ultimate purpose of Christ’s death is that He might present the church to Himself a glorious bride (5:27; 2 Cor. 11:2). After Christ returns, the church will be presented to Him at the Judgment

Seat of Christ. He died that it might be a glorious, splendid, radiant bride. Her splendor is described as “not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing” (5:27). There will be no defilement or disfigurement. There will be nothing to mar her beauty.

The phrase “spot or wrinkle” is like washing and ironing (Toussaint). The bride will be bathed and her dress ironed so that she can be presented to Him in all her glory.

To state the same thing another way, the church is to be “holy and without blemish” (5:27). The original purpose of election (1:4; Hodge) will be realized when the church is presented to Christ. God decreed to do that, and through the process of justification (“cleansing” in verse 26), sanctification (“sanctify” in verse 26), and glorification (“present” in verse 27), he accomplishes that. Human brides prepare themselves for their husbands; Christ, the bridegroom, prepares His own bride for Himself.

Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it—to meet its spiritual need, which He did through the Word. Likewise, the husband should sacrifice his time and interests to minister to the spiritual needs of his wife through the Scripture.

As You Love Your Body At first glance, it might appear that at this point in the passage, Paul employs another altogether different illustration of how a husband is to love his wife. He says, “So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself” (5:28). Actually, this is a further application of the previous illustration. The word “so” or “thus” indicates that this verse is related to the preceding. The connection is this: as Christ loved the church, which is His body (1:23; 5:23), so in like manner, a husband should love his wife because she is his body, or at least the two are one flesh (5:31). Since a man’s wife is like being a part of him, loving her is like loving himself (Hodge).

In Ephesians 5:29-32, Paul seems to jump back and forth between the topics of husbands and wives, and Christ and the church, but what Paul does is rather simple. The unifying factor in this verse is the body. First, he applies the figure to husbands and wives (5:29a). Then, he discusses the fact that the church is Christ’s body (5:29b-32).

Man and wife are one flesh. It’s like she is part of his body. So, as Paul explains (see “for”), “For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord the church (5:29a). No man in his right mind hates his body. He may wish it were healthier, more handsome, taller, or thinner, but it is his body. He does not hate it; he loves it. Consequently, he takes care of it. For example, he nourishes it, that is, he provides for its physical needs, like clothes and food. He also cherishes it.

The Greek word translated “cherish” means “to heat, warm, foster, cherish.” in the New Testament, it only appears here and in 1 Thessalonians 2:8, where it is used for the tender, loving care of a nursing mother. A man may have a wife he wishes was better or more beautiful or brighter, but she is his wife, part and parcel of him. So, he lovingly provides and tenderly treats her. To neglect her or abuse her is unwise and unnatural.

Christ and the church are also one. Thus, He provides for her. Thus, Paul says, “just as the Lord does the church. For [Greek, ‘because’] we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones” (5:29b-30). This has been called one of the most difficult passages in the Bible. How are the church members of Christ’s flesh and bones?

The Roman Catholics, the Lutherans, and even John Calvin related this verse to the Lord’s Supper, that is, believers are “one flesh” with Christ because they partake of His body and blood, but the Lord’s Table is never referred to as “flesh and bone.” Others interpret the words figuratively. The passage affirms the believer’s union with Christ (Pentecost). Apparently, the story of Adam and Eve was in the back of Paul’s mind. The Greek word translated “of” in verse

30 means “out of, from.” God took part of Adam and made Eve. Thus, Eve was *out of* Adam’s body, that is, from his flesh and from his bone. Likewise, believers are members out of Christ’s physical body and bone.

It is evident that that is what Paul has in mind because in the next verse, he quotes Genesis 2:24: “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh” (5:31). The connection between verses 30 and 31 is explained in verse 31 (“for this reason”), but how does our being members of Christ’s body prove that a man should leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife? This verse is not quoted to explain anything directly connected with husbands and wives. The subject at this point is Christ and the church (5:30). Hodge contends, “The passage is quoted from Genesis solely for the sake of the last words, ‘they shall be one flesh.’” The point is that the church is one with Christ; it is His body.

How is the church “one flesh” with the Lord (5:30)? Paul confesses, “This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church” (5:32). How the church is “one flesh” with Christ is a sacred secret hidden from human knowledge.

Paul concludes, “Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband” (5:33). Even though the flesh relation between Christ and the church is a mystery, what is clear is that a husband is to love his wife as his body, as himself (5:28) because the two are “one flesh” (Hodge).

The loving husband will provide for his wife’s physical needs and be tender toward her, just like he is toward his own body. After all, the two are one flesh. This is something that the husband, and only the husband, can do. Each one, in particular, must do this for his own wife.

A psychologist counseling a married couple abruptly stood up, walked over to the wife, kissed her and said to her husband, “She needs that twice a week.” Her husband replied, “I’ll see if I can get her here on Tuesdays and Thursdays.”

In summarizing the passage, it would be expected that Paul would say, “Husbands, love your wives and wives, submit to your husbands.” Instead, he says, “Let the wife see that she *respects* her husband” (5:33). The Greek word translated “respects” is the word “fear.” That word means reverential fear as well as fright. Hodge points out that this word “may express the emotion of fear in all of its manifestations and all its degrees from simple respect, through reverence, up to adoration, according to its object.”

This indicates that respect is a major part, if not synonymous with, submission and that submission is, first and foremost, an attitude. This also teaches that the husband should be respectable so the wife will not struggle to respect him. When a wife looks up to her husband, she will find it natural to submit to him. With tongue in cheek, someone said, “If I could only be respected without having to be respectable.” Unfortunately, it doesn’t work that way.

Most husbands fail to meet the emotional needs of their wives. Here is an illustration of how to do it right. Paul Harvey tells the story of a man named Carl Coleman driving to work one morning when he bumped fenders with another motorist. Both cars stopped, and the woman driving the other car got out to survey the damage. She was distraught. It was her fault, she admitted, and hers was a new car, less than two days from the showroom. She dreaded facing her husband. Coleman was sympathetic, but he had to pursue the exchange of license and registration data. She reached into her glove compartment to retrieve the documents in an envelope. On the first paper to tumble out, written in her husband’s distinctive hand, were these words: “In case of an accident, remember, Honey, it’s you I love, not the car.”

Summary: The model of marriage is the relationship between a submissive church and a loving Christ.

If Christ and the church are the pattern, giving (not getting) is what each partner must do. Marriages get in trouble when one partner expects another to meet “my needs.” The model is the exact opposite. It is what I can do to meet your needs.

At a Bible conference where I spoke for a week on the home, I spoke from this passage to the men on being ideal husbands. Afterward, an elderly man said to me, “I liked your choice of words.” He went on to say that his wife had said, “I wish you were a model husband, like my brother.” He said, “I heard that so much I got tired of it, and I looked up the word ‘model’ in the dictionary. I discovered that a model is a ‘miniature of the real thing.’ Once I informed her of that, she has never used it on me since.”

The model is Christ and the church, not some other couple or mate. Your marriage needs to be a miniature of the real thing.

WALK IN WISDOM—CHILDREN AND PARENTS

A lady who signed her letter “Frustrated in Colorado” wrote to Dear Abbey. She told Abbey that she had two normal sons, ages five and seven, but their constant fighting, yelling, and beating each other was driving her crazy. This mother wanted to know if Abbey could recommend a “how-to” book for sibling rivalries. What parent has not felt the need to read a how-to book on rearing children? Is there such a book on how to rear children and parent-child relationships in general? Indeed, one is urgently needed. Children are aggravated, agitated, and angry with their parents. Parents are frustrated, fed up, and furious with their children. As one exasperated father explained, “My home is not a castle; it is a hassle!” There is not only a book on parent/child relationships, it is a divine book. There are not only recommendations in it, but God writes rules for harmony in a house full of children. Consider Ephesians 6:1-4.

Children are to Obey and Honor their Parents

Obey Addressing the children directly, which indicates that they were present in the assembly when this letter was read, Paul says, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord” (6:1a). The Greek word translated “obey” means “to listen to, attend; hence, submit, obey.” It is a stronger word than “submit” used of wives in Ephesians 5:22 (Toussaint). This obedience is “in the Lord.” That does not mean only obeying their parents if they are Christians. As Colossians makes clear, children’s obedience to their parents is pleasing to the Lord (Col. 3:20).

Paul further expands on this injunction by explaining, “for this is right” (6:1b), children should obey their parents because it is right. As Hodge points out, “It is not because of the personal character of the parents, nor because of his kindness, nor on the ground of expediency, but because it is right.” To paraphrase Eadie, nature expects it; Scripture enjoins it; Christ, the Son of God, exemplifies it.

Honor Children are to also “honor your father and mother which is the first commandment with promise” (6:2a). Paul is quoting the fifth commandment of the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:12; Deut. 5:16). To honor is to respect, reverence, and obey. It is an inward attitude and an outward action (Hodge).

Paul says the command to honor your father and mother is “the first commandment with promise” (6:2b). This statement has two possible interpretations. One is that the fifth commandment is the first command in the Decalogue, with a specific promise attached (Barnes). Some object, pointing out that the second commandment has a promise (Ex. 20:6). F. F. Bruce answers that by saying that the words attached to the second commandment are a declaration of God’s character rather than a promise. The other possibility is that Paul means that this is the first in the sense of being a “primary commandment,” and it has a promise (Hodge; Pentecost and Toussaint say it refers to the whole Mosaic Law, not just the Ten Commandments). This is clear: Paul means to say this is an important commandment.

The promise to those who honor their parents is “that it may be well with you and you will live long on the earth” (6:3). In Exodus, the promise was that those honoring their parents would live long in the land of Palestine (Ex. 20:12). Paul omits the reference to the land of Israel. He generalizes the promise to include all parent-honoring people (Hodge). The question is, “Do obedient children live longer?”

Hoehner suggests, “The promise for those who obey their parents is that they enjoy a prosperous and long life on the earth. This states a general principle that obedience fosters self-discipline, which in turn brings stability and longevity in one’s life. (Stated conversely, it is improbable that an undisciplined person will live a long life. An Israelite who persistently disobeyed his parents was not privileged to enjoy a long, stable life in the land of Israel. A clear example of this was Eli’s sons, Hophni and Phinehas [1 Sam. 4:11])” (Hoehner, BKC).

Hoehner has made an interesting point. Perhaps Paul is not suggesting that days will be added to his life if a child obeys his parents. Instead, as is evident, if a child disobeys his parents, he will not live as long. One author tells of his nine-year-old cousin who refused to heed his mother’s warnings about hitching rides behind cars. As an automobile was leaving a parking place, he would grab its back bumper and sit in a wagon. He would allow the car to tow him for about a block and then let go. As a result, he could coast for a long distance at high speed.

One day, he was late for dinner, so he grabbed the back of a huge dump truck he thought was going his way. Unexpectedly, the driver, who couldn’t see the boy in his rearview mirror, shifted into reverse. It all happened so quickly that the lad had no chance to move, and the double wheels of the heavily loaded vehicle rolled over him and his shiny red wagon. Death was instantaneous. Had he obeyed his mother, he would have lived longer on the earth (*Our Daily Bread*, 1/10/1974).

Proverbs 10:27 “The fear of the LORD prolongs days, but the years of the wicked will be shortened.” The fear of the Lord, which leads to righteous and wise living, adds days to a person’s life, but living a wicked life can shorten one’s life. This proverb and others clearly claim that the fear of the Lord (10:27; 14:27), obeying the Lord (3:1-2), and living a wise life (3:13-16; 4:10; 9:11) will add years to your life. Proverbs are not absolute laws. They are generally true; there are exceptions. As a general rule, “Wicked men are cut off prematurely, e.g., gangland slayings, reprisal killings, deaths caused by drunkenness, drugs, and dissipation” (MacDonald).

Proverbs 11:4 “Riches do not profit in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death.” Wealth cannot prevent the judgment of God, which includes premature physical death, but righteousness does.

Proverbs 11:19 “As righteousness *leads* to life, so he who pursues evil *pursues it* to his own death.” Righteousness leads to life, and wickedness leads to death.

Proverbs 13:14 “The law of the wise *is* a fountain of life, to turn *one* away from the snares of death.” Listening to wise counsel provides life and protects from premature physical death. For example, listening to the wise advice concerning not driving too fast or too recklessly could save your life, preventing your premature death.

Proverbs 15:10 “Harsh discipline *is* for him who forsakes the way, *and* he who hates correction will die.” Those who forsake the godly way of wisdom will encounter painful discipline, and if they are so unteachable that they refuse to learn from the correction, they will experience premature physical death.

Proverbs 16:17 “The highway of the upright *is* to depart from evil; he who keeps his way preserves his soul.” Those who live an upright life not only depart from evil, they preserve their life from premature physical death.

Proverbs 16:31 “The silver-haired head *is* a crown of glory, *if* it is found in the way of righteousness.” Silver hair indicates that living a long life is a glory because of living a righteous life.

Proverbs 19:16 “He who keeps the commandment keeps his soul, *but* he who is careless of his ways will die.” Keeping God’s command to do what is right enables people to keep their life, but those who go their way experience premature physical death.

A friend sent me an article entitled “Can attending church really help you live longer?” It said, “New research says worship services might be just what the doctor ordered. A recent study by Vanderbilt University professor Marino Bruce has found that people who attend religious services live longer and are less stressed. The findings held true across faith traditions, said Bruce, the associate director of Vanderbilt’s Center for Research on Men’s Health, in a video posted to the university’s YouTube channel. ‘We found in our study that actually attending church is actually good for your health, particularly for those who are between the ages of 40 and 65,’ said Bruce, who also is a Baptist minister. Specifically, the study says those middle-aged adults who go to church, synagogues, mosques, or other houses of worship reduce their mortality risk by 55%. The *Plos One* journal published the ‘Church Attendance, Allostatic Load and Mortality in Middle Aged Adults’ study May 16. ‘For those who did not attend church at all, they were twice as likely to die prematurely than those who did who attended church at some point over the last year,’ Bruce said.

“Bruce, a social and behavioral scientist, is a primary author of the study along with Keith Norris, a professor at the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA. The study has nine other co-authors, too. ‘I’m ordained clergy so I’m always about what do we mean by our spiritual health. Does spiritual health matter with respect to biological outcomes?’ Bruce said. The researchers used publicly available data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, which is collected by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s National Center for Health Statistics, for the study. They filtered the data set, finding 5,449 participants of both sexes and all races. They looked at the participants’ survey results, analyzing their worship attendance, mortality, and allostatic load, which is a physiological measurement. Higher allostatic loads were interpreted as a person experiencing more stress. The researchers also took social support into consideration since other studies have presumed that it was a key factor. ‘While churches are places where people can get social support, we actually found that and began to think about whether compassion is particularly important—feeling that you’re doing good or having empathy for others,’ Bruce said” (USA Today Network Holly Meyer, *The Tennessean* June 1, 2017).

Fathers do not irritate your Children; Discipline them

Do not Irritate your Children Parents hear God’s instructions to children with delight. Every parent wants obedient children, but children can be submissive to their parents and be abused. So Paul balances the command to children with one to fathers: “You fathers do not provoke your children to wrath” (6:4a).

Why does Paul address this to fathers and not parents? Perhaps he has in mind both fathers and mothers. The word “fathers” can refer to parents (Heb. 11:23). Hodge says this verse gives the duty of parents who the father here represents, but if Paul had meant parents, he would have said so. He uses the word parents in verse 1! The conclusion is that fathers are responsible for this verse’s discipline (Toussaint). That does not mean mothers should not follow this injunction; it means that the ultimate responsibility lies at the feet of the father.

Fathers (and no doubt mothers) are not to provoke their children to wrath. The Greek word translated “wrath” is from the verb form of the word translated “wrath” in Ephesians 4:26. It is actually the word “anger” plus a prefix. It means “irritation” and implies a less permanent state than the word for “anger.” Fathers are not to irritate their children. In Colossians 3:21, Paul warns fathers not to “provoke” their children lest they get discouraged. “Provoke” in Colossians 3:21 carries the same idea of “irritate.”

There are a variety of ways for a parent to irritate a child. Harsh treatment will do it, and so will neglect. Constant and unfair comparison to another child or person generally provokes most children. So will favoritism.

The way to prevent this is to love. If children know and feel they are loved, they will be less likely to become irritated by the actions of their parents. Eadie says, “The parental reign is not to be one of terror and stern authority but of love. The rod may be employed in season in moderation and never from momentary impulse and anger. Children should not be moved to ‘wrath’ by harsh and unreasonable treatment or by undue partiality and favoritism. Suppose they are uniformly confronted with parental frown and menace. In that case, their spirit is broken, and the most powerful motive to obedience—the desire to please—is taken away from them.”

Regimentation is training by force; discipline is training with love. Wiersbe points out that in Paul’s day, the father had supreme authority over the family. When a baby was born, it was brought to the father and laid before him. If he picked it up, he accepted it into his home. If he did not pick it up, the child was rejected. It could be sold, given away, or even killed by exposure. Wiersbe suggests that Paul is telling parents, “Don’t use your authority to abuse the child, but to encourage the child.” The opposite of provoking is encouragement.

Bring them up in Discipline In contrast to irritation, the father should bring up his children in the “training and admonition of the Lord” (6:4b). The Greek word translated “training” includes instruction, correction, discipline, and chastening. It is the word translated “chastening” in the New Testament. It is a comprehensive word embracing the whole process of rearing and training children (Hodge).

Training your children certainly includes teaching them about Jesus Christ. Do not wait until your children are twelve or sixteen to lead them to Christ. Matthew Henry, the prince of commentators, was converted at age eleven. Isaac Watts, the writer of the hymn “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross,” was saved when he was ten. Polycarp, one of the early church fathers, was converted at age nine. The noted theologian, evangelist, and college president Jonathan Edwards was saved at seven. Richard Baxter, the author of the book *A Call to the Unconverted*, mightily used to influence many, became a Christian at the age of six. Dr. W. O. Vaught, Jr., a great pastor and preacher, was converted at age five. Count Zinzendorf, leader of the Moravians, signed a covenant at age four which read: “Dear Savior, do Thou be mine and I will be Thine.”

Training also involves teaching children to obey. That is basic to living and learning. Anne Sullivan, who tutored the blind and deaf Helen Keller, once said, “I saw clearly that it was useless to try to teach her a language or anything else until she first learned to obey me. I have thought about it a great deal, and the more I review my actions, the more certain I am that obedience is the gateway through which knowledge, yes, and love, too, enters the mind of a child.”

There is much more to teach and do. One survey of 200 college students indicated that 91% said their parents had given them no instruction about dating. 43% had had no instruction from their parents whatsoever about sex. 82% were given no warning about drinking, smoking, and using drugs. 83% were never taught how to use money.

The Greek word translated “admonition” means “to be in mind.” The picture is of one who has stepped out of formation and is being admonished to get back in line or rank. The word implies blame. Children are not to be irritated, but they are to be instructed and corrected. In *Why a Child Is Important*, Phillip Wylie says, “To give a child material things and withhold discipline is more cruel than to strangle it, for such a child is headed for a lifetime of emotional strangulation—a walking death. Parents who have untouched the immense problem of child discipline, and substitute the abundant gifts, do not actually love their children at all; they love things.”

Training and admonition are to be “of the Lord.” The whole process must be as He prescribes and as would please Him. The child’s father has a Father he must obey!

Summary: God’s book instructs children to obey and honor their parents and tells fathers they are responsible for training their children without irritating them.

In the context of Ephesians, this is one way to live a wise life.

Children need and want fathers. A friend sent me an article entitled “Millennials Seek ‘Generic Father Figure’ For Backyard BBQ on Craigslist.” It said, “A group of millennials in Spokane, Washington are seeking a ‘generic father figure’ to help them host a barbecue on Father’s Day weekend. In the Craigslist post, which has inexplicably since gone viral, college student Dane Anderson and his “boys” are offering free food and booze to any enterprising area dad who’s willing to come to their party next Saturday and man the grill for a few hours. Anderson, who was interviewed by local NBC affiliate KHQ, says he created the post because he and his roommates, who range in age from 21 to 26, live too far away from their own dads” (Tyler Durden, 6/3/2017).

Children without fathers doing their job is a national problem. Dennis Prager says: “Honoring parents is how nearly all of us come to recognize that there is a moral authority above us to whom we are morally accountable. And without this, we cannot create or maintain a moral society. No generation knows better than ours the terrible consequences of growing up without a father. Fatherless boys are far more likely to grow up and commit violent crimes, mistreat women, and act out against society in every other way. Girls who do not have a father to honor—and, hopefully, to love as well—are more likely to seek the wrong men and to be promiscuous at an early age.” In 2013, it was reported that the proportion of children born to unmarried mothers hit a record 47.5 percent last year, according to the Office for National Statistics. The figure has risen from 25 percent in 1988 to just 11 percent in 1979.

Fathers need to be examples (Deut. 6:6-7). Donald Grey Barnhouse tells the story of a man who became intoxicated at various holiday celebrations during the Christmas season. As he started home across the field of freshly fallen snow, he weaved a crooked and stumbling path, unaware that his son was behind him. Then he heard his five-year-old son calling to him from behind. The father turned and watched his son traveling the same crooked, stumbling path he had made. “Look, Daddy!” he called, “I’m walking exactly in the same path you are!” If human fathers are obedient to the heavenly Father, it is much more likely that their children will follow their example and be obedient to their father.

WALK IN WISDOM—SERVANTS AND MASTERS

In 1933, Will Rogers said, “I’ve been thinking more about changing things so that a week’s work consists of thirty-five hours. You know, I doubt very much if the people working now will agree to an increase in time of work like that. We stick to the old American principle of only working when the boss is looking.” What determines your actions and attitudes at work? Do you work better when the boss is watching? What motivates you when you are the boss?

I’ve been both—boss and bossed. I’ve been under people in an office, in a factory, and on a ship. I’ve been over people as a camp director, professor in a seminary, and pastor of a church with a pastoral staff, office staff, and janitorial staff. It seems to me that most people work for financial reasons. Money determines what they do. If they can get a higher-paying job, they’ll take it. The other deciding factor in work performance I’ve observed is fellow workers. I’ve witnessed more than one worker adopt the actions and attitudes of fellow employees. In my experience, the bottom line for most bosses is profit. Show most managers how to make more money and they’ll do it. Other factors, like company policy and even government regulations, can motivate employees, but there is no motivation in the workplace, such as profit motives.

Are these motivations wrong? Not necessarily. Nevertheless, a spiritual reality should determine believers’ actions and attitudes at work, whether they are employees or employers. What Paul said to slaves and masters of his day applies today to labor and management.

Servants Obey Your Masters

Be Obedient Paul commands, “**Servants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh**” (6:5a). The Greek word translated “servants” means “slaves.” Paul is not speaking to hired servants; he is addressing slaves. Does that mean that the Scripture promotes the institution of slavery? No. The New Testament does not promote slavery, but neither does it prohibit it. Paul well recognized that freedom was better than slavery (1 Cor. 7:21), but if Christianity had embarked on a crusade to free the slaves of the first century, it would have become a social/political revolution instead of a spiritual movement.

A Presbyterian theologian and commentator penned words before the American Civil War that capture the New Testament’s spirit. Concerning slavery, Charles Hodge, the Princeton theologian, said, “It is neither enjoined nor forbidden. It is simply assumed to be lawful.... In this view, the spiritual doctrine on this subject differs on the one hand from the doctrine that slave-holders is in itself sinful, on the ground that one man cannot lawfully possess or exercise the rights and authorities over his fellow man, which are involved in the relation of a master to his slave. This, of necessity, leads to setting up a rule of faith and practice higher than the Scripture, and thus tends to destroy their authority, and leads to uncharitable feelings, and to unrighteous judgments, as well as to unwarrantable measures for abating the evil. On the other hand, the Scriptural doctrine is opposed to the opinion that slavery is, in itself, a desirable institution, and, as such, to be cherished and perpetuated. This leads to results no less deplorable than the other error.”

What the New Testament does do is regulate the institution of slavery for both slaves and masters. The present-day application of what Paul said to slaves is to employees. The command to all who have human masters is “be obedient,” the same word that was used of children (6:1). The

phrase “according to the flesh” suggests that such a person has two masters: one heavenly and one earthly. It also implies a limitation in that there is another higher authority.

A supervisor was giving me a tour of an assembly line when I asked him what his greatest problem was. He replied, “To find people who will do what they are told.” He told me, “We hire college graduates to do assembly line work just to get someone who has learned to follow instructions!”

With Reverence This obedience is to be “with fear and trembling” (6:5b). The Greek word translated “fear” is the same as the one rendered “respect” in Ephesians 5:33. To fear, Paul adds, “trembling.” He uses the phrase “fear and trembling” of himself in relationship to God (1 Cor. 2:3) and of all believers (2 Cor. 7:15; Phil. 2:12). Here, it is the fear of God (Col. 3:22).

Is the reverential attitude toward men, in the case of human masters, or toward God? Westcott is willing to interpret it as applying to men. He says, “Such feelings have a right place in the relations of men to men.” F. F. Bruce, however, feels the fear and trembling is toward God. He states, “For Christian slaves, the service of this earthly masters was a special form of service to God to be discharged in a spirit of reverence toward Him. They were not to tremble lest anything unpleasant might happen to themselves, but lest their Lord’s name should be brought into disrepute through them.” What follows seems to indicate that this attitude is at least first and foremost to the Lord.”

With Sincerity Paul adds “in sincerity of heart” (6:5c). The Greek word translated “sincerity” comes from a word that means “without folds, simple.” It means simplicity, sincerity and can also mean graciousness, and even liberality (Jas. 1:5). The simple, single, sincere, reverential attitude is obeying the slave owner “as unto Christ.” Slaves are to regard their obedience to their masters as obedience to Christ (Hodge). Paul elaborates on this concept in the next verse.

He says, “Not with eye service, as men pleasers” (6:6a). This explains the simplicity of heart or sincere obedience. It is not eye service, which is service for the benefit of the human eye of the master, nor is it to be done only to please the human master. Believers should not practice what Will Rogers called “the old American principle of only working when the boss is looking.”

Instead, as Paul adds, “but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart” (6:6b). It is God’s will that people work and that they obey their bosses. By doing that, they are servants of Christ and should work with an internal, reverential attitude toward the Lord.

Howard Hendricks talks about being on an American Airlines flight from Boston to Dallas. It was delayed six hours. When the flight finally got underway, a man sitting across from him who soaked up the free booze on every occasion reamed out the stewardess for the delay. She repeatedly and graciously served him and tried to make his trip as conveniently comfortable as possible. Hendricks went to the galley and said to her, “I am impressed with the way you’ve handled that man. I would like your name so I can write American Airlines and tell them how much I appreciate your service.” She replied, “I appreciate that, but I really don’t work for American Airlines; I work for Jesus Christ.”

With the Good Will This obedience is to be “with good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men” (6:7). The Greek word translated “goodwill” means “benevolence, kindly disposed.” Again, Paul adds that this is to be done to the Lord and not to men. A maid testified, “Now that I know the Lord, I always sweep under the mat. Before I was saved, I swept around it.”

The Lord Rewards such Service The reason such service is to be rendered is: “that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord” (6:8a). At the Judgment Seat of Christ, slaves will be rewarded for work they did for their human master, which was also done as unto the Lord. Why do you do a good job? To get paid? To get promoted? To prevent being fired? One

company in Cleveland lays it on the line: “We tell our salespeople that if they do a good job, they get to keep it.” Believers should work to please the Lord. If they do, they will be rewarded by the Lord.

God will not only reward slaves; He will also reward slave owners. Thus, Paul says, “whether he is slave or free” (6:8b). Hodge says, “In this world, some men are masters and some are slaves. In the next, these distinctions will cease. There, the question will not be who is the master and who is the slave, but who has done the will of God.... At the bar of Christ, and from His hands, every man shall receive according to his works whether bond or free.”

Masters, Treat Slaves with Good Will

Have Good Will Turning his attention from slaves to slave owners, Paul says, “And you, masters, do the same things to them” (6:9a). It was easy for an ancient slave owner to mistreat his slaves because he had absolute authority over them. Earthly laws allow them to exercise “practically irresponsible power” (Westcott). Plato said, “The treatment of slaves is a test of character because a man could so easily wrong them with impunity” (Plato, cited by Eadie). Paul tempers that for Christian masters.

What does Paul mean by “the same things”? Some connect “the same things” with verse 8 and conclude that Paul is saying that Masters are to treat their slaves with the same spirit of the slaves, who know that the Lord rewards doing good (Robinson). Others relate “the same things” to the goodwill of verse 7 (Eadie; Bruce, 1984). Still others include both. Hodge says, “Masters are to act towards their slaves with the same regard to the will of God, with the same recognition of the authority of Christ, and with the same sincerity and good feeling which has been enjoined on the slaves themselves.”

In verse 7, Paul told the slaves to be kindly disposed, that is, have goodwill toward their masters, as unto the Lord. Then, he added that it should be done because the Lord rewards such servants, no matter who renders it (6:8). So the “same thing” of verse 9 refers to the goodwill of verse 7 (Eadie). Masters should treat slaves with goodwill as unto the Lord.

A commentator, writing in 1810 when there were slaves in this country, said, “And with respect to all servants of every denomination, *equity* requires that we treat them with humanity and kindness: that we endeavor to make their service easy and their condition comfortable; that we forbear harsh and passionate language; that we overlook accidental errors, and remit trivial faults; that we impose only such labor as is reasonable in itself and suitable to their captivity; that our reproofs be calm and our counsels well timed; that the restraints we lay upon them be prudent and salutary; that we allow them reasonable time for rest and refreshment, for the culture of their minds, and for attendance on the worship of God; that we set before them a virtuous example, instill in them useful principles, warn them against wickedness of every kind, especially against sin which most easily besets them; that we offer them opportunity for reading and private devotion, and furnish them with the necessary means of learning the way of salvation; that we attend to the preservation of their health, and have compassion on them in sickness; and in a word that we contribute all possible assistance to render them useful, virtuous and happy” (Lathrop, cited by Eadie).

Do not Threaten The one thing Paul says a slave owner should not do is threaten. He says, “giving up threatening” (6:9b). Unjust and cruel punishments were familiar features of slavery. Threatening was prevalent. Slaves were “kept in line” by intimidating looks, promises of severe punishment and the ever-present sight of the scourge. Paul admonishes slave owners not to treat

slaves that way (Eadie). “The threatening tone must be heard no more” (Robinson). They must not adopt a “browbeating attitude” (Bruce, 1961). Peter says that when Christ suffered, He did not threaten (1 Pet. 2:23). Christian masters are to be Christ-like, giving up threatening. Even the Old Testament gives this counsel: “You shall not rule over him with rigor, but you shall fear God” (Lev. 25:43).

You Have an Impartial Master The reason or motive for giving up threatening and granting goodwill is “knowing that your master also is in heaven and there is no partiality with Him” (6:9c). Masters have a Master in heaven to whom they are responsible for their treatment of those around them and under them. The issue is not what the civil law allows but what the law of love allows (Hodge).

The divine judge is impartial. A master might gain favor from the magistrate because of who he is; however, before the judgment bar of God, the question will not be who did it, but what was done (Hodge).

Summary: Slaves and slave owners who render goodwill to each other as to the Lord will be rewarded by the Lord.

The determining factor at work for believers is not money but the Master in heaven. Slaves should obey their masters and show goodwill toward them as unto the Lord. Masters should not threaten but treat slaves with goodwill because they have a Master in heaven. The Lord will reward such goodwill.

In the context of Ephesians, this is one way to live a wise life (5:15). The Lord will reward those who work as unto the Lord. Perhaps there is tension, frustration, and dissatisfaction at work because we are working for Mammon, not the Master. Therefore, we expect something from work and humans; when we don’t get it, we are unhappy. On the other hand, if we worked for the Lord to be rewarded by Him, we could enjoy work now and rejoice because of it later. John Donne said, “Keep us, Lord, so awake in the duties of our callings that we may sleep in peace and awake in Thy glory.”

The story of a missionary who returned home after many years of sacrificial service in Africa has been told many times. On the same ship was President Theodore Roosevelt, who returned to the United States after game hunting in Africa. When the ship docked in New York, great crowds greeted the President. The press was there to cover the story. The old missionary and his wife walked off the ship unnoticed and went to a cheap hotel to spend the night before traveling west. The missionary turned to his wife, saying, “It just doesn’t seem right. We gave our lives in Africa for Christ, and when we arrived home, there was nobody to meet us, and there was no reward. The President shoots animals and gets a royal welcome. As they were praying before retiring, the Lord seemed to say, “Do you know why you haven’t received your reward yet? It’s because you aren’t home yet.”

STAND AGAINST SATAN

In the book of Ephesians, Paul repeatedly links the Christian life to a walk. What kind of walk did he have in mind? Is the walk of the Christian life like a lovely stroll down a pleasant path in a botanical garden with beautiful flowers and singing birds? No! The Christian walk is much more difficult than that; it is more like climbing up a steep hill with boulders in the way. That is not the complete picture. The Christian lifestyle is also dangerous. There are wild beasts along the way waiting to attack and destroy. Peter warns that believers have an adversary who stalks the jungle where believers walk, like a roaring, hungry lion seeking whom he may devour (1 Pet. 5:8).

Since that is the case, believers need a defense system to know how to protect themselves from the dangers of the journey. In Ephesians 6:10-20, Paul informs them of how to do that. There are three commands in this passage.

Be Strong in the Lord

Be Strong in the Lord Paul begins by saying, “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord” (6:10a). The word “finally” is like a speaker saying, “In conclusion.” This is the final point Paul makes in the body of the book. The Greek word translated “strong” comes from a Greek root from which we get our English word “dynamite.” It means the ability to perform. This power is in the Lord; it comes from Him (Eph. 4:13; 2 Tim. 4:17, where this same word is used).

Hodge says, “As a branch separated from its vine, or as a limb severed from the body, so is a Christian separated from Christ. Therefore, he rushes into this conflict without thinking of Christ, without putting his trust in Him, and without continually looking to Him for strength and regarding Him as a member of his body, deriving all life and vigor from Him, is demented. He knows not what he is doing. He has no strength even to reach the field. Without him, the whole conflict is a sham.”

Be Strong in the Power of the Lord Paul adds, “and in the power of His might” (6:10b). Bruce suggests that this is probably a Hebraic genitive construction meaning “in His mighty strength.” These same words were employed in Ephesians 1:19, where the references to God’s power exerted in raising Christ from the dead. That same resurrection power is put at the believer’s disposal.

As we obey God’s Word, in dependence on Him, we experience His power to accomplish His will. Frankly, sometimes I am aware that something beyond me is at work, and sometimes I am not. Once, in the midst of a long, difficult committee meeting, I was physically and mentally fading out when someone said to me, “You look like you’re going to collapse.” As the meeting continued, I silently prayed, “Lord, this is Your work. Give me the strength to do it.” Within minutes, I felt refreshed and continued for several more hours. On other occasions, however, I’ve acknowledged my need of the Lord’s strength, but I did not experience such a dramatic demonstration of it, although I am certain He did it.

The need to be strong in the Lord is continual. No matter what armor is provided, no matter how well the fit, no matter how highly polished, if there is no strength in the heart of the man in the armor, there is merely a manikin with a dress of a soldier.

Put on the Whole Armor of God

The Enemy Paul continues, “Put on the whole armor of God” (6:11a). When he penned these words, he was under house arrest in Rome. As he wrote, either a Roman guard was standing nearby (Acts 28:16) or one was chained to his wrists (Acts 28:20; Eph. 6:20). Using that handy image, Paul urges all believers to clothe themselves with God’s armor. The Greek word translated “armor” was properly used for heavily armed soldiers.

Hodge applies the command: “Instead of relying on the arms which God has provided, men have always been disposed to trust those which they provide for themselves or on which have been prescribed by others. Seclusion from the world (i.e., flight rather than conflict), ascetic and ritual observance, invocation of saints and angels, and especially celibacy, voluntary poverty, and monastic obedience constitute the panoply which false religion has substituted for the armor of God. Of this fatal mistake, manifested from the beginning, the apostle traces at length in his epistle to the Colossians, 2:18-23.”

The purpose of putting God’s armor on is “that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil (6:11b). The Greek word translated “able” comes from the same root as the word “strong” in verse 10. The phrase “stand against” was a military term meaning “to stand in front of with a view to opposing.” The same root word plus the prefix “against,” is translated “resist” in James 4:7 where James says “Resist the devil.” Thus, the aim of adorning God’s armor is to have the ability to stand in front of and resist the devil’s wiles.

What are the wiles of the devil? The Greek word translated “wiles” means “craft, deceit.” “Deceitful scheming” would be a good translation. The schemes of Satan are any sins that will sidetrack saints from spiritual maturity. He will also use anything from anger (Eph. 4:26), to sex (1 Cor. 7:5), to religion (2 Cor. 11:3; 13-15).

Paul explains that this warfare is spiritual, not physical (4:12). “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (6:12). The believer’s struggle is not just with humans but with the whole hierarchy of evil (Westcott). When Satan fell, a whole host of angels followed, possibly as much as one-third of the heavenly host (Rev. 12:4). Those fallen angels or demons are organized (Westcott). The highest rankings are called principalities, under which are authorities, and perhaps under them rulers, and finally under those a host of helpers. This spiritual mafia operates in the heavenly sphere. The Greek word translated five times in verse 12 “against,” is the Greek word “before.” Believers have to stand *before* the host of hell. To do that, they will need the strength and armor of God.

A sweet elderly lady named Aunt Lizzy always had something good to say about everyone. No matter who the scoundrel was, she could see the bright side and look for virtues rather than faults. Finally, a friend, who was exasperated by her pollyanna attitude, exclaimed, “Well, Aunt Lizzy, how about the devil? Certainly, there is nothing good you could say about him!” The elderly lady thought for a moment. Then a smile swept across her face as she said, “Well, there’s one thing you can say for the devil: he’s always on the job.” Since that is the case, believers must always wear the armor of God.

The Equipment The apostle concludes that since there is such a formidable foe, “Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand” (6:13). This is the second command in this passage. The evil day has been interpreted as the future Tribulation, the present age, and the day the enemy attacks (Toussaint). Believers live in an evil age (5:16), but Paul probably has in mind the day believers battle evil

forces. Since the conflict is inevitable (Hodge), believers must do two things: 1) put on the whole armor of God, and 2) stand against the attack. The sum of a believer's responsibility toward Satan is to stand (Jas. 4:7 and 1 Pet. 5:9, where the same Greek word is translated "resist"). "Having done all" refers to putting on the armor.

At this point, Paul explains the various pieces of armor in the armor of God. For example, he says, "Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth" (6:14a). Before a Roman soldier put on his armor, he put a belt around his waist that held his flowing garments together and provided a place to hang his armor. The belt of truth is not the Word of God called the word of truth (Jas. 1:18; 2 Tim. 2:15). In this passage, the sword is the Word (6:17).

Hodge explains: "But it means truth subjectively considered, i.e, the knowledge and belief of the truth. This is the first and indispensable qualification for a Christian soldier. To enter this spiritual conflict ignorant or doubting would be to enter battle blind and lame. As the girdle gives strength and freedom of action, and therefore confidence, so does the truth when spiritually apprehended and believed. Let not anyone imagine that he is prepared to withstand the assaults of the powers of darkness if his mind is stored with his own theories or with the speculations of other men. Nothing but the truth of God clearly understood and cordially embraced will enable him to keep his feet for a moment before those celestial potentates. Reason, tradition, speculative conviction, dead orthodoxy are a girdle of spider webs. They give way at the first onset. Truth alone, as abiding in the mind in the form of divine knowledge, can give strength or confidence even in any ordinary conflict of the Christian life, much more in any really 'evil day.'" Perhaps the modern parallel to Paul's imagery is flying in an airplane. At high altitudes and turbulence, people are to fasten their seat belts.

The second piece of armor is the "breastplate of righteousness" (6:14b). The breastplate of a Roman soldier covered his front and back from his neck to his thighs. Without it, he was exposed to even casual darts (Hodge). The breastplate of righteousness is not the imputed righteousness imported at conversion (Rom. 4:5), but the practical righteousness practiced by believers (Rom. 6:16; Titus 2:12; Toussaint).

Police officers wear bulletproof vests for protection. Many have been shot point-blank at close range but only suffered a minor bruise instead of being severely injured. Likewise, God has provided a breastplate for believers. If they wear it, they can prevent serious injury, but it only works if you put it on.

It is said that Napoleon once engaged a skillful workman to make him a bulletproof jacket. The workman took a lot of time and pain in its construction, and when it was finally completed, he arranged for a fitting. The craftsman put the jacket on himself so that the emperor might see how nicely it fit him and how it would protect him. After carefully examining its makeup and apparent safety, Napoleon stepped back a few feet, drew his pistol on the man and pointed it right at him. The man immediately cried out, "Don't try it out on me!" The emperor said, "But you told me it was perfectly safe," and with that, he fired. Fortunately, the armor was as bulletproof as the workman claimed. God has provided the believer with the possibility of wearing a bulletproof breastplate.

Paul continues by saying, "and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace" (6:15). The Roman soldier did not have on track shoes so he could run (Toussaint). He wore something similar to heavy boots. Besides, Paul tells them to stand, not run. What are the boots of preparation of the gospel of peace? It is possible that the word "preparation" could be translated "foundation" (this Greek word is so translated in the Septuagint; see Ps. 88:14; Ezra 2:68; etc.). Believers are to stand solidly on the foundation of the good news of peace. They have

peace with God through faith in Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:1), and they are to let the peace of God rule their heart (Col. 3:15).

Paul urges, “Above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one” (6:16). The shield of the Roman soldier consisted of two layers of wood, two-and-a-half feet wide and four feet long, glued together and covered with linen and leather. It was bound with iron above and below and had an iron stud (Robinson). This shield has been called the door shield because of its size (Hodge). A soldier could crouch behind it and be completely covered, which was necessary when flying arrows, spears, and darts were coming at him.

What are the darts the devil hurls at the believer? If the shield symbolizes faith, the darts must be doubts. With faith, believers can extinguish the fiery darts of doubt. Hodge applies the darts to other areas: “It is a common experience of the people of God that at times horrible thoughts, unholy, blasphemous, skeptical, malignant, crowd in upon the mind which cannot be accounted for on any ordinary law of mental action and which cannot be dislodged. They stick like burning arrows; and fill the soul with agony. They can be quenched only by faith; by calling on Christ for help. These, however, are not the only kinds of fiery darts, nor are they the most dangerous. There are others which enkindle passion, inflame ambition, excite cupidity, pride, discontent, or vanity, producing a flame which our deceitful hearts are not so prompt to extinguish and which so often disallow to burn until it produces great injury or even destruction. Against these most dangerous weapons of the evil one, the only protection is faith. It is only by looking to Christ and earnestly invoking His interposition on our behalf that we can resist these insidious onslaughts which inflame evil without the warning of pain.”

Welcome Deliverance

Deliverance In a sense, the next verse contains the next piece of armor, but in introducing it, Paul gives the third imperative in this paragraph: “And take the helmet of salvation” (6:17a). The Greek word translated “take” is not the usual Greek word for take. This one suggests a personal welcome and glad appropriation (Westcott). The helmet of a Roman soldier, being hot and uncomfortable, was only put on when faced with danger, but when he did need it, it was a welcome piece of equipment. What is the helmet of salvation? It either signifies present deliverance from Satan’s attacks or a future deliverance (1 Thess. 5:8). In 1 Thessalonians 5, the helmet of salvation is future deliverance; here, it is probably present deliverance (Hodge; the figure of the breastplate is also different in both passages).

The Word of God Paul adds, “and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (6:17b). The Greek word rendered “sword” indicates that this was the short sword, a dagger. It is the only offensive weapon mentioned in this passage. This particular weapon was used in hand-to-hand combat. “Of the Spirit” refers to the source or origin of the sword. The Spirit gave the sword. It is the Word of God. The Greek word translated “word” here is not the normal word for “word.” This one refers to a spoken word. It is not sufficient to know the written word, or, for that matter, just to speak the word of Scripture when being attacked by Satan. The concept is that believers must apply the text and truth of Scripture to their situation at the moment. Christ is the example (Mt. 4:1-11).

The sword in the hand of a child is more dangerous than a straw in the hand of a giant.

Prayer Paul mentions one more item. Technically, it is not part of the armor but rather the soldier’s spirit or attitude. Paul says, “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit

(6:18a). The Christian combatant is to be in a constant (“always”) spirit of supplication. Prayer is prayer in general; supplication includes a special, definite petition. Believers are to pray “in the Spirit.” The phrase “in the Spirit,” which is the same in the Greek text as “with the Spirit” in Ephesians 5:18, is a problem. Is the spirit our spirit or the Holy Spirit? If this refers to the human spirit, believers are not to pray in word or form (Westcott) but from the heart, that is, sincerely. On the other hand, Jude 20 refers to praying in the Holy Spirit. Believers pray in the sphere of the Spirit when they pray biblical prayers.

Believers are not only to be continually praying; they are also to be always alert. Paul continues, “being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints” (6:18b). Believers are not in the battle alone. Thus, they must not only pray for themselves but be steadfast (“with perseverance”) and watchful (Greek: “sleepless”) in prayer for all saints.

The ancient sport of falconry employed trained hawks to pursue wild game. The hawks, however, often rose too high for human eyes to see against the blue sky. It was not uncommon, therefore, to carry a small caged bird called a shrike. The hunter could easily tell where the hawk was located by watching the antics of the little creature in front of him, for it instinctively feared the falcon and always cocked its head to keep it in view. Likewise, the believer should continuously be watching his adversary.

Prayer should especially include spiritual leaders. Paul adds, “and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak” (6:19-20). Paul was God’s ambassador, one authorized to represent Him and speak for Him, but he was an ambassador in chains which could tempt him to remain silent or “play it safe.” Thus, he requested prayer that he be given divine assistance in speaking and preaching. The Greek word translated “boldly” means “freely, openly, plainly.” He requests that they pray that God grant him the freedom to openly proclaim the gospel, keeping nothing back.

Paul is in prison, but he does not request prayer for freedom from jail or for success in his trial, but rather freedom in speech to speak the gospel as he ought to as an ambassador for Jesus Christ. The Romans considered the Christians a sect of the Jews, and the Jews considered them a heretical group. In his trial, Paul needed to make clear that Christians were neither a Jewish sect nor a radical group but a new entity, the church, the body of Christ, composed of both Jews and Gentiles.

Summary: Because believers are in a spiritual battle with the formidable foes of hell, they must be strong and put on the whole armor of God so that they may be able to stand and welcome deliverance through the Word and prayer.

Believers have a spiritual enemy. A five-year-old boy once announced to his mother, “The devil’s buried on the hillside.” She assured him he was not but that he was very much alive and wandering about the world. His response to that was, “Well, how ‘bout that! No wonder I have so much trouble.” Out of the mouth of babes!

God has provided an adequate defense. It is easy to come to this passage and focus on the armor: the belt, the breastplate, the boots, the shield, the helmet, and the sword. Those are illustrations. We must have truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, the word, and prayer. We must live truthfully, righteously, planted in peace, live by faith, and welcome God’s deliverance, Word, and provision for power, which is prayer. We must do our part. *We* must be strong. *We* must put on the armor of God. *We* must welcome the weapons. *We* must stand.

All of those together are the *whole* armor of God. If any of these is missing, we give place to the Devil (4:27). One preacher illustrated the problem of just one missing piece by describing a

parking lot. The entrance into the parking lot consisted of a concrete driveway. Adjoining this driveway was the blacktop parking lot, which had been put in after the driveway had been installed. The concrete driveway and the asphalt parking lot had been joined together so that the two areas seemed to be one piece, but the construction crew left one small crevice uncovered. A small seed and water were allowed to seep into that tiny crevice, and a weed sprang up. Thousands of square feet of hardtop were protected against any vegetative growth, but that one unguarded crevice allowed weeds to grow. One uncovered, unprotected spot will enable weeds to grow (M. R. DeHaan, *Our Daily Bread*, 3/2/1965).

When David fought Goliath, he was up against a man who wore a complete suit of armor. He had a bronze helmet on his head and brass body armor that weighed 125 pounds (1 Sam. 17:5). He had on shin guards and shoulder shields, but he left one small spot exposed—his forehead. It has been suggested that maybe he had thrown back his visor to show disdain for little David, but that was his fatal mistake. The pebble from David's sling found that single, exposed spot, which was enough.

“The Christian has been provided an all-sufficient armor that affords protection for the head, the heart, the legs, and the feet. To neglect one piece makes us a target for the enemy” (M. R. DeHaan, *Our Daily Bread*, 3/2/1965).

LIVING IN LIGHT OF YOUR CALLING

What determines how you live your life? A Freudian psychiatrist would say, “Unconscious forces in your subconscious mind.” Other psychiatrists, while not going that route, claim that past experiences shape your present behavior. Most of us would like to think we have more control over our actions. Assuming that you are a thoughtful person aware of the basis of your choices, what is the determining factor in your daily life? Is it pleasure, power, possessions, people, popularity, prestige, or the pursuit of happiness? Or are you just drifting through life? Are you floundering so that one day, one thing determines what you do and the next day, it is something else?

What should determine how you live your life? For a believer, from a biblical point of view, there are several different ways to answer that question, all of which say virtually the same thing. The book of Ephesians is one of the books of the Bible that answers that question. It tells you what should determine your lifestyle, and it tells you what your lifestyle should be.

The subject of Ephesians is the Christian calling (1:18; 4:1). More specifically, it is the believer’s calling to be part of Christ and His church. The book is divided into two parts: 1) our calling (chapters 2-3) and 2) our conduct (chapters 4-6).

The book opens with a salutation that identifies the author and the recipients and sends a greeting (1:1-2). Paul, an apostle by the will of God, is the one writing to the believers in Ephesus and beyond them to all faithful Christians. He greets them with grace and peace, which come from God the Father and His divine Son, Jesus Christ.

It was customary in ancient letters to include a thanksgiving for the recipients that followed the salutation. In Ephesians, Paul pens a magnificent doxology instead. He praises God for blessing believers with every spiritual blessing (1:3-14). Believers are in Christ (1:3-4, 11, 13, etc.). In Him, they have been blessed by the Father with election and predestination, by the Son with redemption and revelation, and by the Holy Spirit with sealing and a guarantee of inheritance. All of these blessings were by God’s grace for God’s glory.

It was also customary in an ancient letter for the thanksgiving to be followed by a prayer. In Ephesians 1:15-23, Paul prayed for their enlightenment. That paragraph contains a thanksgiving for their faith and love and a prayer that they would understand God’s calling, inheritance, and power.

Our Calling

Individually in Christ Technically, the prayer of Ephesians 1 does not formally conclude. Having stated that God’s power raised Jesus Christ from the dead, Paul *applies* that to believers, explaining that they were dead in sin and have been spiritually raised and seated in heavenly places in Christ. This is the doctrine of regeneration, which means God imparts spiritual life to those who trust His Son. God saves them by grace to demonstrate His grace (2:1-10). In the overall context of Ephesians, this paragraph describes the believer’s calling individually, that is, each believer has been “called” by grace to a relationship with God, which is to be in Christ in the heavenlies (1:6).

The question is, have you answered the call? The Greek word “call” means “to call to one’s house, to invite.” You have been invited to God’s house in heaven with an R.S.V.P. attached.

There is no cost involved—at least to you. All you have to do is accept the invitation, but you do have to respond.

Ephesians 2:8-9 explains the R.S.V.P. Simply trust Jesus Christ, who died to pay for your sins and rose from the dead. You cannot work to earn entrance into heaven. All you can do is receive the gift. It's not polite to not respond to an R.S.V.P. Either say, "Yes" or "No."

Collectively in the Church In the second half of Ephesians 2, Paul describes the believer's calling collectively (2:11-22). Believers have been called to fellowship with God and Christ and placed in a new entity called His body (2:15-16). Collectively, all believers are united in the church.

The Ephesians were Gentiles, which meant that they were separated from God and His program since God's covenant in the Old Testament was made with Israel. Now, Gentile believers are not only reconciled to God, whereas before, they were without God in the world, but both Jews and Gentile believers are united into one new body. Believers are reconciled to God and to each other. Gentiles, who were once aliens from God's program, are in Christ, fellow citizens with the saints, and members of the household of God; they are members of the church.

If you have responded to the R.S.V.P, you're part of God's program—the church. If you want to know what God is doing in the world, He is building His church (Mt. 16:18; Acts 15:13-14). You need to be part of His program, the local church.

A freelance missionary visiting a pastor asked for financial support. "What group are you associated with?" the pastor asked. The man replied, "I belong to the invisible church." The pastor then inquired, "But what church are you a member of?" Again, the missionary answered, "I belong to the invisible church." Getting suspicious, the pastor asked, "When does this invisible church meet, and who pastors it?" The man became incensed and said, "Well, your church here isn't the true church. I belong to the invisible church." The pastor replied, "Well, here's some invisible money to help you minister to the invisible church." The invisible church of which Paul speaks so eloquently in Ephesians has local manifestations in individual churches.

The Revelation of the Call At this point in the epistle, Paul begins to pray again or to pick up where he left off and continue the prayer he began in chapter 1 (3:1; 3:14). He starts a sentence, interrupts himself, and introduces another topic. This is the second time he has not finished a prayer in the letter. No wonder Graham Scroggie calls Ephesians Paul's most "labored epistle" (Scroggie, vol. 2, p. 212).

In chapter 2, Paul said the church was new (2:15). Now, he explains just how new it is (3:1-13). The mystery, that is, the sacred secret of the church, was not made known in other ages (3:5). It was begun and revealed in the New Testament to the apostles and prophets (3:5). Paul was a minister of that revelation. In a personal, tender note, Paul adds, "So don't lose heart just because I'm in jail" (3:13).

As a believer, you have been called to Christ and to the church, which is a new body composed of believing Jews and believing Gentiles. You have been regenerated (2:1-10), reconciled (2:11-22), and, through Paul, God has revealed all of this to you (3:1-13).

Prayer for Empowerment Now Paul is ready to finally finish the prayer he began in chapter 1 and started to finish in 3:1 (3:14-21). In this prayer, Paul asks that believers be strengthened so that Christ can be formed in them, that they comprehend the love of Christ and that they be filled with God. He concludes with a benediction that expresses the assurance that God is able.

Our Conduct

Walk Worthy Having clarified the Christian's calling, Paul commences communicating how Christians should live in light of that calling. The key concept in Ephesians 4:1-6:9 is "walk," a metaphor for living. In light of being called to Christ in the church in the heavenlies, the Christian should live a worthy life.

What is worthy of such a call? For starters, a worthy walk is characterized by humility, meekness, and patience (4:1-3). A Christian ought not to be proud. Granted, they are blessed with every spiritual blessing, but those were not bestowed because of works (2:9). Rather, believers are blessed by grace for God's glory. Likewise, Christians ought not to be easily irritated or impatient. They are plunged into God's program and power. A worthy walk of that is characterized by meekness and patience.

A worthy walk also endeavors to maintain the unity in Christ's body (4:4-16). How is that possible when Christians are so different? The answer is that God has given different gifts to each individual Christian so that all can work toward bringing everyone to maturity. As long as we all keep our aim at that goal, unity will not be disturbed.

Walk in Righteousness Next, Paul exhorts believers not to walk as unbelievers—in unrighteousness, but to walk worthy of their calling by walking in righteousness (4:17-32). The principle is to put off the old man and put on the new man by constantly renewing your mind. To be more specific, avoid lying, staying angry, stealing, injurious speech, and malice. In their place, speak the truth, deal with anger the same day, work to have something to give, use your tongue to build people up, and be gracious.

Walk in Love To put the same thing another way, God is love; imitate Him. Walk in love (5:1-7). Since God is love, a loving lifestyle is worthy of Him. This kind of living consists of self-sacrifice, not self-indulgence. That goes for your humor, as well as your attitude and actions. You should live a life of love because it is worthy of a God of love, but you need to also know that God is holy and just. The life of lust angers Him (5:6), and He, thus, disciplines.

Walk in the Light Paul considers a worthy walk a walk in the light (5:8-14). After all, believers are lights. So, they should exhibit light and expose darkness so that it may become light.

Walk in Wisdom The last time Paul uses the word "walk" is in the command to walk circumspectly, that is, in wisdom (5:15-21). Such a lifestyle consists of carefully considering one's actions and grabbing every opportunity to do good. A wise walk acknowledging the Lord results in joy, gratitude, and submission.

Paul drops the word "walk," but he continues discussing lifestyle, particularly life at home and work. Having said walk in wisdom, Paul applies that to living at home and at work. Wives are to submit respectfully, and husbands are to love sacrificially. Children are to obey and fathers are to rear their children in the nurture of the Lord. Servants are to be obedient as unto the Lord and masters are to treat those under them, remembering they have a Master in heaven.

Hunters tell of seeing tracks of various animals in the new-fallen snow. Each animal has its own particular footprint and, for that matter, pattern in its walk. The distinct walk of a deer can be seen in the snow as compared to that of a dog or a rabbit. The distinct walk of believers who are walking worthily of the Lord is that they walk in unity (4:4-16), in righteousness (4:17-32), in love (5:1-7), in light (5:8-14), and in wisdom (5:15-6:9).

Stand in Strength Finally, Paul says that believers are to stand. This time, he refers to the hoards of hell, but obviously, the believer's behavior is still in view (6:10-20). To withstand this attack,

the believer must stand strong in the Lord, dressed in the armor of God, welcoming the deliverance of God, the Word of God, and access to God.

Summary: Since believers have been called to be in Christ in the church, they should live a worthy life in unity, righteousness, love, light, and wisdom and stand against all the forces that would move them away from that lifestyle. Walk worthy of the calling with which you are called (4:1).

Ephesians commences with the believers' calling and concludes with their conduct. It begins with their position and moves to their practice. It starts with their wealth and ends with their walk. In between, it explains that believers are in Christ, the church, and the heavenlies. The church is so much a major theme of the book that many have concluded that it is the theme of the book. After all, consider 1) The church is a body (1:22-23; 2:16). 2) The church is a building, a temple (2:21-22). 3) The church is a bride (5:25).

To put the message in chronological order: 1) you were dead, without God and foreigners from the covenants and promise. 2) God regenerated you, raised you, reconciled you to Himself. 3) He placed you in Christ in the church in the heavenlies. You are seated in the heavenlies! Now, walk worthy on the earth.

Some listen and learn. Thus, they walk and stand. Others do not know and grow, so they fail and fall.

A welfare worker told of finding, in a poverty-stricken section of the city, a crippled boy to whom she was greatly attracted. Longing to see him walk and achieve like other lads his age, she consulted a famous orthopedic surgeon who graciously agreed to help the young lad. An operation was performed. Slow, tedious days of recovery followed. Gradually, the child could walk, then run, and finally play normally with other boys. Telling the story, the woman said, "He is now a grown man. I want you to guess where he is and what he is doing." Many suggestions were made. "He's a doctor, a great humanitarian, a minister, or a welfare worker." The woman solemnly replied, "No. You're all wrong. He's in Sing Sing serving a life term for murder. You see," she went on to say, "We spent all of our time teaching him how to walk, but failed to teach him where to walk." The book of Ephesians is the believer's manual on where to walk.

HOW TO MINISTER

According to the book of Ephesians, every believer is in the ministry (Eph. 4:12). What does that mean and how do you do your ministry? The general principles of ministry are embedded in a passage in Hebrews.

General Principles

Hebrews says, “Let us consider one another to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as *is* the manner of some but exhorting *one another*, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching” (Heb. 10:24-25). We are to *consider* one another so that we might *exhort* one another.

The Greek word rendered “exhorting” is pregnant with meaning. Consequently, it is difficult to translate. Because it contains so many nuances, no English word can adequately translate it. It means “calling to one’s aid, summons,” hence, “comfort, encouragement, exhortation.” The noun is used for the Holy Spirit (Jn. 14:16; 14:26; 16:7) and Christ (1 Jn. 2:1). The verb is translated by three different English words, each describing a ministry believers are to have to each other.

Be There The most basic meaning of the Greek word “exhort” is “called alongside to help.” Furthermore, the writer to the Hebrews speaks of “not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together” (Heb. 10:25). If you are not present, you cannot minister to others. To minister, you need to be near the person. You need to be there.

When I was in seminary, I became the pastor of a small rural church. I remember well the first time somebody in the church passed away and I, as the pastor, had to go see the family. I did not have a clue as to what to do. We have not covered house calls in the seminary yet, especially in a house full of bereaved people! I wondered, “What do you say?” I called an older, much more experienced pastor and asked, “What do I do now?” I particularly wanted to know what to say. I have never forgotten what he told me: “The most important thing you can do is just be there.”

Listen The writer to the Hebrews says, “Consider one another” (Heb. 10:24). The Greek word translated “consider” means “to take note of, perceive, consider carefully.” While other things are, no doubt, involved, this includes listening. It is has been said that 90% of the people who go to counselors do not want answers; they want someone to listen.

My car needed some work recently, so I took it to my mechanic. While I was waiting in the waiting room, a fellow came in and began to talk. He talked and talked and talked. Frankly, he wasn’t making much sense, but I patiently listened to him. At one point, I decided to eat lunch. The only thing within walking distance was a filling station, which was not too far away. I couldn’t decide what I wanted to eat when I got there. So, I took my time to look over all the possibilities. Finally, I chose a tuna fish sandwich, a protein bar, and a diet Snapple. When I put it on the counter, the clerk said, “It’s already been paid for.” Surprised, I asked, “Who paid for my lunch?” The clerk pointed to a man I had not noticed was there. It was the man who had talked to me while I was waiting. I looked at him and said, “Thank you, but what did I do to deserve this?” He replied, “You listened to me.”

Identify with Them Part of the reason for considering one another is being able to relate to where they are. Weep with those who weep. After you listen, you need to identify where they are so they will listen to you. The way to identify with people is to tell them about the same thing

happening to you. If the same thing has not happened to you, tell them about something similar that has happened to you. If you cannot think of anything, repeat back to them what they have told you. They need to know you understand where they are.

Years ago, Patricia and I took an acting class. I learned a great lesson. The instructor said, “What you must do is “see, feel, express.” That is great advice, not just for identifying with a character in a script but for identifying with what people you know are going through. Feel their pain. Then speak.

Specifics Ministries

Comfort When people are grieving, you need to comfort them. Paul went to Thessalonica, led people to Christ, and told them that the Lord was coming at any minute. Then, he left town. After his departure, some people in the congregation died. Those who survived were worried that those who had died would miss the rapture. Paul assures them that those who died would be raised first and we would all together meet the Lord in the air (1 Thess. 4:15-17). He concludes by saying, “Comfort one another with these words.” When people are sorrowing, comfort them. The Greek word translated “comfort” here is the same one that is rendered “exhorting” in Hebrews 10:25.

How do you do that? The first step is to be there. Someone has written, “I can’t give solutions to all of life’s problems, but I can listen to you. I can’t change your past with all its heartache and pain, nor the future with its untold stories, but I can be there now when you need me to care. Your joys, triumphs, successes, and happiness are not mine, yet I can share in your laughter. I can’t keep your heart from breaking and hurting, but I can cry with you and help you pick up the pieces and put them back in place. I can’t solve the problem, but I can love you and be your friend.”

When people are grieving the loss of a loved one, one of the ways to minister to them is to listen; let them talk about that person. There may be exceptions to this rule; some may not want to talk. Considering one another includes being aware of where they are emotionally so you can be sensitive to what they need at the moment.

It is not just those who have lost someone in death who need comfort. It is anyone who has lost anything, including a job, their health, or maybe something much less serious. Losses cause sorrow and grief. You can comfort people going through such experiences by just being there, listening, identifying with them, and, depending on the situation, giving them a word of comfort from the Word.

In addition to being there, listening, identifying, and, in the case of grief, give hope. In bereavement, a major issue is hope (1 Thess. 4:13). Notice Paul says, “Therefore comfort one another *with these words*” (1 Thess. 4:18). The words he has in mind are the words concerning the Lord’s return and our gathering together with Him. Don’t preach, but *after* you have identified with them *when* appropriate, comfort them with the Word, which is why you need to know the Word.

Encourage When people are discouraged, encourage them. The believers in the church at Thessalonica were doing well spiritually (1 Thess. 1:3-8), yet Paul was concerned about their *faith* (1 Thess. 3:2, 5, 10) and their sanctification, especially their love (1 Thess. 4:3, 10). There was also a doctrinal question (1 Thess. 4:13-18) and there were difficulties in their meetings (1 Thess. 5:12, 19, 20). Paul and Silas left Thessalonica when persecution broke out (Acts 17:1-10). Facing all of these problems was, no doubt, discouraging. They did not *believe* they could make it or do it. Paul sent Timothy to “encourage” the church at Thessalonica (1 Thess. 3:2). The Greek word

translated “encourage” in 1 Thessalonians 3:2 is the same one that is translated “comfort” in 1 Thessalonians 4:18 and “exhort” in Hebrews 3:13 and Hebrews 10:25.

Those who are facing tough circumstances need courage. Larry Crabb, a Christian counselor, has written a book entitled *Encouragement*. In it, he says, “*Encouragement is the kind of expression that helps someone want to be a better Christian, even when life is tough*” (Crabb, p. 10, italics his). He says that the theme of his book is “*encouragement through the careful selection of words that are intended to influence another person meaningfully toward increased godliness*” (Crabb, p. 20, italics his).

The general principles of ministry apply to those who need encouragement: 1) be there (Paul did not just send a letter; he sent Timothy; 1 Thess. 3:2), 2) listen, and 3) identify with them. In the case of encouragement, the issue is faith (1 Thess. 3:2). They need to believe what God says. You can minister to them by letting them know that you believe they can do whatever they need to do. That will give them the courage to do it. Someone has said, “The human spirit soars with hope when lifted by a word of encouragement.”

In the opening paragraph of his book, Crabb states, “Encouragement is important business. It merits our careful attention, not only because Scripture tells us directly to think about it but also because it represents the unique value of Christian fellowship. Any group of compatible people can enjoy themselves, but Christians can enrich their social enjoyment with the knowledge that when they spend time together, they can have an eternally significant impact on one another.”

Crabb relates, “I can recall standing by the finish line at many track meets, waiting for my son to come straining down the last stretch of a two-mile run. Exhausted by the labor of pushing himself to his limit and sometimes bothered by a variety of aches and cramps, he was sorely tempted to collapse 50 yards short of the finish line. As each of our team’s runners came into view, the line of paunchy, out-of-shape fathers would take up the cry, ‘C’mon on, only a few yards to go! Push! Push! Kick up your legs! You can do it!’ And most of the young athletes would respond to those words by grinning with determination, narrowing their eyes, and pumping their legs with renewed strength until they crossed the line. I have never heard a father call out to his son during that final stretch, ‘You look tired! Why don’t you quit? You are in the back third of the field anyway. Maybe running isn’t your sport.’ Yet I have overheard a Christian say to a young man after he had taught his first Sunday school class, “When is the regular teacher coming back?” There really isn’t much difference between the words” (Crabb, p. 20).

Exhortation When believers are slacking off, exhort them. Hebrews was written to Jewish Christians who were contemplating forsaking Christianity and returning to Judaism. These people needed to be exhorted to go on to maturity (Heb. 6:1).

Paul says, “Exhort one another daily” (Heb. 3:13; 10:25). The Greek verb translated “exhort” in Hebrews 3:13 and Hebrews 10:25 is the same one translated “comfort” in 1 Thessalonians 4:18. It is used of exhorting troops who were about to go into battle (Barclay, p. 134).

The general principles of ministry apply to those who need exhortation: be there, listen, and identify with them. Beyond that, in the case of exhortation, you need to urge them to continue toward the goal (Heb. 3:12-14). The essence of exhortation is urging people not to give up, but to continue moving toward the goal. The adage says, “Give a man a good name and he will live up to it.” Another way to exhort people is to remind them of the consequences (Heb. 3:15-17).

Again, the second principle of ministry is critical listening. If you do not listen first, you will lose them. The following letter was left by a son who ran away from home. “Dear Folks, Thank you for everything, but I am going to Chicago to try and start a new life. You asked me why I gave you so much trouble, and the answer is easy for me to give you, but I wonder if you will understand.

“Remember when I was about six or seven and I used to want you to just listen to me? I remember all the nice things you gave me for Christmas and my birthday, and I was really happy with the things—for about a week—but I didn’t really want presents the rest of the time. I just wanted you to listen to me like I was somebody who felt things too. But you said you were busy.

“Mum, you’re a wonderful cook and have everything so clean. You were so tired from doing everything that made you busy, but you know something, Mum? I would have liked crackers and peanut butter just as much if you had only sat down with me during the day and said, ‘ Tell me all about it. Maybe I can help.’

“I think that all the kids who are doing so many things that grownups are tearing out their hair worrying about are really looking for somebody that will have time to listen a few minutes and who really will treat them as they would a grownup who might be useful to them, you know.

“Anybody asks you where I am, tell them I’ve gone looking for somebody with time because I’ve got a lot of things I want to talk about. Love to all, your Son.”

Summary: The way to minister to one another is to be there, listen, identify, and speak to the specific need as much as possible.

Some ministries are never said to be performed by “one another,” such as teaching, reproving, rebuking, and restoring. For example, Paul says, “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who *are* spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted” (Gal. 6:1). Those who are spiritual (mature), not all believers, are to exercise the ministry of restoration.

The fact that the phrase “one another” is attached to each of these exhortations indicates that all believers are to perform all of these ministries. There are things you can do. (Be there. Listen. Identify.) Beyond the principles of ministry, when people are sorrowing, comfort them with hope. When they are slipping, encourage them to keep the faith. When they are slacking off, exhort them by pointing them toward the goal.

There are things you should *not* do, such as preach. Don’t just say, “Don’t worry, it will be OK,” or “Just trust the Lord.”

Someone has written, “One day, a teacher asked her students to list the names of the other students in the room on two sheets of paper, leaving a space between each name. Then she told them to think of the nicest thing they could say about each classmate and write it down. It took the remainder of the class period to finish their assignment, and as the students left the room, each one handed in the papers.

“That Saturday, the teacher wrote down each student’s name on a separate sheet of paper and listed what everyone else had said about that individual. On Monday, she gave each student his or her list. Before long, the entire class was smiling. ‘Really?’ she heard whispered. “I never knew that I meant anything to anyone!” and “I didn’t know others liked me so much” were most of the comments.

“No one ever mentioned those papers in class again. She never knew if they discussed them after class or with their parents, but it didn’t matter. The exercise had accomplished its purpose. The students were happy with themselves and one another. That group of students moved on.

“Several years later, one of the students was killed in Vietnam and his teacher attended the funeral of that special student. She had never seen a serviceman in a military coffin before. He looked so handsome, so mature. The church was packed with his friends. One by one, those who loved him took a last walk by the coffin. The teacher was the last one to pass the coffin. As she

stood there, one of the soldiers who acted as pallbearers came up to her. “Were you Mark’s math teacher?” he asked. She nodded: “Yes.” Then, he said, “Mark talked about you a lot.”

“Most of Mark’s former classmates attended a luncheon after the funeral. Mark’s mother and father were there, obviously waiting to speak with his teacher. “We want to show you something,” his father said, taking a wallet out of his pocket. “They found this on Mark when he was killed. We thought you might recognize it.” Opening the billfold, he carefully removed two worn pieces of notebook paper that had obviously been taped, folded, and refolded many times. The teacher knew without looking that the papers were the ones on which she had listed all the good things each of Mark’s classmates had said about him. “Thank you so much for doing that,” Mark’s mother said. “As you can see, Mark treasured it.”

“All of Mark’s former classmates started to gather around. Charlie smiled rather sheepishly and said, “I still have my list. It’s in the top drawer of my desk at home.” Chuck’s wife said, “Chuck asked me to put his in our wedding album.”

“I have mine too,” Marilyn said. “It’s in my diary.” Then Vicki, another classmate, reached into her pocketbook, took out her wallet and showed her worn and frazzled list to the group. “I carry this with me at all times,” Vicki said and without batting an eyelash, she continued: “I think we all saved our lists.”

“That’s when the teacher finally sat down and cried. She cried for Mark and for all his friends who would never see him again.”

Words of love, comfort, encouragement, and exhortations are desperately needed and deeply appreciated. We need to minister to one another. We forget that life will end one day and don’t know when that day will come. So tell the people you love and care for that they are special and important. Tell them before it is too late.

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