

Ephesians Devotionals

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Ephesians Devotional Commentary

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EPHESIANS 1

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Ephesians 1:1-10

To the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. - Ephesians 1:6

TODAY IN THE WORD

Tennis player Althea Gibson was a trailblazing African-American athlete in the 1950s. Born on a South Carolina cotton farm and raised in Harlem, she battled poverty and segregation to achieve unprecedented success. She won 11 Grand Slam titles and was the first African-American to win the U.S. national championship and Wimbledon. To put this in perspective, Venus Williams in 2000 was only the second African-American woman to win Wimbledon. When Gibson died in 2003, Williams said, "I am grateful to Althea Gibson for having the strength and courage to break through the racial barriers in tennis... I am honored to have followed in such great footsteps."

Inheriting a rich legacy and following in great footsteps also describes us as believers in Jesus. We stand in and by His glorious grace, which Paul celebrated in today's memorable opening to Ephesians. All the credit and glory for redemption go to God. He's the agent of action in all these verses—He blessed, He chose, and He revealed His will. Best of all, He's freely given us grace, to the point of lavishing it upon us (vv. 6-8).

God's gracious plan gives us a new position. Forgiveness of sins and redemption in Christ mean we've been adopted as God's children. As such, we are to be "holy and blameless." We have this identity and purpose through no merit of our own, but by His loving and sovereign choice (vv. 4-5).

This tremendous "spiritual blessing" is at once past, present, and future. Christ's death and resurrection are past, concrete historical events. Our salvation is a present reality within which we are to live, walk, and serve the Lord. And His ongoing work of redemption will be completed in the future. On that day, all things will be brought under the headship of Christ (v. 10; cf. Phil. 2:10-11). Our inheritance of grace is indeed one "that can never perish, spoil or fade" (1 Peter 1:3-5).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

During last month's Today in the Word study on Paul's epistle to the Ephesians, you no doubt noticed several key passages on God's grace. You may want to review those Scripture or devotional readings for insights that you gained about grace, mystery, freedom, and transformation. We explored several aspects of the connection between grace and good works in that study; today ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you more of His biblical truth on this subject in a way that will give your life a greater sense of purpose for Him.

PAUL AND THE EPHESIANS

Read Ephesians 1:1–2

You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia. Acts 20:18

Thirty years ago, few would have said that Dan would become a pastor. He never attended church, was foul-mouthed, and had no interest in spiritual things. Today, by the grace of God, he preaches weekly to a small congregation that once knew him as the town drunk.

There was a time when Paul (formerly known as Saul of Tarsus) would also have seemed to be the least likely person to preach to the Gentiles in Ephesus. He was a member of one of the strictest sects of the Jews, sharply opposed to Jesus Christ, and had no love for Gentiles or Christians. What happened to change the course of his life so radically?

He reveals the answer in the first two verses of this letter to the church in Ephesus. Paul, like those to whom this letter was addressed, experienced the grace and peace that comes from God through Jesus Christ. God was the initiator in this relationship, interrupting Paul's life with the gospel and sending Paul as His commissioned messenger (Acts 9:1–6). As part of this mission, Paul traveled to Asia Minor where he preached the gospel to several cities including Ephesus.

God sent this unlikely messenger to proclaim the grace of Christ in what must have seemed like an intimidating spiritual environment. Ephesus was one of the largest trading centers in that region and a sort of spiritual melting pot. It was a focal point for pagan and emperor worship as well as the occult. The gospel found a receptive audience—but not without opposition. Later Paul would write that he “fought wild beasts in Ephesus,” which many scholars think is an allusion to the opposition he faced during his ministry there (1 Cor. 15:32).

APPLY THE WORD - Can you think of someone who seems unlikely to become a follower of Jesus Christ? Paul and the Ephesians must have seemed just as unlikely to those who knew them. Make a commitment to pray for the person you know each day this month, asking God to exercise His gracious will and open hearts to the Savior.

EVERY SPIRITUAL BLESSING

Read Ephesians 1:3–6

Our citizenship is in heaven. Philippians 3:20

“Count your blessings, name them one by one,” an old gospel song urges, “count your blessings, see what God hath done.” As Paul takes stock in this letter of all that God has done for us through Christ, he begins by focusing on the nature of God rather than by itemizing each individual blessing. He begins by noting that God is worthy of being “praised.” This is the Greek word from which the term eulogy comes. His opening words are a form of Jewish prayer known as a berakah or “blessing.” An opening blessing was a common feature of letters in the ancient world.

God is worthy of being blessed or praised by those who are in Christ because He has blessed them with spiritual blessings. Chief among these is the privilege of being “chosen” and “predestined.” Since this choosing was done “before the creation of the world,” it must have taken place in the heavenly realms (v. 4). God's choice set in motion a series of events and influences that would result in our being “holy” and “blameless.” This holiness is a gift before it is a practice. It is first and foremost a state of blamelessness that is given to us by God as a result of Christ's work.

God's choice also guaranteed the believer's future status. Those who have been chosen are therefore predestined for “adoption to sonship” (v. 5). It is because God has chosen us that we can address Him as our heavenly Father. The gift of blamelessness brings with it all the rights and privileges that come with being a child of God. We not only receive forgiveness for sin and righteousness from God, but we also receive a spiritual inheritance and status as full-fledged members of God's family. God did not make this choice based on anything we have done. He did all this to highlight the grace that comes to us through Jesus Christ.

APPLY THE WORD

Paul's remarks are actually a doxology, a short hymn of praise to God. Respond to today's study by singing your favorite doxology from the hymnal or listen to a song of praise by your favorite artist. If you have a creative side, you might even try writing your own doxology and praying it aloud.

SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS

Read Ephesians 1:3-14

Praise be to God...who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. Ephesians 1:3

For many years, the most-watched episode in every season of The Oprah Winfrey Show was “Oprah’s Favorite Things.” Usually airing around Thanksgiving, the episodes featured Oprah describing her favorite sweater or coffee maker or watch—and then giving the item away to every member of the studio audience. The total value of the “Favorite Things” gifts was estimated to be over \$23 million.

The gifts that we have from God are more extensive and more expensive than anything The Oprah Winfrey Show could ever give away. We have these blessings in Christ, who paid the penalty for our sin with His own life. He was raised by God and now serves as our Advocate in heaven (see Heb. 4:14–15; 1 John 2:1). And just look in our passage today at the list of ways God is blessing us!

God chose us and made us His children through our faith in Christ. He has lavished His grace in our lives and forgiven our sins. He allows us to be part of His great eternal purpose for all of creation. He gives us wisdom, understanding, and hope. We have the message of truth, and we have the Holy Spirit to confirm that all these gifts are truly ours. We have been given “every spiritual blessing in Christ” (Eph 1:3).

Notice how many times the word praise occurs in this text. There is no better response to these amazing gifts than to offer our praise to God. Our words and songs of praise are fitting and appropriate for the Lord who has freely given us “his glorious grace” (v. 6). And our lives should also be a tribute of praise that brings glory to God (v. 12). Truly, in Christ we are a people who are blessed.

APPLY THE WORD - Consider how you can praise God for all His blessings. Perhaps you have a praise session in which you sing or listen to songs that glorify Him. Or you might choose to offer your gifts of volunteer labor or financial gifts to a ministry that serves underprivileged people. You could also share the message of truth with a loved one.

IN CHRIST ALONE

Read Ephesians 1:7–14

God . . . set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. 2 Corinthians 1:22

Those who make a major purchase like a house are often required to make a down payment when they sign the contract. This money is evidence that they are “in earnest” about the deal and serves as a guarantee that they will pay the rest of the amount owed. God has given us a kind of “down payment” on all the blessings that He has promised to us in Christ. It is the indwelling Holy Spirit.

This gift shows that God is in earnest about His promise to bless us through Jesus Christ. The indwelling ministry of God’s Spirit is tangible evidence of two foundational blessings we have received through Christ. One is our redemption through His blood, which results in the forgiveness of sins (v. 7). The other is our election in Christ, God’s gracious choice to include us in His plan of redemption and glorify God through our salvation (v. 11).

These two foundational blessings are mentioned in the opposite order that we experience them. It is clear from Paul’s description that although redemption is mentioned first, it comes as a consequence of God’s choosing, which is itself a result of our having been predestined “according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will”(v. 11). God makes us aware of this plan through the gospel. All those who respond in faith to its message are included in Christ and are marked with the seal of the Holy Spirit.

All three persons of the Trinity are involved in our salvation experience, but Paul’s description of it here is decidedly Christ-centered. Every blessing mentioned in these verses comes to us as a result of what Christ has done for us; the chief blessing is being “in Christ.”

APPLY THE WORD

Some people are troubled by the Bible’s language of choice and predestination. Those who are anxious should take comfort from Christ’s open invitation: “All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away” (John 6:37). If you come to Him in faith, He will not turn you away.

Ephesians 1:1-6

He chose us ... to be holy and blameless in his sight. - Ephesians 1:4

TODAY IN THE WORD

As Moses stood before the burning bush, he gave the Lord every excuse he could think of to get out of having to speak to Pharaoh about freeing Israel from captivity. But as God answered each objection, Moses discovered a powerful truth: when God calls people to do something, He enables them to do it. As the one chosen by God to go to Pharaoh, Moses was given the ability and so had the responsibility to go (see Ex. 3-4).

In our month-long study of Ephesians, the apostle Paul will remind us again and again of this truth. In fact, he opens this letter by announcing two interrelated themes that form the core of the entire epistle. On the one hand, God has graciously called us through Christ to be His own children. On the other hand, as God's children, we have a responsibility to live lives that are worthy of that calling—holy and blameless. Holy living, Paul says, is one of the reasons that God issued His call before the foundations of the world, having predetermined to adopt us into His family on account of His love for Jesus.

This divine call to holiness is just one of many “spiritual blessings” that we have as those who are in Christ Jesus (v. 3). As we examine other blessings over the next few days, we will learn the same lesson Moses learned. Living in God's call is not beyond our reach—for when God calls, He also equips.

How has God equipped us for holy and blameless living? As we continue through chapter one we will see that God has forgiven our sins, made known to us the mystery of His will, included us in Christ, and sent the Holy Spirit to dwell in us. All of these truly amazing blessings have come to us as a result of God's loving call. We now have the ability to live in a way that brings glory to God! So we must live in the power of those blessings.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Do you ever find yourself giving the Lord excuses about your spiritual life? Perhaps you don't feel like you have enough knowledge, faith, or experience. Or maybe you keep reminding God about your hectic schedule that prevents you from focusing on what He's calling you to do. Just as with Moses, when God has called us He will equip us. Prayerfully surrender your excuses to God and ask Him this month to show you how He will provide.

Ephesians 1:3-10 Colossians 2:8-10;

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness. - 2 Peter 1:3

TODAY IN THE WORD

Few things are more terrifying than a kidnapping. In many countries, wealthy or influential individuals face the daily threat of kidnapping for ransom. The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children says that of the 4,600 children missing every year, nearly one hundred are taken by strangers for extended time periods.

Given this, it may seem surprising that Paul uses this severe verb, “take captive,” to describe the deceptive teaching in Colosse. The idea is literally to kidnap, or to prey upon. Paul knows that it is dangerous to be exploited both spiritually and physically.

Paul's description of this teaching as “hollow and deceptive philosophy” might not sound very harmful. But then again, most cults have just enough truth to sound harmless. Paul here counters teaching that had the appearance of wisdom, but which was actually empty.

This problematic teaching was rooted in human tradition. We saw yesterday how important it is to have believers grounded in the basics about Christ, which depend upon God's revelation, not human traditions. Again, we're not exactly sure what these false teachers were saying, but it's clear that they were drawing on the conventional wisdom of the day. They might claim that certain mystical experiences or religious rituals were necessary to be accepted by God.

Today people often say that as long as you're just good enough then you'll go to heaven. Teaching that rests on human traditions and the world's way of doing things ignores the fact that humans can never be good enough and that a price had to be paid for human rebellion. In other words, false teaching denies Christ and His sacrificial death on the cross.

In denying Christ, false teaching often either denies Christ's humanity or His deity. That's why Paul stresses both in verse 9: the fullness of “God-ness” is in Christ bodily. Salvation is only possible through the fully human, fully divine Christ.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

False teaching always ends up being deceptive and empty. Truth and fullness can only be found in Christ. That's the point of verse 10. “Fullness in Christ” is another way of saying that believers have perfect completeness in Christ. This includes such things as full acceptance before God, abundant life, membership in the body of Christ, and provision of every spiritual need. Looking over Ephesians 1, what other blessings have we been given with “fullness in Christ”?

Ephesians 1:3-14; Colossians 1:9-23

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. - Colossians 1:15

TODAY IN THE WORD

“Twinkle, twinkle, little star ... like a diamond in the sky” goes the familiar children's song. It's actually true! A team of astronomers at the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics recently discovered a “diamond star” 10 billion trillion trillion carats in size, or about 932 miles across. By comparison, the largest diamond ever found on earth was only 3,100 carats. The star is actually a crystallized white dwarf, the leftover core of a star that has burned out. About 50 light years away from us, its carbon interior “has solidified to form the galaxy's largest diamond,” explained one scientist.

How much would such a diamond be worth? It boggles the mind. Paul felt exactly this way about the incredible, incalculable worth of Jesus Christ. We cannot emphasize enough that a “life filled with purpose” is a life filled with Christ. In today's two readings—again drawn from epistles written during his first imprisonment—Paul celebrated this truth. A theological library could be written on these passages, but we will focus on one question: What does a life filled with Christ look like?

A life filled with Christ is one filled with blessing and lavished with grace. After all, God predestined and chose us to be adopted as His children. He loved us so much that He sent His Son on a life-costing, life-giving mission of forgiveness and redemption. Our lives, too, should be characterized by love, grace, and forgiveness—doing as well as speaking gospel truths to those around us. God's purpose in choosing us is to make us holy and blameless, to the praise of His glory. We believe and hope in these spiritual realities, and already enjoy the Holy Spirit as a guarantee and firstfruits of the inheritance to come.

A life filled with Christ is one governed by the knowledge of God's revealed will, that is, His plan of salvation. Having crossed over from death to life in Christ, we should continue walking with and growing in Him. We should live righteously, worthy of our salvation—that is, to please Him. This will assuredly bear fruit in our lives, including endurance, patience, thankfulness, and joy.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

If you find that you can better relate to fiction, pick up a copy of *Paul: A Novel*, by Walter Wangerin Jr. In this engaging and substantial modern novel, Wangerin takes into account the latest historical and cultural scholarship on the first century and writes from an imaginative, faith-filled perspective. In the author's own words, “This is a novel, particularly, of the man who bore [the] gospel east to west with fury and faith and tenderness... He is the hinge of history.”

Ephesians 1:3-14; Colossians 1:9-23

Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. - 2 Corinthians 5:5

TODAY IN THE WORD

In both Britain and the United States, it's customary for a man to give an engagement ring when he asks a woman to marry him. This tradition probably dates back to the Greeks or perhaps even the Egyptians. The first diamond engagement ring was apparently given in Austria in 1477. Thus the engagement ring is an enduring token of a couple's commitment to marry each other and spend their lives together.

The Bible also talks about a “token” and a marriage. The Bridegroom is the Lord Jesus Christ, and we, His church, are the bride. As His bride, we have received something more glorious than a ring, because we've been given God's pledge, His Holy Spirit, as a token of His promise to be with us forever.

In both Ephesians and 2 Corinthians Paul describes the Holy Spirit as a deposit, who guarantees our eternal inheritance. Although the imagery is different, the same truth is expressed whether we think of the Holy Spirit as type of engagement ring or down payment. In both cases, God's indwelling Spirit assures us that we'll be in His presence for all eternity.

The opening part of Paul's letter to the Ephesian church underscores God's glorious work on our behalf through the work of Christ. These verses span God's work of election before the world's foundation to our present redemption and adoption as God's own children to the eternal inheritance that awaits us. This sweep from past to future assures us of God's complete control over the entire scope of our lives.

Our greatest assurance of our future glory, however, is our marking, or sealing, with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13). In Paul's day as well as our own, cattle were often marked, or branded, with their owner's seal to protect against theft. In a similar way, Paul says that

believers have been “sealed” as God's special possession with His own seal, His Holy Spirit.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Engagement rings, down payments, and cattle brands are all helpful pictures of commitment, guarantee, and protection, but none of them can truly capture the depth of God's commitment to us through His indwelling Holy Spirit. Later in Ephesians, we read that we've been sealed until the day of redemption, or Christ's return (Eph. 4:30). What assurance this gives us when we face trials or doubts. We are God's possession, with His own Spirit to vouch for it.

Ephesians 1:7-10

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins. - Ephesians 1:7

TODAY IN THE WORD

Last December, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld was questioned about equipment for American troops fighting in Iraq from reporters as well as troops and their family members. President Bush himself responded to reassure families: “We're doing everything we possibly can to protect your loved ones in a mission which is vital and important.”

The right equipment makes the difference for any mission. In Christ we are equipped for holy living. One way that God enables us to live blamelessly is redemption through the blood of Jesus. As the perfect sacrifice on our behalf, Jesus' death brings about the forgiveness of our sins. God's provision represents a lavish outpouring of His grace (vv. 7-8). Curiously, Paul goes on to speak of this redemption as a “mystery” in which all things, both heavenly and earthly, are brought together under the headship of Christ. What does he mean?

In good rhetorical fashion Paul introduces us here to a concept that he will not develop fully until later in the letter (see 2:11-3:12). For the time being we can note that this “mystery” that God has revealed to those in Jesus involves uniting things in heaven and on earth under the authority of Jesus. Being “in him” (v. 7) not only brings forgiveness of sins, it also brings, as part of that forgiveness, a great new reconciliation involving things in heaven and on earth—that is, all aspects of creation.

We often forget that God's redemption in Jesus extends far beyond simply cleansing us of our personal sins. This redemption involves a re-ordering of the fallen creation around the authority of Jesus. The Bible tells us that it is because all authority in heaven and earth has been given to Jesus that the good news can be proclaimed to people of every nation (see Matt. 28:18-20). One way, then, that we have been equipped to live holy and blameless lives is as recipients of God's gracious act to redeem creation. We have been included in Christ and have received forgiveness. This great mystery has been revealed to us!

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Our Lord has authority over all heaven and earth! Yet sometimes we want to retain control over some area of our lives. We may believe that Christ has the authority to forgive our sins—but not to direct our finances or daytimer. If you have something in your life that you still want to manage, surrender it under the umbrella of Jesus' loving authority. This is a critical part of the equipment God has provided for our sanctification.

Ephesians 1:9-10 Colossians 1:18-20; 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

He made known to us the mystery of his will ... to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. - Ephesians 1:9-10

TODAY IN THE WORD

Most people wouldn't have looked twice at a packed U-Haul truck driving from California to Mississippi in June 1960. Only God knew the profound implications of this move. Leaving behind a successful career and a big house, John and Vera Mae Perkins moved to New Hebron and began practicing what John later called the three R's: “Relocation to a community in need, Reconciliation between the races, and Redistribution of the economic base.” Despite bigotry and brutality, Perkins realized that, “True justice could come only as people's hearts were made right with God and God's love motivated them to be reconciled to each other.”

Yesterday we focused on Christ's lordship over creation; today, we'll consider His lordship over His church. Recall that firstborn indicated supreme rank. Here it refers to Jesus as the beginning of resurrection life. Hebrews 12:2 says that Jesus is “the author and perfecter of our faith,” going before us to eternal life. Because of His resurrection, Jesus is both Lord and the beginning of God's new work through the church.

Jesus has always existed, even before creation, and He has always been fully God, even though He is also fully human. In verse 19,

Paul writes that God was pleased to have the full measure of His deity dwell in Christ. It's likely that the false teachers in Colosse were distorting this truth, so Paul stresses that "all the fullness" of God dwells in Christ.

The idea that it pleased God to have His fullness dwell in Christ shows that there is perfect unity between the Father and the Son. It shouldn't be surprising that the great work that God is accomplishing through His Son is to reconcile a fragmented world back to Himself (v. 19). In fact, as new creations in Christ, we are both reconciled back to God and called to participate in this "ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:18), so that we too may experience God's unity.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

As we submit to the Lord, we participate in His great work of reconciliation around the world, as He brings together human beings from "every nation, tribe, people and language" (Rev. 7:9). What a privilege to be part of such holy work. This week, ask the Lord what specific steps you or your church can take to participate in this redemptive work.

Ephesians 1:11-14

Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit. - Ephesians 1:13

TODAY IN THE WORD

Egyptologists who study hieroglyphics have identified a man named Hemaka as one of the earliest to hold the position "Keeper of the Royal Seal." The title reflects the great power of his position, as virtually no official business transpired in Egypt without the stamp of the royal seal. Hemaka, who served King Den in the First Dynasty, has a tomb that rivals that of the king, further emphasizing the importance of the seal and the man who kept it.

We have already seen that God's call to live holy and blameless lives comes with the provision of forgiveness of sins and reconciliation; now Paul introduces another important element. Part of God's eternal plan for His people was to send them the promised Holy Spirit to seal them (v. 13). As we saw yesterday, Paul is still only beginning to introduce subjects that he will deal with at greater length in the rest of the letter. Much of what we will read over the next month will help clarify for us the work and presence of the Spirit in our lives. For now, it is important for us to see that the Spirit's presence in our lives is the "seal" or guarantee of our salvation that God has given us (v. 14).

This guarantee, Paul says, comes to us when we are "included in Christ" (v. 13). That is, when we hear and believe the gospel or "good news" about Jesus. What is this gospel? It is the revealed mystery we read about yesterday—namely that God has chosen to forgive our sins and redeem His fallen creation by means of Jesus' death. The revelation of this mystery is nothing less than God's call. We show ourselves to be those whom God has chosen, those who are included in Christ when, having heard this call, we believed it. All we need to do is believe the message. Once we believe, we are included in Christ and equipped with the Spirit and forgiveness to live holy and blameless lives that have been reconciled to God.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Perhaps you've never believed the good news about Jesus and been reconciled to God. You may think that you are too sinful, or that God would never love you. None of this is true! God's redemptive call goes out to all people. All you need to be "included in Christ" is believe in Jesus' redeeming death. You will receive forgiveness and the Holy Spirit and be equipped to live a holy and blameless life! Pray to God right now, confess your sins knowing that He will forgive, and begin a new life reconciled to God through Christ.

OPEN THE EYES OF MY HEART

Read Ephesians 1:15–21

For God . . . made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.² Corinthians 4:6

Although taught the Bible at an early age, John Newton was a slave trader before his conversion to Christ. "I sinned with a high hand," Newton said, "and I made it my study to tempt and seduce others." It was God who eventually opened the spiritual eyes of this prodigal and turned him toward Christ.

Today's passage includes Paul's prayer that the Ephesians would have a similar experience. Only in this case he is not praying for those who need to be converted, but rather for those who already have faith in Christ. Unbelievers are not the only ones who need to be enlightened by the Holy Spirit! Those who have embraced the gospel also need ongoing illumination by God's Spirit to understand all that has happened to them in Christ and to grasp the full extent of what God will do for them in the future.

This is not just knowledge of facts or an ability to restate the details of a doctrinal position. Paul characterizes it as an understanding of the heart that results in a confident hope. This hope is rooted in the recognition that the power at work in us is the same power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Those who are in Christ are even now living in the reality of the resurrection. It is this transforming power that enables us to turn from those things which are displeasing to God.

Paul's example is a good model for our own prayer life. We can pray for ourselves that God will continue to open the eyes of our heart so that we will understand all that He has done for us in Christ. We can also pray for others who do not have spiritual understanding and ask that God will remove their blindness.

APPLY THE WORD

Respond to today's study by using Paul's words as a guide for your own prayer. Begin by praying these words for yourself. Pray them for someone you know who belongs to Christ. Then pray for someone who is spiritually blind but needs to see. As you pray, ask the Lord to help you grow in understanding of His grace through the study this month.

Ephesians 1:15-19a

I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation. - Ephesians 1:17

TODAY IN THE WORD

Someone has wryly observed that saying to a person ""I'll pray for you"" has become the way we Christians say goodbye. It's a clever line, but it has enough truth in it to sting a little.

Nothing is easier at church or on the telephone than to tell a Christian friend you'll pray for him or her. We know we are supposed to pray for others, and we sincerely want to pray. But we sometimes forget to follow up on our prayer promises.

The fact that other people would seek our prayers on their behalf and the fact that we feel burdened to pray for them underscores the importance of intercession. The meaning of intercession is to go before the Father on behalf of others: our sisters and brothers in Christ, lost people, family members, and anyone else who needs prayer.

God is looking for intercessors. He is ready to bless and save and comfort and restore--and in His wisdom, He has decided that He will move in response to the prayers of His people.

The ministry of intercession doesn't need a lot of explaining. We can pray for anyone God lays on our hearts, and we can pray for anything in their lives that is within God's will. And in those cases where our prayers for others do not align with His will, God has a way of bringing our requests in line with His desires.

You won't find a better biblical intercessor than Paul. Time and again he told the people to whom he wrote that he prayed for them, constantly and fervently. The prayer in today's text remains a classic example of the kind of prayer God can bless.

Paul went right to the heart of the Ephesian believers' spiritual needs. He prayed that they would know God intimately. He also asked God to open the eyes of their spiritual understanding so that they would grasp the greatness of their position in Christ. When Paul said, ""I'll pray for you,"" he prayed! How about us?

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

One good way to deal with a memory lapse is to write down what you want to remember.

It works with prayer requests too. Even if you don't have the problem of forgetting a well-meaning promise to pray for someone, writing down the request accomplishes at least two good things. It helps to fix the request on your mind, and it gives you something tangible to pull out and review when you pray. Try carrying a few 3 x 5 cards in your pocket, purse, or Bible for this purpose.

Ephesians 1:15-23

Set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. - Colossians 3:1

TODAY IN THE WORD

Some of you may remember the TV game show, Let's Make a Deal. Contestants had to choose one of three doors, all of which concealed various prizes. Suspense mounted as a contestant deliberated between a known prize and the possibility of a better one behind Door Number One, Door Number Two, or Door Number Three.

Sometimes life can feel a bit like this game show. As believers, we are asked to give up attachments to this world for the “prizes” God promises in the world to come, which we have never seen. It can be hard to forsake what’s so familiar and comfortable without a clear idea of what’s behind the next door.

Maybe that’s why Paul spent so much time talking about the glorious inheritance of believers. He wanted believers to be so focused on what was eternally theirs through their relationship with Christ, that they would become less distracted by things that would eventually pass away.

Paul wrote Ephesians from a prison in Rome. It increases our appreciation for his heavenly focus and his prayer that believers would also be focusing upward. Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians is rooted in his praise for the work of God through His Son. In Christ, we have been chosen and called as believers (Eph. 1:3–14). It is the key starting place for any prayer--God’s plan of redemption.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Paul’s prayer not only shows us how we can pray for our needs; it is also an example of how we can pray for others.

Ephesians 1:15-23

I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone. - 1 Timothy 2:1

TODAY IN THE WORD

Don Hardin’s story offers many reasons to thank God for His liberating power. Before he met Jesus, Don describes his life: “I ran with the devil and was a very evil person. Life was “all about me’ and nobody else.” Don’s life at this time was consumed by drugs and crime. Eventually he ended up in prison. An unexpected thing happened, once Don was away from drugs and other temptations. He kept hearing a voice telling him to read the Bible. When he finally started reading, he couldn’t stop. Day after day he read, until one day Don prayed to receive Jesus. And his life was transformed. Don was eventually released from prison, but he knows that Jesus released him from even greater bondage. He writes, “I am so thankful for everything God has done for me... Jesus gave me my freedom when I first asked Him into my heart and my life. Then He opened the gates and let me out of jail.”

Many in the Ephesian church experienced a similar freedom in Christ. Acts 19 tells us that occult practices were common in Ephesus. But Acts 19 also shows the gospel’s power and records the conversion of many who had walked in deep darkness. This explains the gratitude that Paul expresses to God for the Ephesian believers in today’s passage. It also explains the focus on power that runs through these verses.

Notice that this power rests squarely on Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. The outworking of this power in the lives of believers demonstrates that there is no force of evil that cannot be broken by the power of God working through Christ. No wonder Paul had not “stopped giving thanks” for these Christians brothers and sisters. Notice also that he prays that they would continue to be filled with the knowledge and wisdom of God and the hope of their calling in Christ.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

The testimonies of the Ephesian church and believers like Don Hardin give us plenty of reasons to thank our Lord for His complete power over the darkness of evil. Perhaps you can praise the Lord for a similar type of deliverance in your own life. If so, then take some time today to pray through today’s passage, and personalize it by inserting your name where appropriate. Paul’s prayer also encourages us how to pray for continued freedom and growth of all believers, regardless of their past circumstances.

Ephesians 1:1-23; 2 Corinthians 1:21-22

Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit. - Ephesians 1:13b

TODAY IN THE WORD

Traditionally, members of the English gentry possessed crests or “arms” that depicted their family heritage. Poet John Donne’s family crest was a “sheaf of snakes” but when he decided to take holy orders, he changed it to an image of Christ upon an anchor. This exchange of an image of sinfulness (snakes) for an image of redemption (Christ) was Donne’s way of symbolizing his full yielding to God. “This Seal’s a Catechism, not a Seal alone,” he wrote to fellow poet George Herbert. When Donne changed his heart, he changed his seal.

Believers also receive a new seal at conversion--the seal of the Holy Spirit. What does it mean for us to be sealed?

Seals provide an authoritative, identifying mark. In the Old Testament, a seal from a signet ring indicated the authority of a king. For

example, in Esther 8 King Xerxes asked Queen Esther to write a decree in his name and to stamp it with his ring. The king's seal guarantees its authenticity and power.

Seals also signal the completion of an act. In sealing us with the Spirit, God acknowledges our definitive inclusion in Christ and marks us as His own. We are His, guaranteed. The Spirit is God's "seal of ownership" upon us (2 Cor. 1:22).

Note what is not the sign of our inclusion in Christ: not baptism, not the Lord's Supper, not circumcision, but God's own Spirit. Isn't it wonderful that God's seal, His mark of authority, is His very Spirit?

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

The Beloved in the Song of Songs says to her lover, "Place me like a seal over your heart" (8:6).

Ephesians 1:15-23

I pray ... that you may know the hope to which he has called you ... and his incomparably great power for us who believe. - Ephesians 1:18-19

TODAY IN THE WORD

Who has the most power? Many people would answer it's the U.S. President. Condoleezza Rice, Secretary of State, is routinely listed at the top of lists of the world's most powerful women. But others argue that political power is only one area of influence—what about those in business or entertainment? No matter how we define human power, though, it can't compare with what we see in our passage.

Thus far Paul has reminded us of our call and of our responsibility to live up to that call. He has also, however, pointed us to the ways in which God Himself has equipped us to live as those He has called. In our reading for today Paul directs our attention toward the power of God, the exalted position of Christ, and the place of the church in the world.

The power at work in us is the same power that brought Jesus back from the dead and lifted Him up to His present exalted position at the right hand of the Father. Paul wants us to know more fully the presence of God's power to transform death into resurrection life. What is the effect of this transforming power?

First of all, God's power brought about the heavenly exaltation of Jesus. That is, God's mighty act of resurrection not only brought Jesus back from the dead, it also vested Him with authority over all the heavenly powers and dominions (vv. 19-22). In addition, though, this power has given Jesus an enduring presence on earth in the form of the church, which is His body (v. 23). In verse 10 Paul spoke of God unifying all things under Jesus. Part of this mystery is now revealed to us, for as believers in Jesus we are a manifestation of His presence here on earth. God's resurrection power is present with us. Through our redemption, God is working out the redemption of the rest of creation. As we in the church live as God's children in the world, we are nothing less than a tangible representation of Jesus' presence and power.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

You may never be considered as a candidate for World's Most Powerful Person, but as a believer in Jesus, you are a testimony to the greatest power ever imagined. Our lives should bear witness to the power of forgiveness. One way we do this is through forgiving others when they have wronged us. This can be extremely difficult, but it is one of the most powerful ways that we represent Christ in our world. As you thank the Lord for His forgiveness toward you, ask Him for the power to forgive others.

HEAD OF EVERYTHING

Read Ephesians 1:22–23

He is the head of the body, the church . . . so that in everything he might have the supremacy. Colossians 1:18

Two children were playing when one decided to take charge of the game. The other complained: "You're not the boss of me!" On occasion members of the church also find it difficult to "play well together." Congregational life may often be marked by disputes over leadership and power struggles.

There should be no doubt about who is in charge of the church. It is not the pastor or the board or an archbishop or a pope. According to Scripture it is Jesus alone who is "head over everything for the church" (v. 22). This superior role results from His resurrection and exaltation. Following the humiliation of His death, Jesus was raised to life by the power of God and seated at the Father's right hand in the heavenly realms.

Paul's description links Christ's exalted position with the historical events of His incarnation. The effect of Christ's ministry, death, and resurrection reached far beyond the New Testament world or even the church. The results were cosmic in proportion. The language in the verses that precede our reading echoes Psalm 8 and portrays Jesus' authority as superior over every power presently and in the age to come.

Paul spells out the implications this has for church life when he characterizes the church as the body of Christ. This language underscores the church's dependency upon Christ for life as well as leadership. Other members can be severed and the body will survive—but not the head. The body cannot exist apart from its head.

What does this mean for leadership in the church? Among other things, it means that all authority in the church is derived. It is God the Father who made Jesus "the boss of us" both now and forevermore.

APPLY THE WORD

Paul's understanding of Jesus' exalted position reflected his understanding of Psalm 8. This psalm is often quoted in the New Testament. Take some time this week to read through Psalm 8 and see how many parallels to the arc of Jesus' life and ministry you can identify in its verses. Then praise Jesus as the Head over His body, the church!

EPHESIANS 2

Ephesians 2:1-10

God ... made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions. - Ephesians 2:4

TODAY IN THE WORD

Daily life still doesn't look like an episode from the 1960s cartoon *The Jetsons*, but the popularity of mobile robots is growing. Scientists continue to explore ways to develop robots that can perform specific tasks to assist people. No matter how sophisticated the robot, though, it is useless without its power source—the batteries necessary for any of its motors, sensors, or processors to work. All that technology is worthless if the batteries run down.

Much of what we have read in Ephesians lays the groundwork for some of the main points of the letter. The themes of God's call, forgiveness, the Spirit, redemption, resurrection power, Jesus' exalted status, and the church as Christ's body will all be further developed as we continue through the epistle. Today, for example, Paul brings home the reality of God's resurrection as the power source for our own lives.

Paul describes our present status in Christ by contrasting it to our situation apart from Christ. Apart from Jesus we were all in a state of death. That is, we were completely captured by the power of sin and, as such, were destined to face God's just wrath (vv. 1-3). This description no longer applies to those who belong to Christ. God has graciously saved us from this state of death by extending the power of Jesus' resurrection to us (vv. 4-5). Since we are in Christ, we share in the resurrection life and in the exalted status of Jesus (vv. 6-7).

These blessings have come to us from God. Nothing that we could possibly do earns us God's saving favor. Rather, God graciously extends salvation to us as a gift (vv. 8-9). Yet Paul reminds us that this grace has come for a reason—that we might do good works (v. 10). As people who have been raised with Christ, we participate in the redemption and renewal of creation. That is, as the body and presence of Christ on earth, we have the responsibility of doing good works in the fallen world. This is all part of God's eternal plan of salvation.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

God certainly didn't create us to be robots, but He does intend for us to be fully charged with His power. And when we are connected to our "power source," certain attitudes and behaviors will result. Our good works don't earn our salvation—they are a result of the salvation we have already been given in Christ! Does some aspect of your life need to be recharged with the power of God? If so, plan to have an extended time with God in His Word and prayer soon.

BEFORE AND AFTER PICTURE

Read Ephesians 2:1–5

You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. Colossians 3:7

Ads for self-improvement products like diet or exercise programs often use before-and-after pictures to prove their effectiveness. Paul uses a similar approach in this chapter to help us grasp the blessings that have come to us through Jesus Christ. He begins by reminding us that before we had trusted in Christ, we were “dead in transgressions in sins” (v. 1). This frank assessment underscores our helpless condition. Those who are dead cannot do anything for themselves.

Spiritually dead, however, did not mean spiritually inactive. Although we were dead in sin, we used to live for and walk in the ways of the one who is “the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient” (v. 2). We did not have to be members of the occult or Satan worshipers to be under Satan’s dominion. Satan’s control over us was exercised through the sinful nature. To be spiritually dead meant that all our efforts, even our religious efforts, were shaped by desires of our sinful nature. For some this took the form of immorality. For others it was a life of striving after morality that left us feeling either guilty or self-righteous.

The fact that our condition was “dead” proves that nothing would have changed if we had been left to our own devices. But Paul’s “after” picture makes it clear that a fundamental change has taken place in all who belong to Jesus Christ. This change did not come about from a program or spiritual regimen. The change happened before we could do anything for ourselves, while we were still dead in our transgressions. It was a work of God’s power. Neither was the change a reward given to us because we tried to turn over a new leaf. It was a merciful gift of grace.

APPLY THE WORD

Can you paint a before-and-after picture of your own spiritual life? Even if you don’t think you have artistic ability, you can still draw two columns on a sheet of paper. In one write down the things that were true of you before you trusted Jesus Christ as your Savior. In the other list everything that has changed. Spend time praising God for the difference!

THE BEST SEAT IN THE HOUSE

Read Ephesians 2:6–7

If we have been united with him in a death like his, we will . . . be united with him in a resurrection like his. Romans 6:5

Two years ago an experiment involving an extremely thin sliver of metal that had been cooled to a thousandth of a degree above absolute zero seemed to verify one of the theories of quantum physics: it is possible for an object to be in two states at once. In this case the small metal paddle was vibrating and standing still at the same time.

Today’s passage indicates that those who belong to Christ experience something similar in the spiritual realm. We might say that they are in two places at once. Because those who belong to Jesus are “in Christ,” they died with Christ and have been raised up with Him. Since Christ has been exalted to the Father’s right hand, there is also a sense that we too are seated there with Him. This is certainly true in terms of our position. We have been so identified with Christ that His suffering for sin has been credited to our account. His death is our death and His victory is our victory.

Paul, however, seems to be describing something that involves more than mere spiritual accounting. We are not divided into two parts, yet we do inhabit two realms at once. This helps us to understand the power that is available to us once we are in Christ. Our sinful nature does not suddenly disappear. It cannot be rehabilitated and made less sinful.

The secret to successful Christian living, then, does not lie in trying to reform the old “earthly” nature but in acting in accordance with the new “heavenly” nature that is ours as a result of what Jesus has done. In this way our earthly experience provides a point of access for heavenly power. We live out our lives on earth, but as those who are also citizens of heaven with all its resources at our disposal.

APPLY THE WORD

Do you have a favorite location that gives you a sense of being “above it all?” Perhaps it is the view from a mountain peak or a tall building. Maybe it is when you stand on a bridge over a river watching the water below. The next time you are there, savor the reminder that while you are a citizen of earth, you have access to the resources of heaven.

Ephesians 2:8 Genesis 15:1-6; Romans 4:1-5

It is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God. - Ephesians 2:8

TODAY IN THE WORD

Following the Civil War, General Ulysses S. Grant was showered with gifts by admirers and people grateful that the terrible war was

over. Grant received so many presents that one newspaper even grumbled about the way the former “stern soldier” gladly received these gifts--which reportedly led Grant to develop a taste for lavish living.

It's hard to turn down a reward when it's set before you, especially if you think you've earned it. Abraham had a great opportunity to enrich himself after defeating an alliance of kings who attacked Sodom and Gomorrah and took his nephew Lot captive (Gen. 14:1-12).

Abraham and his men rescued Lot and all the goods that had been taken, and the king of Sodom offered to let Abraham keep all the property. But Abraham refused the reward as an act of faith (vv. 22-24), because he had committed his future to the Lord.

This is the context for God's further promise that He would be Abraham's security and reward (Gen. 15:1). This assurance dealt with whatever fear Abraham may have had for his future after passing up the reward offered to him.

Abraham understood that the Lord's promise to make him into a “great nation” (Gen. 12:2) required him to have an heir. Enough years had passed since the promise that Abraham began to wonder if he would have to name his servant Eliezer his heir.

It's not entirely clear if Abraham's question (Gen. 15:2) was an evidence of doubt. This is a possibility because even though Abraham was faithful, he wasn't perfect.

But God restated the promise in no uncertain terms. Abraham's heir would be “a son coming from [his] own body,” and his descendants would be as many as the stars (vv. 4-5).

Abraham's response to this was to believe the word God spoke, and to receive God's declaration that he was righteous--that is, Abraham believed God in the face of seemingly impossible circumstances.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Many lost people may tell you about the good things they are doing to earn their place in heaven--much as Paul said that Abraham could have bragged about his good works. The problem is that human goodness has no weight with God, a reality that lost people have to understand.

GRACE AND WORKS

Read Ephesians 2:8-10

Our people must learn to devote themselves to doing what is good, in order to provide for urgent needs. Titus 3:14

Towards the end of the second century a Christian leader named Tertullian asked, “What does Athens have to do with Jerusalem?” His question was intended to underscore the difference between Greek philosophy and the Christian faith. Today some Christians would draw a similar distinction between grace and works. They would be tempted to ask, “What does grace have to do with works?” These two principles seem to be incompatible.

In one sense they are incompatible. The New Testament repeatedly stresses that our salvation is not derived from our works. This point is clearly stated in today's passage. We are saved by God's grace and not by our works. We cannot attribute God's choice to any merit of our own (cf. Titus 3:5). Yet those who have been saved by grace have also been “created in Christ Jesus to do good works” (v. 10). How do we reconcile these two assertions?

We can do so only if we clearly understand all that the Apostle has previously said about us in this letter. Prior to the experience of God's grace we were guilty in sin and unable to help ourselves. Our union with Christ came as a result of something God did on our behalf. When we believed the gospel, we were united with Christ in both His death and resurrection. Consequently, we have a new capacity to please God with our actions. These “good works” are not the cause of our salvation but a result of it. They are not the means by which we are saved, but they are evidence of God's saving power in our lives. In other words, the kind of works Paul speaks of in Ephesians 2:10 are not enemies of God's grace but a reflection of it.

APPLY THE WORD

When it comes to grace and works the order is essential. When works take precedence over grace they become toxic. When we understand works in the light of grace, we see that our works are an extension of God's work in us. As we become more like Christ, our works will reflect more the grace and mercy found in God's work of salvation.

For it is by grace you have been saved. - Ephesians 2:8

TODAY IN THE WORD

The crowd cheered when George quickly moved into the lead at the beginning of the race. As he circled the track with a solid advantage over his nearest competitor, he seemed like the clear winner. However, something happened as he moved into the final stretch. Unexpectedly losing his footing, George stumbled and fell a few feet from the winner's ribbon. In the blink of an eye the rest of the runners rushed past and the race was over.

The apostle Paul envisions a similar scenario in today's passage. Only in this case the race is the Christian life and the competitors were the Galatians. Paul's letter to the Galatians was addressed to a group of churches located in Asia Minor. He wrote to them after learning that troublemakers had infiltrated the church and were urging the Galatians to turn from the gospel of grace and embrace the law of Moses. This mingling of works and grace was labeled by Paul as a "different gospel" and condemned (Gal. 1:6-7).

Paul asked the question of Galatians 3:3 to highlight the incompatibility of a works-based approach to the Christian life: "Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?" The past experience of the Galatians should have shown them the fallacy of the Judaizer's gospel. The transforming work of the Holy Spirit had not come into their lives through the observance of the law but through faith in the gospel.

If the ultimate goal of the Christian life cannot be attained by human effort, then what is the role of our own effort in the believer's spiritual experience? Many of the practices that lead to spiritual growth involve a measure of exertion. It takes effort to worship, pray, and read the Bible. But no amount of human effort can lead to justification. Salvation is God's work from first to last. It is begun in the Spirit and completed by the Spirit (see Gal. 5:22-23).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

We finish the race known as the Christian life the same way we began it: by grace and through faith. Any effort must be empowered by the Spirit. We cannot substitute our works, no matter how good, for the work of Christ. How would you answer Paul's question? Having begun the Christian life by the Spirit, are you now trying to perfect it by human effort? Have you begun to add other conditions to the gospel of grace in a way that has diluted it into a different gospel? If so, return to the first principle of the faith: the principle of grace.

Ephesians 2:10 James 2:1-26

For we are ... created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. - Ephesians 2:10

TODAY IN THE WORD

A church in Naperville, Illinois, had delayed its plans to hang bells in the open space above its sanctuary. As they approached their twenty-fifth anniversary, they decided that something needed to be done. The congregation's funds were limited, so instead of purchasing real bells, they elected to fill the spot with artificial bells made of resin without clappers. Although they looked like the genuine article, they were incapable of sounding a note.

James, the author of today's passage, would probably say that the person who claims to have faith but has no corresponding works has a lot in common with those bells. In James 2:14 he asks, "What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?" This may seem like an especially difficult question, in view of Paul's assertion in Galatians 3:3, that those who have begun in the Spirit cannot attain the goal of their faith through human effort. However, there is no real contradiction. Paul, like James, agrees that God's purpose for the believer includes good works. After asserting that we are saved by grace apart from works in Ephesians 2:8-9, the apostle Paul adds that we have been created in Christ to do good works (Eph. 2:10).

The difference between James and Paul has more to do with a difference in perspective than a difference in theology. Paul condemns works that are human attempts to measure up to God's standard, achieve our own salvation, or take credit for our own spiritual growth. James refers to works that are evidence of God's work in our life—the evidence that the Holy Spirit is indeed working through us.

True faith that comes as a gift from God will transform us and give us purpose. As this faith grows, it will express itself through the power of the Holy Spirit as a life filled with fruit that pleases God (see Gal. 5).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Like the bells of resin, dead faith may look like the genuine article to the casual observer. But when it is put to the test, it will not ring

true. As we conclude this study of questions of faith and answers of purpose, ask yourself how your faith in Christ impacts your purpose in life. The example that James uses in today's passage focuses on the needs of the poor. Consider making a donation to a Christian organization that meets the needs of the poor or volunteering in a soup kitchen or homeless shelter.

Ephesians 2:1-10

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works. - Ephesians 2:10

TODAY IN THE WORD

One of the premier furniture makers of the Arts and Crafts Movement was a woodworker named Gustav Stickley. Born in 1858, Stickley founded a design company with his brother. He put great care into each piece of furniture he created, believing that well-designed objects could help make people's lives better. As the style grew more popular, many imitators flourished and sold pieces that resembled the real thing. Buyers and appraisers need to tell if a piece of furniture is authentic or merely a copy. A true Stickley is identified by a brand or label, usually placed in an unobtrusive spot. Unsigned pieces, while still desirable, are not nearly as valuable as those bearing the maker's signature.

In today's passage, our value is declared by the phrase, "we are God's workmanship" (v. 10). We have seen that we were created, chosen, and bought with a price. Those already signify our value. In addition, we are considered a cherished creation by God. We are marked by God, designed in His image, and bear His attributes.

Paul explains that in our natural state, we "were dead" (v. 1), and this was the way we "used to live" (v. 2). Even now, we sometimes cling to "the ways of this world" (v. 2). In this sinful state, Paul explains, "we were by nature objects of wrath" (v. 3). While we are cherished by God, we should recognize that the Almighty cannot abide our sinfulness. He is perfection. Mere mortals would tremble in the presence of this great judge.

Author C. S. Lewis explained it this way: "God is the only comfort, He is also the supreme terror: the thing we most need and the thing we most want to hide from." The comfort, as we have learned, is that our value and identity, does not rest in our own ability. We have been remade, perfected by God. "We are God's workmanship" (v. 10). We are not a fake imitation—we are the real thing.

With that in mind, we should bear the marks of our Creator, doing the good works He has intended for us.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Are you clinging to this world and its ways? One way to check this is to ask yourself how you measure your worth. By your bank account? By your popularity? By the lack of wrinkles on your face? God does not measure us this way. Scripture says that man looks at the outside, but God looks at the heart (see 1 Sam. 16:7). What will God see when He examines your heart today?

Ephesians 2:10, 2Timothy 2:20-26

We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. - Ephesians 2:10

TODAY IN THE WORD

According to a French existentialist Albert Camus, life is completely absurd. We have no real purpose because there is no life beyond our days on earth, which themselves are filled with meaningless suffering. The only meaning to be found is heroically enduring the absurdity of it all and finding joy in the hollow emptiness of life.

No wonder people despair when they embrace such bleak world views! Today's verse describes one of the Christian's purposes, that of usefulness. God made us to do good works. He calls not just pastors but every Christian to take part in doing good for Christ and in Christ's name. In our text, Paul instructs Timothy how to be useful to God in his ministry, words that also benefit us.

First, to be useful to God, one must continually strive for purity in all areas of life, public and private. Usefulness to God depends upon our willingness to be consecrated—to be "made holy" or set apart from lesser desires and pursuits (v. 21). This includes obviously battling sin in our lives, but even as we've seen in the previous chapter, it also includes setting oneself apart from things that would distract and dilute our passion for God (cf. 2:4). In avoiding everything that compromises personal holiness, we can be "prepared to do any good work." By living obedient lives, we are then in a constant state of readiness to be used by God (cf. John 15:10).

Specifically, Paul commands Timothy to avoid compromising his character even in ways that seem insignificant. He (and we) should not be quarrelsome. Quarrels, especially wrangling over words, have more to do with parading one's own understanding than

actually resolving a difference of opinion. When disagreement and opposition erupt, the Lord's servant must be gentle and meek, always praying that God would grant a repentant change of heart (v. 25). This demonstrates true humility, without which no one is useful to God.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Are you “prepared to do any good work” for the Lord? What keeps you from serving Him? If it's fear, remember how Paul encouraged Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:7. If it's feeling too busy or too overwhelmed, remember Paul's exhortation to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:4. If areas of personal sin keep you from serving God, ask God to grant you true repentance to turn from that sin and be cleansed by Him.

Ephesians 2:10 Philippians 2:12-13

We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. - Ephesians 2:10

TODAY IN THE WORD

Daniel did his job so well as a civil official in the Persian Empire that the other administrators were jealous. They watched him carefully, looking for a “skeleton in his closet” so they could run to King Darius and tattle. But Daniel, dedicated to his God, lived blamelessly. His rivals could find nothing wrong. That didn't stop them, however, from concocting a plot leading to the famous story of Daniel in the lions' den, which you can read in Daniel 6.

Daniel lived a godly life, being light in a dark, pagan environment. In today's reading, Paul wanted the Philippians to be “Daniels” and “Christ” to the world around them.

Paul's exhortation here was a follow-up to his earlier command to imitate Christ

(v. 5). The intervening verses are an inspiring “detour,” but they also form the foundation for Paul's teachings that follow.

How can believers have the same attitude as Christ? Through obedience and blameless living (v. 12; cf. Phil. 1:10).

Living this way honors the salvation Christ has won. That's what it means to “work out your salvation with fear and trembling” --not to be afraid or fearful, but to cooperate in reverence and awe with God's sanctifying work in your life. Salvation is not by works. It is wholly by God's grace, and we have a part to play after we are saved (Eph. 2:8-10).

That's why Paul immediately balanced “work out your salvation” with “for it is God who works in you” (Phil. 2:13). We are never on our own. We don't have to complete what God started. The strength in which we live out our faith comes from God. He is always working in us for our benefit and for His glory.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

One clear theme in Philippians is the importance of witnessing the gospel. Paul was in prison for the sake of the gospel, and he rejoiced that it was being preached even if some people had bad motives.

REMEMBER WHERE YOU COME FROM

Read Ephesians 2:11–13

We were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or freed.1 Corinthians 12:13

One mother says the same thing every time her children leave the house to go to a friend's house to play. “Remember who you belong to,” she urges. Her boys often roll their eyes when she says this. But they understand what she means. She wants them to remember where they came from and what is expected of them.

Paul urges his readers to remember where they came from in our passage. But in this case he is not pointing to the valuable lessons they learned from their family background; rather, he is reminding them of their prospects prior to experiencing the grace of Christ. Before they came to know Christ they were spiritual outsiders, uncircumcised Gentiles (i.e., non-Jews) who had no right to the promises of God.

Paul's words are a reminder that before God sent the gospel to the world at large, He revealed Himself in a special way to the nation of Israel. He did this by entering into a covenant with Israel and promising to be their God. Some Gentiles found their way into God's family, but those who were not Jews generally had the status of outsiders. This was true even during Jesus' earthly ministry. In one

famous encounter with a Canaanite woman who asked Him to deliver her demon possessed daughter, Jesus replied: "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel" (Matt. 15:24).

Yet the Bible contains numerous indications that God's ultimate plan was to include the Gentiles in His promises. Jesus came to fulfill the promises made to Israel and to reconcile both Jews and Gentiles to God. Paul's aim in today's passage is to remind his readers that they were once strangers to the grace they now enjoy. As spiritual outsiders, they were estranged from God, without any hope of eternal life.

APPLY THE WORD

Do you take grace for granted? You do if you think that grace was something that was owed to you by God. You do if you think you deserve it more than your friend, neighbor, or family member who exasperates you. You do if you think that grace gives you an excuse to live as you please. God's grace was extended to us—outsiders!—at His good pleasure.

Ephesians 2:11-22; Romans 15:5-13

There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. - Galatians 3:28

TODAY IN THE WORD

In October of last year, the Iraqi people voted to approve their new constitution—but not without vehement debate. The Sunnis, who had once held power under the Hussein regime, opposed the Constitution. They feared (as did much of the world) that the Constitution proposed a central government that was too weak. Could it keep this fractured nation together? Can Sunnis, Shiites, and Kurds embrace a national identity as Iraqis?

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul insists upon one collective identity of the church of Jesus Christ. It trumps all dividing walls, including ethnicity and gender and social standing. The unity of the church resembles the unity of the Trinity. One Father, one Spirit, one Christ, and one people, one household, one foundation, one holy temple (vv. 13, 18-21).

The church is unified not by a vision or cause or not even by doctrine. We are unified because of a Person. Christ Himself is our peace as well as the peacemaker (vv. 14-15). Just as He reconciles us to God through His blood (v. 16), He also reconciles us one to another.

This message of unity must have confounded the first Christians. It's hard to imagine greater religious division than that between Jews and Gentiles in Paul's day. For example, in the Jewish temple in Jerusalem at that time, a huge wall separated the court of the Gentiles from the temple proper. On it an inscription read: "No foreigner may enter within the barricade which surrounds the sanctuary and enclosure. Anyone who is caught doing so will have himself to blame for his ensuing death." But even this dividing wall has been destroyed in Christ (v. 14).

If God could reconcile Jews and Gentiles in the first century, He can reconcile blacks and whites, poor and rich, liberals and conservatives of our day. And He wants to. Christ has one bride and one body. He is Lord of one church.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

By understanding our collective identity as the church of Jesus Christ, we can shed the provincial attitudes that keep us callous to the needs of brothers and sisters in other parts of the world. Persecuted Christians in Sudan will start to matter to us. We'll respond more readily to the need for Bibles in Africa. The church of Jesus Christ will be strengthened by its oneness, heeding the warning that a "household divided against itself will not stand" (Matt. 12:25).

Ephesians 2:11-22

Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. - 2 Thessalonians 3:16

TODAY IN THE WORD

In 1962, Don and Carol Richardson risked their lives to go as missionaries to the Sawi people of New Guinea. This tribe still lived as if they were in the Stone Age; they were headhunting cannibals known for using their victims' skulls as pillows. Don and Carol struggled to find a way to communicate the truth of Jesus to this tribe known for their treachery, vengeance, and brutality.

They learned of a New Guinea tradition called the Peace Child. When warring tribes of headhunters made peace, they exchanged a child who would grow up in the other tribe. If conflict threatened the tribes again, these children would be sent to negotiate. The Richardsons used this tradition to point the Sawi to the true "Peace Child," Jesus Christ.

Peace is not some warm fuzzy feeling of goodwill towards others. It is also not simply an absence of war. According to our passage today, true spiritual peace is found through the work of Jesus Christ to unite people who were once enemies (v. 14). Jesus has made a way for people who could not coexist to be united together. Where there used to be disunity and antagonism, there are now people living together in harmony.

We see echoes of Paul's letter to the Galatians in this passage as well. Paul repeats that the Law used to create a wall of hostility between Jews and Gentiles (vv. 11–12, 14). But the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus have destroyed that barrier. Neither group can impose a claim of special privileges, for both needed the work of the cross to bring peace (v. 17).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Is there someone in your church that you have difficulty getting along with? Perhaps she has a personality that grates on your nerves, or maybe you have a conflict with him over how things should be managed.

Ephesians 2:11-22

For [Christ] himself is our peace ... and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility. - Ephesians 2:14

TODAY IN THE WORD

Since the Asian Holocaust, enmity toward the Japanese remains integral to Korean identity. An estimated 30 million Koreans and other Asians were victims of Japanese aggression between 1910 and 1945. In 2009, a Korean missionary to Japan, Michael Oh, testified to the gospel's power to end hostility: "Because God reconciled us to Himself while we were still His enemies, my enemy has become my family. I am loved by God, so I can love my enemies." Michael humbly asked the Japanese people to forgive his past self-righteousness and anger. Nothing but the cross can transform the human hatred and distinctions we maintain between "us" and "them." This is the message of today's passage.

Reconciliation and inclusion were the most pressing concerns of the Gentile Christians. Did Jesus' death and resurrection change the "us v. them"? Could Gentiles and Jews fellowship together as God's new community? Paul vividly recalled the ethnic tensions between these two groups, mentioning the derogatory expression, "uncircumcised," and reminding the Gentiles of their historical status, excluded from the promises and presence of God (vv. 11-12). Verse 13 interjects powerfully: that was then, "but now," through Christ, your status has changed. You have been brought near to God and to one another (vv. 13-14).

Paul clarified what Christ accomplished through His death (vv. 15-18). Jesus brought peace by dissolving the laws that prevented fellowship between Jews and Gentiles. There is no more "clean" and "unclean" because all are made clean through Christ's shed blood. Both Jew and Gentile receive salvation and reconciliation as a gift from God.

Paul announced the Gentiles' new identity with two metaphors (vv. 19-22). Gentiles are no longer "outsiders." They are "fellow citizens," reconciled to Jews with equal access to God. They are also God's children, reconciled to Him and "members of [His] household."

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

We have erected dividing walls of hostility between "us" and "them," whether based on ethnicity, religious, political, or economic views, class, citizenship status, gender, culture, job position, or something else. We marginalize others, and we are marginalized based on these barriers. Jesus establishes a new community of people reconciled to God and to one another; He tears down these walls. With what groups is God calling you to be reconciled? How can you embrace this truth and testify to the power of the cross?

Ephesians 2:11-13

In Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. - Ephesians 2:13

TODAY IN THE WORD

Otto von Bismarck is widely credited as the founder of modern Germany. Within ten years after his appointment as Prime Minister of Prussia in 1862, he had managed to unite the kingdoms of Bavaria, Wurttemberg, Baden, and Hesse in an alliance of eighteen German states. Additionally, as part of uniting Germany, Bismarck also developed a common currency, central bank, and commercial and civil legal codes.

It may seem strange to us that Paul suddenly begins talking about Jews and Gentiles in our reading for today. But in fact the inclusion of Gentiles in God's plan for redeeming creation is part of the "mystery" that Paul has already mentioned in Ephesians 1:9-10. We already saw that God's salvation involves the submission and union of all things under Christ. For the next few days we will

see some of the important implications of this truth. To anticipate, Paul wants us to understand that God's grace in Christ Jesus is so great that the whole creation, even Gentiles, can now share in the great promises of redemption given to Israel.

As we read this letter written almost two thousand years ago, we will need to use clues in the letter to understand who the first readers were. In verses 11 and 12 we learn that the church Paul is addressing consists primarily of Gentiles. All people who are without Jesus are captive to sin (see 2:3; see also Rom. 3:9), but Paul notes that Gentiles are in an especially hopeless position. Since Gentiles are not members of God's chosen people and have no share in God's covenant with Israel or in the promises given to Israel, they are really "without hope and without God in the world" (v. 12).

Jesus' death, however, has forever gloriously changed the situation. Prior to Jesus, Gentiles were far from God. Now that Christ has died and risen, Gentiles have been brought near. That is, through the death of Christ, Gentiles can now share in the promised redemption.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

The hope of salvation for Gentiles in no way means that God has forgotten or abandoned Jewish people. Several organizations have focused their efforts on sharing the good news of Jesus as Messiah with Jews around the world. Every believer can benefit from knowing the Old Testament prophecies concerning Jesus and understanding methods and issues related to witnessing to Jewish people.

Ephesians 2:14-18; Galatians 3:21-25

His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace. - Ephesians 2:15

TODAY IN THE WORD

In 1962, East Germany erected the Berlin Wall to separate communist East Berlin from West Berlin, controlled by Federal Republic of Germany. East German propaganda brochures from that year argued that the Wall was necessary to limit the access of "neo-Hitlerites, youth poisoners, and currency racketeers" from the West. In reality, the Wall limited access to freedom for hundreds of thousands of East Germans. In some ways, the Berlin Wall functioned similarly to the Old Testament Law.

Our passage today will begin to explain how it is that God's redemptive call has been extended to the Gentiles. To better understand the point here, let's see what Paul says about the Law elsewhere.

In Galatians Paul writes that all people stand condemned under sin and need to be reconciled to God (3:22). Only the chosen people, though, had an ongoing relationship with God. The Old Covenant Law stipulated sacrifices such as those offered on the Day of Atonement as a means for Jews to maintain their relationship with God. While the Law provided temporary purification from sin, it acted more as guard than a liberator (3:23-24). That is, the human effort to fulfill the Law never brought the promises of God to fruition (3:22). This is one significant problem Paul has with the Law.

Another problem is the fact that the Law distinguished between Jews and Gentiles. Only Jews had access to God. Uncircumcised Gentiles had no part in the sacrifices of the Law and thus had no access to the Father. The Law was a "barrier" (2:14) to redemption—it didn't bring the promises and it limited access.

Jesus' death on the cross solves both problems. His death fulfilled the regulations of the Law and thus brought peace not only between humanity and God, but also between Jews and Gentiles (2:16-17). Both now share in the gift of the Spirit and have access to the Father (2:18).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

During your prayer time today, reflect on what it means to have access to God. We are no longer kept at a distance. We are welcomed into His presence. He invites us to bring every part of our lives before Him. We are safe with Him.

You may think of other implications of our access to God. Thank Him for each of these, and ask the Holy Spirit to give you an even greater desire for fellowship and closeness with our gracious and loving Father.

JESUS THE PEACEMAKER

Read Ephesians 2:14–18

Since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Romans 5:1

In Paul's day the outermost court of the temple in Jerusalem was known as the court of the Gentiles. Although this court surrounded

the temple, it was separated from the inner courts by a wall. A sign was posted on the wall which warned: "No foreigner may enter within the barrier and enclosure round the temple. Anyone who is caught doing so will have himself to blame for his ensuing death." Paul had this wall with its warning sign in mind when he penned today's passage.

The work of Christ fundamentally changed the spiritual dynamics between Jews and Gentiles. It did not nullify God's earlier promises made to the Jews. Many promises made to Israel have yet to be fulfilled. God continues to have a special interest in and purpose for the nation of Israel. But when it comes to salvation, He does not have a separate path for Jews and Gentiles. Both are saved by the gospel of grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone.

Consequently, the gospel has a leveling effect. Everyone can have direct access to God. In Christ the old distinctions between Jew and Gentile no longer have meaning: "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). No group, class, or gender that has an advantage over another. All are welcome to respond to Christ's invitation to come to Him.

The effective agent in making this change was not a social or political platform but a physical body. Jesus removed the wall of separation by offering Himself on the cross as a sacrifice for sin. This one act not only opened the way for reconciliation between Jew and Gentile but created a way for both to be reconciled to God.

APPLY THE WORD

Paul's ministry was specifically focused on non-Jews. But he himself was of Jewish heritage and his evangelistic strategy when planting a church in a new community often began with its Jewish population. Do you know someone with a Jewish heritage who does not know Christ as Savior? Pray today that they will be reconciled to God by faith in Jesus

Ephesians 2:13 Hebrews 9:11-14

You who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. - Ephesians 2:13

TODAY IN THE WORD

After an explosion sank an off-shore oil rig, The Deepwater Horizon, into the Gulf of Mexico, crews attempted to clean up the nearly 5 million barrels of crude oil using a number of methods. One of the more controversial approaches was the use of an unprecedented amount of a dispersant called Corexit. The blend of chemicals allows the oil to more easily blend with water, preventing it from coating elements of the ecosystem. It doesn't technically remove the oil, but it does clean the surface.

The presentation of the blood of Old Testament sacrifices provided cleansing and purity for the people of God. It provided atonement, and it allowed the high priest to enter the Most Holy Place once every year. But it did not assuage guilt of their sins from their consciences, and it had to be repeated continually.

Jesus did what the high priests before Him could not do: He entered a better tabernacle that was not of this earth (v. 11). A quick translation note: some Bible versions (NIV) translate the phrase in verse 11 as "the good things that are now already here," while others (NASB) render it "the good things that are to come." The reason for the difference stems from a textual variant in the ancient manuscripts, and while most scholars tend to side with the latter translation, the certainty of Christ's complete work is maintained by both wordings. The important point in these verses is that Jesus alone could enter the heavenly Most Holy Place.

He didn't enter only a superior tabernacle as a superior high priest, but also He offered a superior sacrifice. The presentation of His own blood brought eternal redemption that could cleanse us inwardly, spiritually. His sacrifice needed to be made but once. And there's an added level of redemption here. Not only are we protected from the penalty of eternal death caused by sin, but we are also freed from the control of sin and able to serve the living God this very day (v. 14)! Our consciences are clean, and our ability to serve is untarnished!

APPLY THE WORD

How often do we forget that there is another world beyond what we see with our eyes? Let today's study remind you that our eternal destination is in a better place because Christ offered a better sacrifice to pave a better way. And He did more: He cleansed the invisible stain of sin in our souls when we placed our trust in Him. Find strength for what you face today knowing that all that you need has already been given to you by Christ.

Ephesians 2:19-22; Galatians 3:26-4:7

You are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household. - Ephesians 2:19

TODAY IN THE WORD

The historic person Hiawatha lived in the fourteenth century and was instrumental in founding the Iroquois League. Tribes with a history of warfare agreed to form a confederation to resolve their differences; the resulting Constitution impacted the creation of the U.S. government and continues to be in existence today. For his work in bringing the tribes together, Hiawatha was given the title of Peacemaker.

Having shown that Jesus has broken down the barriers established by the Law, Paul now addresses the significant implications that follow from the peace Christ brings, focusing on two.

The first consequence is that the Gentiles, excluded from access to God, have been brought near and made fellow citizens and members of God's household (2:19). In Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile (Gal. 3:28). All who have the Spirit are counted as children and heirs. From this perspective we can see why Paul placed so much emphasis on the language of "choosing," "adoption," and "sonship" earlier in the letter (see 1:4, 11). Paul was applying the language of Israel's election (see for example Deut. 7:6, 14:2; Isa. 65:22; Ezek. 20:5; Hos. 11:1) to Gentile believers. All those in Christ are included among God's chosen people, built up together on the foundation of Israel's apostles and prophets.

The second consequence is equally amazing. Since the regulations of the Law have been abolished by Christ's death (2:15) and since the Spirit has now come to dwell in all those who believe in Christ (1:13-14, 2:18, 22), the Jewish temple has become obsolete. Paul speaks of those who belong to Jesus, both Jews and Gentiles, as the holy temple of the Lord. God's plan to redeem His creation involves uniting Jews and Gentiles. Gentiles are "grafted into" the root of Israel (see Rom. 11:17-18), or built up together into God's holy dwelling (2:21-22). This is only possible because Jesus has become the uniting point, the corner stone (2:20), on which everything depends.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

The image of Jesus as our cornerstone has inspired songwriters for centuries. Today, choose one or more of these songs to praise Him: the hymn "The Solid Rock," the praise chorus "Cornerstone—Jesus Is the Rock," or the worship song "Cornerstone." You may also want to reflect on the words to this hymn from the seventh century: "Christ is made the sure foundation, Christ the head and cornerstone / Chosen of the Lord and precious, binding all the Church in one / Holy Zion's help forever and her confidence alone."

THE CHURCH'S ONE FOUNDATION

Read Ephesians 2:19–22

Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved. Acts 4:12

A much-loved hymn begins, "The church's one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord." In today's passage Paul describes the architectural design of the church of Christ more precisely. The apostles and prophets are the church's foundation and Jesus is its cornerstone.

Paul underscores the change that has taken place in the Ephesians' spiritual status. They used to be "foreigners and strangers" when it came to God's people (v. 19). The Law of Moses required Israel to care for the resident aliens in its midst (see Deut. 10:19), but certain distinctions continued to exist, even for those who chose to worship the God of Israel.

The degree of tension between Jews and Gentiles in Paul's day was significant. The day of Pentecost signaled a major change: instead of expecting Gentiles to come and worship at a distance, God's people were to invite both Jew and Gentile into fellowship with God. This spiritual household made up of Jews and Gentiles was also a new kind of commonwealth and a living temple.

The temple in Jerusalem was the place where God manifested His presence in a unique way in the innermost room known as the Most Holy Place. But no Gentiles and only a few Jews could approach this sacred area. Now both Jew and Gentile were "being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit" (v. 22).

Jesus Christ was the cornerstone of this new structure. Elsewhere Paul describes Him as the foundation (1 Cor. 3:11). Here He is the binding stone that holds the rest of the structure together. The foundation of the apostles and prophets indicates that the church is built upon the Word of God.

APPLY THE WORD

Christians often have strong differences about their preferred worship style. The next time you think you "just can't worship to that music," remember that Christ has made you an "insider" by His sacrifice. You are a citizen in His kingdom and a member of His family, and collectively the church is the dwelling place of God by His Spirit.

Ephesians 2:21 1 Corinthians 3:10-17

In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. - Ephesians 2:21

TODAY IN THE WORD

During His earthly ministry Jesus predicted that Herod's temple would eventually be destroyed. Jesus responded with a dire warning when His disciples marveled at the beauty of the temple. " 'Do you see all these things?' he asked. 'Truly I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down'" (Matt. 24:2). The apostle Paul's description of the church as "God's temple," penned just a few years before Jesus' prediction was fulfilled, indicated that a change had already occurred.

The Greek word that is translated "temple" in verses 16 and 17 referred to the sanctuary. In tomorrow's study we will see that Paul used this term to refer to the individual believer. Here he has the whole congregation in view. God's people are collectively the temple of God. This is because God's Spirit "dwells" in their midst.

When God's people come together as the church, the result is both sacred and unique. The gathered church is unlike any other human gathering. The church does not have to do anything to achieve this status. It does not require a particular ritual, prayer, or incantation. Paul states it as a fact. We are God's temple.

Paul describes the church as a building that is still under construction. The foundation, Jesus Christ, has already been laid by preaching the gospel (v. 11) but the quality of the workmanship by those who build upon this foundation may vary. Two categories of people are in view. One consists of those who labor in "building" the temple, presumably those who exercise spiritual gifts to "build up" the church (cf. 1 Cor. 14:12). These are all believers who will be "rewarded according to their own labor" (v. 8).

The other category of people consists of those who attempt to destroy the church. The Greek word that is translated "destroy" also means to corrupt and appears elsewhere in contexts that refer to false teaching (2 Cor. 11:3; 2 Peter 2:12; Jude 1:10). These unbelievers will eventually be punished for what they have done to the church (v. 17).

APPLY THE WORD

The church is at risk on two fronts. One is the danger posed by false teachers who attempt to corrupt the church's teaching. They distort the gospel and substitute their own ideas for Scripture. The other threat is posed by the church's own members who build on the right foundation but employ shoddy workmanship. As part of Christ's church we are workers and we are those who are "worked upon" by those who teach. Pray for their work as well as our own.

EPHESIANS 3

Ephesians 3:1-6

This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel ... members together of one body. - Ephesians 3:6

TODAY IN THE WORD

The mystery genre of fiction is relatively recent, with the first true mystery novel, *The Woman in White*, written by Wilkie Collins in 1860. The popularity of this genre has grown so exponentially that it's now divided into several subcategories, including crime fiction, detective fiction, cozies, whodunits, thrillers, and even dog mysteries. In any given week, almost 30 percent of the books on the bestseller lists fall into some type of mystery category. Clearly it seems that people are drawn to tales of suspense or sleuthing.

Given human interest in "mystery," we shouldn't be surprised that Paul has used this word throughout the book of Ephesians to pique our interest. He now pauses to make two points. First, he takes time to emphasize that God has not only been gracious to the Gentiles, He has also been gracious to Paul by allowing him to be the one who proclaims this grace to the Gentiles (vv. 2-3). As the one called to preach to the Gentiles, Paul is grateful for the opportunity to serve and in particular to be the one to whom the mystery of God's plan has been revealed (vv. 3-5), even though his service has resulted in his imprisonment (v. 1).

Second, Paul clarifies what exactly the content of this "mystery" is. The message of the gospel has brought about a unification of two peoples that were once at odds with one another. In Christ, God has united Jews and Gentiles. Gentiles have become heirs together with Israel and as fellow heirs they also share with Israel in the promise of redemption (v. 6; see also Gal. 3:28-29; 4:4-7). Paul further describes Jews and Gentiles as being "members together of one body."

Earlier in Ephesians 2:15 Paul wrote that Christ created in Himself one new man out of the two. This new man is the body of Christ

on earth, the church (see 1:22-23). This new man, this joining of Jew and Gentile into a new temple (2:21-22), is the mystery that has been revealed.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

The idea that Gentiles could be part of the community of believers in Christ took some people a while to accept (see Acts 15). Today, we may forget the power of the mystery of the gospel to heal divisions in the church. God never intended His church to look like a homogenous social club, with everyone from the same race, age, and social class. If you find it difficult to accept believers from a different group, repent and ask the Lord to give you opportunities to fellowship with others outside your own demographic circle.

A STEWARDSHIP OF GRACE

Read Ephesians 3:1–6

I am the least . . . and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 1 Corinthians 15:9

For those who love detective novels, a mystery means that there's a puzzle that needs to be solved. Those who figure out the clues can solve the mystery. But in today's passage, Paul uses the term mystery in a different sense. This mystery was a matter of revelation. The mystery that Paul wrote about was something "which was not made known to people of other generations" but was now revealed through God's Apostle.

Specifically, the mystery was the good news that the grace of Jesus Christ was offered to Gentiles as well as to Jews. Paul was called to be an "apostle to the Gentiles" (Rom. 11:13; Gal. 2:8). He regarded this ministry as an "administration of God's grace" (v. 2). Through his preaching, Paul exercised a stewardship of the grace he had received. By offering the hope of forgiveness through faith in Christ, Paul operated as an agent of God's grace.

The biblical idea of stewardship also includes the notion of responsibility. Because he was a steward of God's grace, Paul was obligated to share this mystery with others. "For when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, since I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!" Paul exclaims in 1 Corinthians 9:16–17. "If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me."

Paul also experienced grace when he proclaimed the gospel to the Gentiles. Elsewhere he explains his zeal for this mission as a reflection of the grace of God: "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me" (1 Cor. 15:10).

APPLY THE WORD

God makes us agents of His grace when we share the good news with others. We have also been recipients of the grace which we tell others about. To be the objects of God's forgiving grace is a gift. To be entrusted with that same grace is a responsibility. May we be grateful for the gift and worthy of the responsibility.

Ephesians 3:2-6 Colossians 1:26-27;

This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body. - Ephesians 3:6

TODAY IN THE WORD

On November 26, 1922, Theodore Davis held a candle up to a small opening in an ancient doorway and saw "strange animals, statues and gold, everywhere the glint of gold"—a sight that had remained hidden for 3,200 years. It was one of the greatest discoveries of the modern era, the tomb of Egypt's King Tutankhamun. More than 80 years later, these fabulous treasures continue to captivate viewers wherever they're displayed.

History is filled with remarkable finds, suddenly brought to light after centuries of concealment. But even King Tut's treasures, or the priceless manuscripts found near the Dead Sea in 1947, are nothing compared to the glorious riches of God's purposes for His people that were "hidden for ages and generations, but [are] now disclosed to the saints" (v. 26).

Scripture calls this treasure a "mystery," because God's redemptive purposes can only be known through Jesus Christ. Although inklings of this plan were given to the prophets, the fullness of God's will was revealed in our Lord Jesus. Moreover, no human could have conceived the depth and splendor of God's plan of salvation. Like a treasure waiting to be discovered, God's "mystery" was waiting to be revealed at the proper time.

What exactly is this mystery? Namely, the good news that the Gentiles are now included among the people of God and participate in

His promises. Today's passage from Ephesians is perhaps the clearest statement of this truth in the New Testament, though it's anticipated in several Old Testament passages like Isaiah 42:1-6.

Even though the inclusion of the Gentiles is described as "glorious riches," Scripture tells us there's more to come! This is suggested by the expression "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (v. 27). As we've seen, "hope" in Colossians points to the certainty of our eternal inheritance. In other words, Christ dwelling within us now is the assurance our future glory with Him.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

For many of us, it's hard to grasp the significance of what God has done by revealing the gospel to Gentiles. Yet most of us, if we could trace our ancestries back far enough, probably descended from pagan Gentiles.

This gives us cause to praise God for sending His Son so that the gospel might be offered to all peoples. This also gives us reason to appreciate the rich legacy of the Old Testament that we've been brought into.

Ephesians 3:7-12

We have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus. - Hebrews 10:19

TODAY IN THE WORD

Foreign leaders who come to Washington, D.C. for state visits are often stunned to learn that ordinary American citizens are allowed inside the White House. When George Bush was president, he would often introduce his foreign guests to the people who came for daily tours of the presidential mansion's first floor. One writer says, ""The White House's accessibility continues to stagger visiting heads of state.""

For many of the world's kings and rulers, these times are too dangerous to allow access to their palaces, much less to their presence. But there is no such difficulty in heaven. We who have put our faith in Christ have free, unlimited access into God's presence.

Today's verse and Scripture reading teach the truth of our freedom to come before God confidently in prayer. Ephesians 3 is a wonderful example of a believer using his access to bring his prayer concerns to God, because Paul goes on to say, ""For this reason I kneel before the Father"" (v. 14).

While we bask in the knowledge that God's throne room is open to us, let's remember how we gained such free and open access to the great Ruler of the universe. The first three Gospels mention that when Jesus died, the massive curtain enclosing the inner part of the temple--the small area known as the Most Holy Place--was torn in half (Matt. 27:51).

This was the holiest site in Israel, the place where the high priest came once a year to offer sacrifice for the people's sins. God's holy presence lived among His people in the Most Holy Place...but the high priest did not enter this small cubicle ""with freedom and confidence.""

Instead, he entered under penalty of death if his sacrifice did not please God. All that the people of Israel could do was to stand outside and wait anxiously.

Now, contrast the Old Testament sacrificial system with the free access that is ours in Christ, and you'll see there is no comparison! Jesus' perfect, once-for-all sacrifice on the Cross put an end to animal sacrifices and opened for us the way to God's presence (Heb. 10:19-22). Don't take your access for granted!

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Jesus said that the answer to prayer would come ""quickly"" (v. Cool. There is a lesson and an

Paul's prayer for his spiritual children in Ephesus is a powerful petition that any believer can pray any time for himself or herself with confidence (Eph. 3:14-21).

A SERVANT OF THE GOSPEL

Read Ephesians 3:7-9

To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me. Colossians 1:29

Many programs try to help believers share their faith. Often they involve memorizing an outline or learning a set of principles. Tools like these can be helpful, but they are no substitute for the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The gospel is a message of grace, but the act

of sharing this message also requires the gracious empowerment of God. More is involved in sharing the gospel than a method.

The Apostle saw himself as a “servant” of the gospel. Such language underscored the priority of the gospel in Paul’s ministry. His mission first and foremost was to declare the good news of forgiveness through Jesus Christ. This took precedence even over baptism in Paul’s ministry (see 1 Cor. 1:17).

Although Paul felt obligated by his calling, he did not view it as a work of drudgery. Instead he regarded this responsibility of sharing Christ—especially the revelation of the mystery that the Gentiles were included in the gospel—to be a gift given to him by God. Such a strategic ministry might have inflated Paul’s ego. But the recollection of his background as a persecutor of Christians kept his pride in check (see Acts 9:4–5; 1 Cor. 15:9; Gal. 1:13, 23; Phil. 3:6).

Paul could have been paralyzed by his sinful past, rendered ineffective by a sense of unworthiness. Instead, he viewed his past through the lens of God’s grace. Paul had experienced the forgiveness he preached. He understood that any success he experienced was the working of God’s power. Jesus had promised to do this for His disciples on the day of Pentecost: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

APPLY THE WORD

Is there something in your past that makes you feel like you are “less than the least” of all believers? If you trust in Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, accept the gift of service along with the gift of forgiveness. We cannot earn the grace given to serve Christ any more than we can earn the grace of forgiveness. It is part of the same blessing from God.

Ephesians 3:7-13; Colossians 2:9-15

Through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. - Ephesians 3:12

TODAY IN THE WORD

According to a Federal Trade Commission report last February, complaints of identity theft have increased about 50 percent since 2002. Identity theft, “when someone appropriates your personally identifying information (like your Social Security number or credit card account number) to commit fraud or theft,” raises the question of how secure our personal information really is.

So far Ephesians has explained God’s wonderful mystery that Gentiles, once separated from God and without hope on account of the Law’s regulations, have been brought near to God, because Jesus’ death has done away with the division between Jew and Gentile. The Law no longer determines human identity. Because of Jesus’ shed blood, human identity is first and foremost determined by one’s relationship to Jesus. Instead of Jew versus Greek, the unifying power of Jesus’ heavenly and earthly authority makes the key distinction being “included in Christ” or not. All one needs to do to be counted “in Christ” is believe the gospel.

This wonderful truth means that, whereas the Law limited access to God, those who are “in Christ” may approach God with freedom and confidence (v. 12). Why has God allowed this access? We find several reasons offered in Ephesians. First, God loves Jesus and this love graciously overflows to all those who are included in Jesus (see 1:6).

Second, God has done this to bring glory to Himself (see 1:12, 14). Third, God did this in order that through the church His own great wisdom would be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms (vv. 10-11). Paul tells us clearly in Colossians that these “powers and authorities” had used the regulations of the Law to keep people from having access to God (Col. 2:13-15). Jesus’ death and resurrection, which cancelled the Law’s divisive regulations “disarmed” these powers (Col. 2:15). Christ now holds ultimate authority over them (Col. 2:10). God worked within the Law to open access to Himself and in so doing showed those powers the extent of His own wisdom.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

The government may use your Social Security number and your bank may use your checking account to identify you. But where does your identity truly come from? Perhaps you’ve defined yourself by job status or appearance or even personal relationships. First and foremost, however, our identity should be rooted in our status as children of God through the saving work of Christ. This is an identity that no one on heaven or earth can ever steal from us (see Rom. 8:38-39).

WHY GOD MADE THE CHURCH

Read Ephesians 3:10–13

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments! Romans 11:33

Greg sat with his mother by the lake and explained why he didn't feel it was necessary to attend church. He pointed to the sun that had just started to dip below the horizon. "You won't see anything as beautiful as that in any church," he said. The two watched it set the sky aflame in hues of orange and yellow. "This is my church!" Greg concluded.

Many people agree with Greg's point of view. They wonder why church is such a big deal. Why not worship God alone in the woods or by the lake? Yet in today's passage it is clear that church is important to God. He intends to put the church on display to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms. Paul uses similar language in Ephesians 1:21 and Colossians 1:16 in contexts that seem to refer to angelic powers. The church is doing more than meeting and worshiping. It functions as a cosmic trophy to the manifold wisdom and grace of God.

How does this take place? This cosmic purpose of God is accomplished through Jesus Christ. The church's existence testifies to the power and wisdom of Christ. It is not the church's programs or its dynamic leaders that provoke the cosmic powers to marvel. It is rather the bold confidence with which any believer can approach God. Even the humblest believer enjoys the kind of direct access to God that might give the angels cause to envy. The angels are deeply interested in the Christ's redeeming work (1 Peter 1:12).

God's big plan for the church was a source of encouragement for Paul as he suffered for the sake of the gospel. Paul's ministry to the Gentiles was often marked by suffering. This included imprisonment, hunger, and beatings (2 Cor. 11:23-30).

APPLY THE WORD

Although the church is God's "big idea," it often comes with big challenges. Paul was able to endure these by keeping the bigger picture in view. If you are beginning to wonder why church is such a big deal, remember that there is more to the church than worship music and sermons. You are on display to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms.

Ephesians 3:12 Hebrews 4:12-16

In [Christ] and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. - Ephesians 3:12

TODAY IN THE WORD

The British pastor Charles Spurgeon once made this observation about our need for the application of the Scriptures: ""When a soldier is wounded in battle, it is of little use for him to know that there are those at the hospital who can bind his wounds and medicines there to ease all the pains which he now suffers. What he needs is to be taken there and the remedies applied. It is thus with our souls. To meet this need there is one, the Spirit of truth, who takes of the things of Jesus and applies them to us.""

Although the writer of Hebrews may not specifically have had the comforting power of God's Word in mind here, Spurgeon's point is helpful. Only the Word of God, applied with surgical precision by the Spirit of God, can meet the needs of the human heart.

Why did the author mention the Scriptures at this point (v. 12)? Because sin is so deceitful (Heb. 3:13) and the danger of drifting away so real that our only safe guide is the Word of God.

The Word is so potent that it can expose the deepest motives of our hearts. We need this penetrating work desperately, as did the Hebrews, because ""the heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?"" (Jer. 17:9). God's Word can reveal our tendency toward waywardness and help keep us on the path of faithfulness to Christ.

We have another source of help and strength in our struggle. In addition to the living written Word, we have the living incarnate Word in the Person of Jesus Christ.

In verse 14, Jesus is presented in His ministering role as our great High Priest. Jesus took the blood of His sacrifice into the heavenly sanctuary, just as Israel's high priest took the blood of animal sacrifices into the inner sanctuary of the temple to make atonement for sin.

We are encouraged to approach Jesus in our weakness because He was tempted in every way that we are tempted (v. 15). The difference, of course, is that Jesus never succumbed to temptation. He never sinned.

Instead of Jesus' sinlessness being a barrier between Him and us, we are encouraged to come to Him for mercy and grace in our time of need (v. 16).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

With today's passage we begin the second section of our study, the superiority of Christ's priesthood (see the April 1 study for our brief outline of the book of Hebrews).

We're in for several weeks of encouragement and blessing as we consider Christ's priestly work on our behalf. That ministry is available to you today, especially if you are facing a time of need. Bring your burden, problem, or sin to the Lord right now and thank Him for His mercy and grace to deal with it.

PAUL'S PRAYER

Read Ephesians 3:14–19

For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. Colossians 1:9

The church that Janet grew up in had a tall steeple. At the base of the steeple was a lighted window. When Janet was a little girl she believed this was where the pastor went to pray. Although Janet was mistaken about the location, she was right to think that her pastor prayed daily for the church.

Today's passage includes one of Paul's prayers for the church (another is recorded in Eph. 1:15–23). One notable feature of Paul's prayer is its mention of kneeling (v. 14). This is a form of metonymy, a figure of speech in which something is not called by its own name but by something else which is closely associated with it. Apparently Paul often knelt when he prayed. Kneeling signified an attitude of submission and allegiance (see Rom. 11:4; 14:11; Phil. 2:10).

Paul's request in verse 17 that the Spirit might dwell in their hearts by faith was not a prayer for their salvation but that Christ would make Himself "at home" in their hearts. This is a work of God by which His Spirit strengthens us in our inner being. This experience includes a sense that we are loved by God. One of the Holy Spirit's most practical ministries to the believer is to mediate a sense of God's love and acceptance (Rom. 5:5). It is the Holy Spirit who enables us to confidently address God as our Father (Rom. 8:15).

God's love is the primary theme of Paul's prayer. He earnestly desired that his readers would somehow be able to grasp the full scope of God's love for them, something he readily admits is humanly impossible. The most concrete way for this to begin to be a reality was for them to gain a clear understanding of Jesus Christ and His work. This would introduce them to a love that "surpasses knowledge" (v. 19).

APPLY THE WORD

If you are having trouble focusing during prayer, you might try adopting the posture Paul mentions in today's passage. Kneeling does not make your prayer more acceptable to God, but it may put you in a frame of mind that makes it easier for you to contemplate the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge.

Ephesians 3:14-21

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. - Ephesians 3:14-15

TODAY IN THE WORD

Sociologists have studied the response of people to being in the presence of someone famous. We may see footage of screaming and weeping young people surrounding music stars like Elvis or the Beatles and think we'd never react in such an irrational fashion. But sociological studies indicate that almost everyone has a physical or emotional reaction to encountering a famous person, from stopping and staring to feeling overwhelmed or speechless.

In our passage today we will see Paul's intense reaction to being in the presence of greatness, the greatness of God. Paul has just finished describing the mystery of God's redemptive plan—that in Christ Jesus all people, both Jews and Gentiles, have access to God (2:11-3:13). God's chosen people now includes those who were once excluded! The church, the body of Christ, is the earthly manifestation of God's unifying love and the demonstration of His unsurpassed wisdom even to the heavenly powers and authorities. How can one respond to this great wisdom and the One who possess it? Paul is moved to passionate prayer.

Paul's prayer begins with a description of the Father and His family. This is fitting because the mystery that God has now revealed in Christ is that God's family extends beyond the boundaries set by the Law. All who are "in Christ" are now a part of the Father's family and all of them are now bearers of God's name (v. 15).

Paul next prays for the Ephesians and, because Scripture is God's living Word, for us as well. Specifically he prays that the Spirit's presence among them would increase, so that they would more fully understand and experience the infinite extent of Christ's love (vv. 16-19). The experience of this love extends beyond the bounds of knowledge and allows us to be filled with the fullness of God's presence (v. 19). Paul concludes his prayer in verses 20 and 21 with the only appropriate conclusion one can have. He simply praises the immeasurable power and wisdom of God!

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

If you've ever wondered how to pray for your loved ones, Ephesians 3:16-21 provides a wonderful model. Praying through Scripture passages can help us integrate our time in God's Word with our conversation with Him. As the Lord brings people to mind during your prayer time today, pray through this passage for each one. Then have an extended time of praising our great and good God! When in His presence, we don't have to feel paralyzed—we can be filled with praise!

Ephesians 3:14-21; Philippians 1:3-5; 9

I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy. -

TODAY IN THE WORD

We have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way.—Colossians 1:9–10

Paul's prayers for the believers in churches that he planted are filled with blessing and thanksgiving. Today we'll consider a few of these prayers.

In Ephesians 3, we see that Paul began by praying for power for the Ephesian believers--the power to remain rooted in their faith (vv. 16–17) and to comprehend more fully the love of Christ, in all its glorious dimensions (v. 18). Then Paul prayed that the deep knowledge of Christ's love would lead to spiritual maturity (v. 19). Amazed by God's power to transform lives, it's no wonder Paul ended by praising God (vv. 20–21).

Love and knowledge are also the bases of Paul's prayers for the Philippians. After thanking God for the Philippians' participation in the gospel (vv. 3–5), Paul prayed that their love of God would grow in all know-ledge and insight, so that they might be able to live holy lives until Christ's return (vv. 9–11).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

One of the remarkable things about Paul's prayers is how he focused on the spiritual well-being and blessing of those for whom he prayed, not necessarily trying to "fix" specific problems in their lives. Paul knew that spiritual maturity was the key thing to pray for--everything else flows from this foundation.

You could use Paul's prayers to write out a prayer for your children or grandchildren, or other children whom God has placed in your life. Written prayers are a great legacy to give to the next generation.

Look carefully at today's Scripture readings--as well as Colossians 1:3–12--and rewrite these prayers for individuals in your life. Key items to include are gratitude for the person and a petition for deeper knowledge of God and His love and power. Consider ending your prayer with a benediction.

If children are your focus, you may want to incorporate elements from the following prayer by Jeremy Taylor, a seventeenth century bishop.

Ephesians 3:17–18 Philippians 1:3-11

I pray that you ... may have power ... to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ. - Ephesians 3:17–18

TODAY IN THE WORD

Every parent knows that children love to feel that they can contribute somehow to a project underway. The nails might not be pounded in straight or the cake might not be level, but what joy there is to have helped Mommy or Daddy, or Grandpa and Grandma!

God has created us to be a part of His plan. Ephesians 2:10 says, "We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." The Philippians also experienced this joy of "partnership in the gospel" (v. 5), and the knowledge of it was a great joy to Paul.

As is common in Paul's letters, he began by thanking God for the recipients. In this case, he began by rejoicing over the Philippian church receiving and participating in the gospel from the very first time they heard it. Knowing that some might feel discouraged at how much more they needed to grow spiritually, Paul encouraged them that their ultimate confidence rested with God and not themselves (v. 6). Later in this letter, Paul encouraged them that "it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose" (Phil. 2:13).

It was natural for Paul to encourage the Philippians in this way, for he had a deep affection for them. Paul wrote this letter from prison, and these believers were no doubt distressed about this. But through God's grace, they were all strengthened and united, even though they were apart.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Two people in love want to know all about each other. The same is true about our relationship with Jesus. Today's passage shows that love grows when knowledge is deepened. Our knowledge of the Lord and our love for Him increase when we come together in prayer, Bible study and preaching, as well as fellowship. When you go to church tomorrow, praise God for His family, where we can grow together. Ask the Lord to show you how you can get more involved in the life of your church, growing in love for God and His people.

WHAT GOD CAN DO

Read Ephesians 3:20–21

"Where is your faith?" he asked his disciples. Luke 8:25

Skeptics sometimes ask whether it is possible for God to create a rock that cannot be moved and then move it. They are not usually interested in the answer. They are trying to demonstrate that it is unreasonable to believe in an omnipotent God.

In today's passage, which is really the closing doxology to the prayer we began to study yesterday, the Apostle praises God for His omnipotence. He highlights God's ability to do more for us than we can ask. This letter does more than affirm that God is able to answer our prayers, because all prayer is grounded in this foundational assumption. If we did not believe that God could grant our requests, why would we make them? But God is even greater than this because He is able to go beyond our requests. He can do far more than we ask. King Solomon is a good example of this. Given the opportunity to make any request, he asked for a discerning heart to guide God's people. The Lord granted him this and much more (see 1 Kings 3:5–14).

God's capacity to answer our prayers is limited only by His nature and His good purpose. Since God will not do anything that is inconsistent with His righteous nature, He will grant only those requests that conform with His will (1 John 5:14–15). Any answer that God grants, even if the answer is "no," reflects His commitment to work in all things for the good of those who love Him and have been called according to His purpose (Rom. 8:28).

Even more amazing is the fact that this surpassing power of God is the same one that is at work "within us" (v. 20). The word Paul uses to describe this power is the one from which we get our English word "energy." Through the Holy Spirit we are energized by the unlimited power of God.

APPLY THE WORD

We know that God is able to do for us what we are unable to do for ourselves. But we are not always convinced that He is willing. Take confidence from what you have learned by studying Paul's prayer and ask God to answer beyond all that you can ask or imagine. Do not hesitate to pray for yourself. It is His matchless power that is at work in you.

Ephesians 3:20–21 Luke 11:5-13; 18:1-8

Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. - Hebrews 4:16

TODAY IN THE WORD

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.—Ephesians 3:20–21

In addition to humility and faith—our focus for the past two days—Scripture also teaches the need for persistence in prayer. We often hear of missionaries praying for certain people groups for decades or of individuals praying for another's salvation for years.

In today's passages from Luke, Jesus drew upon real-life situations and used contrast to illustrate this kind of persistent prayer. If even a reluctant neighbor and an unfair judge can be persuaded to respond, how much more will the Father in heaven, who is neither reluctant nor unfair, be willing to give?

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Persistence in prayer runs counter to the instantaneous, noncommittal world in which we live. Why would we ever need to ask God for something more than once?

If we view prayer as simply a means to get something, then, of course, repeatedly petitioning the Lord makes no sense. It's only when we focus on prayer as a relationship with our Heavenly Father that we understand that continually bringing our requests to Him deepens our dependence and devotion to Him.

Persistence in prayer, especially over years, is hard. Here are some suggestions to encourage you. First, meditate on today's passages from Luke and on Galatians 6:9: "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up." Second, seek out a prayer partner. Just as persistent prayer deepens our relationship with the Father, so too continued prayer strengthens our relationships with other believers. Finally, read about examples of persistent prayer such as Jim Elliot or George Müller—we can learn much through the spiritual maturity and prayers of other believers.

EPHESIANS 4

Ephesians 4:1-3

I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. - Ephesians 4:1

TODAY IN THE WORD

Young children love to imagine what they'll be when they grow up. One second-grader confidently announced that she would be a nurse, astronaut, mother, veterinarian, and teacher—all in the interest of curing cancer. She certainly couldn't be faulted for her ambition to do good!

We saw at the very beginning of this letter two key themes that we noted would form the central points around which Paul develops his epistle—God's call and our responsibility (see 1:4). Paul has just spent the better part of two chapters explaining that the call of God in Christ is not limited by the regulations of the Law. The great mystery of redemption has been revealed. Now even Gentiles are seen among God's chosen people! Now Paul will turn to focus on that second theme—our responsibility to live a life worthy of this call.

Put differently, we have seen how Paul revels in the grace that God has shown to him as the one chosen or called to proclaim the mystery of salvation to the Gentiles (see 3:1, 7-9, 14-21). That is, in light of God's call, Paul is compelled to respond with obedience—even when it means imprisonment—and almost unspeakable praise. Now that Paul has explained to us that in Christ Jesus God's call goes to both Jews (those who are near, 1:17-18) and Gentiles (those who were far, 1:17-18), he will now spend the rest of the letter explaining to us how it is that we ought to respond to God's grace. We too are called to obedience, called to live holy and blameless lives (see 1:4).

In shifting the focus to our response, Paul begins by calling for unity and peace in the church. Gentleness, humility, patience, and a willingness to bear with one another in love ought to characterize relationships within the body of Christ (4:2-3). When these virtues are present the peace of Jesus will reign. As the manifestation of His presence on earth, the church ought to be the primary place where this peace is evident. These are those works God prepared in advance for us to do (2:10).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Good works aren't limited to finding a cure for cancer or donating millions of dollars to good causes. Each of us is called and able to pursue the good works that God has ordained. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, we are to be gentle, humble, and patient (see Gal. 5:22-23). These things may not seem glamorous, but they are the true demonstration of God's saving and sanctifying work in us.

THE KEY TO UNITY

Read Ephesians 4:1–6

And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Colossians 3:14

A survey of congregations by the Barna Group this past January indicated that young adults feel differently about their church experience than older adults. Church attenders in the 18-to-27 age group were 30 percent less likely to feel like they were part of a group that cares for each other.

With so many different kinds of people involved, is it realistic to expect the church to be united? Today's passage proves that unity is possible, but not without effort. The New Testament term that is translated "make every effort" in verse 3 means to "be eager" or "to do one's best."

It's important to remember that church unity is not a purely human effort. The effort described in this passage is aimed at preserving a spiritual unity that already exists. All those united to Jesus Christ by faith are also joined to one another by the Holy Spirit. But this spiritual unity does not automatically guarantee that we will get along with one another. The key to congregational unity according to the apostle Paul is humility. Humility enables us to affirm the value of others and be patient with them.

The call for patience reminds us that the people we encounter in the church are still growing spiritually. They are forgiven by God and are being sanctified by the Holy Spirit but are not perfect. They will sometimes fall short of our expectation. In view of this, we should not be surprised to find that our experience in the church is occasionally disappointing. We work at preserving the unity of the Spirit by dwelling on the things we have in common. We have had a common experience of salvation and are mutually dependent upon one another. The church has many members but is one body under the headship of Jesus Christ.

APPLY THE WORD

Humility takes the interests of others into account instead of focusing exclusively on its own interests. If you want to preserve the unity of the church in the bond of peace, then you must do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Instead, value others above yourself (cf. Phil. 2:1-4). This is the pattern of our Savior that we are to follow in our lives.

Ephesians 4:1-2; Colossians 3:12-14

TODAY IN THE WORD

If you plan to do any ice skating or driving around on a frozen lake this winter, here's a useful piece of information from the National Weather Service. The Service estimates that six inches of clear lake ice that has not been heavily traveled on can bear the weight of one person on foot. Under the same conditions, it would take about twenty-four inches of ice to hold a car or a light truck.

Most of us would rather not test the accuracy of the Weather Service's estimates. Overload a patch of ice, and you could find yourself swimming in freezing water.

How much can you bear before you give way? We're not asking about the major pressures--crises in life that weigh us down and drain our spirits. We're talking about the daily annoyances and irritations that are inevitable whenever two or more people's lives rub together.

Evidently, the Christians in Ephesus and Colosse were just like us. They sometimes found it hard to put up with one another. Paul had to urge them to do so, just as we have to learn (and re-learn) the art of overlooking contrasting opinions, personality quirks, and differences of habit and behavior.

The problem with a lack of forbearance--to use the old King James word for this virtue--is that letting the ""little stuff"" get under your skin can lead to big explosions.

When two Christians can't put up with each other, their energies for productive service are drained off and they are derailed from their devotion to Christ. This can also happen to an entire body of believers in a church, disrupting unity and squelching forgiveness (Eph. 4:3; Col. 3:13).

If that happens, the ice has given way, so to speak. The problem has grown from a handful of small irritations to a spiritually destructive condition. We will learn throughout this month that maintaining harmony, love and unity in the body of Christ is essential to a healthy ministry.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Patience is a virtue everybody wants... right now!

How can you develop a tolerant spirit? Our text today gives some helpful clues by surrounding this virtue with other character traits that form the right soil for its growth: humility and gentleness (Eph. 4:2); compassion, kindness, a willingness to forgive, and love (Col. 3:12-14).

Ephesians 4:3 Philippians 4:1-3

Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. - Ephesians 4:3

TODAY IN THE WORD

American inventor and diplomat Benjamin Franklin played a key role in the struggle for independence. He is the only person to sign all four documents on which the United States was founded: the Declaration of Independence, the alliance treaty with France, the peace treaty with England, and the Constitution.

As he and other leaders prepared to sign the Declaration of Independence in 1776, Franklin joked, "We must all hang together, or assuredly we will all hang separately."

His humor had a serious message--without unity, they could not hope to defeat the military might of England. Paul had a similar message in today's reading. Unity can and must characterize the church if we are to be effective spiritually.

"Therefore" in verse 1 signals another section transition. Notice how Paul didn't just say, "So do it." He first expressed his personal love for the Philippians and his joy in their faith, then he exhorted, "That is how you should stand firm" (v. 1).

But what is "that"? He was referring to the letter so far, especially chapters 2-3. The believer's life should consist of imitating Christ (and anyone who imitates Him), hoping and rejoicing in Him, desiring to share in His sufferings and resurrection, holding onto the pure gospel and witnessing it to the world, and living out our God-guaranteed destiny with Christ. That's a lifetime assignment!

The various exhortations and messages of this last chapter of Philippians flow from these attitudes and priorities. Paul first urged two women to "agree with each other in the Lord" (v. 2). Evidently they had a quarrel or a difference to settle.

Notice two facts. First, these were not a pair of "crabs." Euodia and Syntyche had worked faithfully at Paul's side in the cause of the gospel. The lesson? Even the best of us can fail to practice Christlike unity.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Of what does Christian unity consist? Writer and preacher John Stott offers several insights linking unity and God's Word. "True unity will always be unity in truth, and truth means biblical truth." "Since Christian love is founded upon Christian truth, we shall not increase the love which exists between us by diminishing the truth which we hold in common."

Ephesians 4:4-16

From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. - Ephesians 4:16

TODAY IN THE WORD

The health of our physical body depends on the health of each individual organ and system. Torn ligaments don't kill us, but ask anyone with a torn ACL and they will attest to pain and handicap that requires surgery. Though not as vital as the heart, even a torn ligament requires immediate attention so that the body doesn't suffer permanent damage. The body of Christ mirrors this complexity and interdependence. In the church, every member is important. Not one single member is unnecessary. Each part has a job to do (vv. 12, 16).

That said, certain spiritual gifts are absolutely vital within the church. The local congregation needs those who equip the church (v. 11). To say that these gifts are perhaps more necessary doesn't elevate the pastor or evangelist to a sort of "super-Christian" status before God. It also doesn't mean that they alone do all the work while the congregation sits idly by. On the contrary, their most important function is to train those under their leadership to do "works of service" (v. 12).

The "equipping" gifts are different from other gifts, such as encouragement or intercession, in that they are "truth" gifts. The church cannot stand apart from the foundation of the truth. The church itself is the pillar and foundation of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15). The Holy Spirit's role is also to guide us into truth (see March 14). For any other gift to operate properly, it must be grounded in truth and equipped by truth. Without truth, the church is vulnerable to its own immaturity and to deception (v. 14).

Timothy, himself a pastor, evangelist, missionary, and teacher, received profound advice from Paul that is much needed for people in those roles today: "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved ... who correctly handles the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

If you are serving as a pastor or teacher in your church, evaluate the time and intentionality you are giving to your study of the Word.

If you don't have these gifts but appreciate those who exercise them in your church, encourage them by saying so. They need it.

And if you're a "supporting ligament" in the body of Christ, recognize and fulfill the work God has for you!

Ephesians 4:4-6; Psalm 133

There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called. - Ephesians 4:4

TODAY IN THE WORD

For decades, scientists and government officials have worried about the city of Venice. The city is sinking—and the water is rising—an estimated 0.5 to 2 millimeters per year. Already the Piazza San Marco, one of the most famous tourist attractions in the world, is frequently covered with water during high tide. One reason that Venice is sinking is due to its foundation. Built on reclaimed marshland, the city's foundation depends on millions of wooden piles that have been pounded into the marshy ground.

In case we have not quite grasped the importance of peace and unity in the church, our reading today stresses the foundation on which that unity is based. There is only one body. This, in fact, is one of the critical results of Jesus' redeeming work. Earlier in Ephesians 2:15-16, Paul wrote that one of the reasons that Jesus died was to create a new humanity in His one body. By abolishing the Law's regulations and the division between Jew and Gentile, Jesus has formed a new humanity in which the old distinction between Jew and Gentile no longer exists. Since there is now only one body, there can be peace between all people. Yet Paul does not stop here.

Another reason that this one body has to have peace and unity is that it shares one Spirit. The same Spirit of God indwells all those who have been included in Christ. Since we all share and partake of this one Spirit, we ought all to live at peace with one another. In fact, this "oneness" defines us as God's church. We share one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism and one God, the Father of all of us. As His family, each of us shares these things (see 3:15). As brothers and sisters, recipients of God's redemptive call and thus members together of His chosen people, Paul urges us to live in the peace and unity that ought to characterize a people who are the children of one Father and who are joined in one body by one Spirit. Anything less is a failure to live in way worthy of our calling.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Clearly we will not always agree with our brothers and sisters in Christ. And we may find some of them rather hard to get along with, too! But the peace and unity that Paul describes isn't based on having the same opinions or compatible personalities.

If you find yourself at odds with another believer, take some extra time today to pray about the situation, and ask the Holy Spirit to restore biblical unity in your relationship.

CHRIST'S GIFTS TO THE CHURCH

Read Ephesians 4:7–16

When someone gives us a gift that we don't really want or need we remind ourselves, "It's the thought that counts." But when it comes to Jesus Christ and the gifts He gives the church, the thought always matches the need. God only gives good gifts to His children (Matt. 7:11).

The gifts listed in today's chapter are manifestations of the grace of Christ through the Holy Spirit. Everyone who belongs to Christ is indwelt by the Holy Spirit, but not everyone has the same spiritual gifts (see Rom. 8:9). A wonderful diversity of gifts is given to the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:11). The gifts included in this list, one of several in the New Testament, are given to individuals so that they can bless the church as a whole.

All spiritual gifts work toward the same basic objective. They have been given for "the common good" (1 Cor. 12:7). But some gifts are more specialized than others. The ministry of apostles and prophets, for example, was to lay the foundation of the church (cf. Eph. 2:20). For this reason some scholars believe that the ministry of apostles and prophets was primarily confined to the New Testament era. Other gifts mentioned in this list are dedicated to the ongoing equipping of the church.

Spiritual gifts are not intended to elevate those who possess them above other believers. The cult of personality that can be so alluring has no legitimate place in the life of the church (cf. 1 Cor. 3:4–5). Instead, the gifted individuals described in this list have been given by God in order to equip God's people for works of service (v. 12). Those who have been equipped exercise their own particular ministries and as a result the body of Christ is built up. Ministry is not the province of an elite priestly class but is something in which all the church's members participate.

KEY VERSE

There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. (1 Corinthians 12:4)

APPLY THE WORD

According to the model outlined in today's passage, everybody is ministered to and everyone has a ministry. Whose ministry has helped you serve Christ more effectively? Write them a note of appreciation today and share how you have benefitted from their particular gift. Also thank the Lord for the spiritual gifts that have blessed your life.

Ephesians 4:7-13

To each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. - Ephesians 4:7

TODAY IN THE WORD

The science fiction series Star Trek has invented dozens of unusual species. One of these, the villainous Borg Collective, was notorious for the desire to conquer, assimilate, and destroy other civilizations. After such a victory, each living being would be converted into a drone, a cog in the Borg machine. Interestingly, the motivation of the Borg was to achieve "perfection."

Given Paul's emphasis on unity in Ephesians, we might be tempted to think that as brothers and sisters in Christ we all ought to be exactly the same. After all, if we share one body, Spirit, hope, Lord, faith, baptism, God and Father, should we not also share exactly the same gifts, desires, and personalities?

Paul seems to anticipate this question and explains in our reading today that this is not how the body of Christ works. We all share in God's grace, but Christ has not given us all the same gifts. We are the one body of Christ and we all partake of the one Holy Spirit, but that one body has many members each of which contributes to the body's health and welfare. Imagine a body that was only a hand! Without a mouth or a stomach that hand would soon die from lack of nourishment. In a similar way, the many individuals in a church all have gifts of ministry that contribute to the proper functioning and growth of that church (v. 12).

The goal of the church is to manifest the fullness of Christ on earth. This happens as the various members work together, each contributing their spiritual gift for the common good. The goal is that the body of Christ might be built up, that the many members would all be growing together toward maturity in Christ Jesus (v. 13). When the unity and peace of the Spirit are present in a church, the body will grow together toward maturity and God's presence will fill it in a powerful way. Genuine church growth is primarily about the body's members practicing humility, gentleness, patience, and forbearance in love in order that the church might display the unity and peace for which Christ died.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

The church of Jesus Christ is not like the Borg Collective! We should never confuse our pursuit of holiness with imposing our notion of perfection on others.

Nor should we assume that all of our brothers and sisters in Christ will look exactly like us. We should instead seek to serve one another through our spiritual gifts, thanking God that He unites our different personalities and talents and gifts into His body.

Ephesians 4:1-13

Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. - Ephesians 4:32

TODAY IN THE WORD

Genocide ... torture ... massacre—these words come to minds when most people think about Rwanda. In the spring of 1994, over 800,000 Tutsi were killed by their Hutu neighbors. Anglican Bishop John Rucyahana is chairman of Prison Fellowship Rwanda and experienced Hutu brutalities first-hand. Despite his rage, he knew that hatred wasn't the answer and that "healing could not come from anywhere but God Himself." He asked for God's power to forgive his enemies, and began sharing Christ with Hutus who were in prison for participating in the genocide.

Forgiveness ... reconciliation ... unity—these words describe the Spirit's work among Rwandan believers today. Through Prison Fellowship Rwanda's Umuwumu Tree Project, Bishop Rucyahana has seen murderers and rapists turn to Christ. He's also seen reconciliation between victims and offenders. "Mary," a Tutsi who watched Hutus murder her family, had her new home built by Hutu who are now Christians. Only God's resurrection power working through His Spirit could bring about reconciliation and unity.

As we saw yesterday, the diversity of spiritual gifts within the body of Christ functioning in unity is a compelling witness to God's power. This same truth is in today's passage, where we see additionally that spiritual gifts are intended to build up the body and to help individuals reach spiritual maturity.

Notice also the emphasis on oneness in today's passage: one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of all. This oneness is the basis for the body's unity. But unity isn't the same as uniformity. Notice that the triune God is revealed in three persons—the Spirit, the Lord, and the Father—but is still One God. In a similar way, unity in the body certainly doesn't mean that everyone is the same. In fact, the Spirit's work in Rwanda shows that He can bring forth unity from the most diverse and devastated backgrounds.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

It's important to notice that Ephesians 4:3 urges to keep the unity of the Spirit. In other words, our job isn't to create unity from nothing, but rather to maintain the unity that only the Spirit makes possible. There are four essential qualities that keep unity and peace: humility, gentleness, patience, and forgiveness (Eph. 4:2). We can learn a lot from our Rwandan brothers and sisters in this regard. Do these qualities characterize your interaction with other believers?

Ephesians 4:7 1 Corinthians 12:1-11

But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. - Ephesians 4:7

TODAY IN THE WORD

Parents with more than one child will sometimes give each one the same gift at Christmas. They do this because of the jealousy that arises between siblings. The gift that a parent gives to one child seems to be perfectly fine—until that child sees that a sister or brother has received something else. Once children realize the difference, they begin to want what the other child has. Or they might have the opposite response, gloating over what they have received as if their gift were the better of the two.

This same childish perspective was reflected in the Corinthians' view of spiritual gifts. Some who had received greater gifts gloated over them and adopted a superior attitude. Others who had been given lesser gifts suffered from a spiritual inferiority complex. Both attitudes caused the Corinthians to forget that God had given the manifestation of the Holy Spirit for the common good (v. 7).

It is wrong to view the list of gifts mentioned in this chapter as a kind of menu from which we can select those gifts that seem most attractive. It is not a ranking that measures the value of one believer compared to another. Indeed, it is not even an exhaustive list of the spiritual gifts given to believers. Other lists include many of the same gifts but in different order (Rom. 12:6–8; Eph. 4:11; 1 Peter 4:11). Some of the gifts mentioned in this chapter (most notably healing, miracles, and tongues) are missing from the other lists. The implication is clear. God never intended every believer to possess the same spiritual gift. Nor does it seem likely that any single church will possess all the gifts. It is the Holy Spirit who gives to each one "just as he determines" (v. 11).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Do you know what your spiritual gifts are? A few key questions may help you to discern them. First, in what contexts do you enjoy serving the Lord most? Usually, we feel most energized when we are ministering in our area of giftedness. Second, where have you seen evidence of the Holy Spirit working through you?

Ephesians 4:14-16

From him the whole body ... grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. - Ephesians 4:16

TODAY IN THE WORD

A frequent ritual for new babies involves trips to the doctor for height and weight measurements. Eager grandparents and friends then inquire about how much baby has grown, and inches and pounds are plotted on growth charts. These check-ups are more than parental bragging, though, because the baby's growth provides a major indicator of health.

For the past few days Paul has been describing for us what an appropriate response to God's redemptive call should look like. We have seen that the body of Christ ought to be characterized by unity and peace in the Spirit. One way that this comes about is by every member of the body putting his or her spiritual gift to work in the church. In fact, doing such work represents nothing less than doing the works that God has prepared in advance for those He has called to do.

Given that God's mysterious intent was to allow all people to have access to Him by bringing peace in Jesus Christ, it makes sense that He would want His chosen people to reflect the peace He has made possible. That is, since in His eternal plan He intended to unify Jews and Gentiles in Jesus and to bring things both heavenly and earthly under Jesus' authority, it follows that the works that He has prepared for His children to do, the holy and blameless lives He has called them to live, are characterized as works that contribute to unity and peace. In verses 15-16 we find Paul saying just that.

Each member has been called and has been joined to the head of the body—Christ Himself. Christ has supplied each member with a gift. That person is thus enabled to do the work for which he or she was called. That is, each member is expected to do its work and thereby to contribute to the health of the body. When members do, the entire body grows and builds itself up in love (4:16). Why have we been called into God's family? So that we might do those works God ordained in advance for us to do—to contribute to the growth of the body of Christ.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Are you and your church growing and healthy? In recent decades much emphasis has been placed on “church growth,” but unfortunately in some cases this has focused simply on numerical growth. As we see today, God is concerned about our growth in love—and this growth will indicate whether our church is healthy. Prayerfully consider how you can practice love in your church in the coming weeks. By doing so, you will be fulfilling your call to contribute to the growth and health of your church.

Ephesians 4:16 1 Timothy 2:8-15

I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. - Ephesians 4:16

Judith Martin has been writing Miss Manners for over twenty-five years. She answers questions of all sorts, from those of simple table etiquette to more complex questions of social graces. “You can deny all you want that there is etiquette, and a lot of people do in everyday life,” Miss Manners explains. “But if you behave in a way that offends the people you're trying to deal with, they will stop dealing with you.”

Etiquette is a word that describes social propriety. This word propriety appears twice in our text today (vv. 9, 15), and its meaning is richer than simple manners. It appears only one other time in the New Testament (cf. Acts 26:25) where it is translated “reasonable.” “What I am saying is true and reasonable,” Paul insists when Agrippa mocks his testimony as the words of a crazy man. “Propriety” refers to reasonable and appropriate actions.

In today's passage, Paul sets forth guidelines for a life governed by Christian propriety. These actions are our reasonable response to the grace we have in Christ. For the men, propriety means peace (v. 9). As a reasonable response to the peace they have with God because of Christ, they must make peace with one another.

For the women, propriety includes modesty in dress and submission. Propriety in dress doesn't necessarily forbid women to wear gold and pearls but emphasizes that their focus and energies should be spent on inner beauty (cf. 1 Peter 3:3-4). Propriety also means understanding proper roles in the family and church. This does not mean that women are relegated only to the kitchens and nurseries of the church. Paul obviously expects that women will want to learn and should continue learning (v. 11). However, men, not women, are given responsibility for the authority of the church and family (cf. Eph. 5:23). By submitting to these reasonable restraints in dress and decorum, women continue in the high calling of “faith, love and holiness” (v. 15).

Today's passage is one of the most controversial biblical texts, and it has certainly been abused by some as an excuse to mistreat women. Note that Paul does not exclude women from pastoral roles because they lack the intellect or leadership savvy. He bases his argument on the order of creation (v. 13). The argument is not cultural or psychological but inherently biblical.

THE NEW LIFE

Read Ephesians 4:17–24

You have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness. 1 Peter 4:3

A popular genre of television shows today involves makeovers, ranging from houses to people to motorcycles. The focus of today's Scripture passage has to do with the believer's makeover. As we saw in chapter 2, these verses paint a before-and-after picture. Paul reminds his readers that they “must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking” (v. 17). This pre-Christian worldview, marked by both ignorance and hardheartedness, alienated them from God. The truths they learned when they turned to Christ revealed a radically different way of life empowered by the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit's role in enabling us to live the Christian life does not mean that our obedience is automatic. We must choose the way of life marked out for us by God's Word on a daily basis. This decision has both negative and positive aspects. Negatively it means that we will intentionally lay aside those things that belong to our “old self” with its corrupted desires. Positively it means that we must put on the “new self” that reflects God's righteousness.

This lifestyle requires more than mere choice, however. The decision to live for Christ would be meaningless without a capacity to follow through on our decision. Not only have we learned an alternative lifestyle from Christ, but also in Christ we have become a

different kind of people.

The primary location for this transformation is the mind. We can put on the “new self” only after we have been “made new” in the attitude of our minds (v. 23). Elsewhere Paul uses the language of accounting to convey this idea. We are to “reckon” or “count” ourselves dead to sin and alive to God (see Rom. 6:11).

APPLY THE WORD

How do you think about yourself now that you belong to Jesus Christ? Do you see yourself as someone who has been fundamentally changed by God’s grace and who has been given the power of the Holy Spirit to put on the new self? If not, you need to change your “mental accounting” and take stock of what God’s grace can do for you.

Galatians 5:19-26; Ephesians 4:17-5:2

Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us. - Ephesians 5:1–2

TODAY IN THE WORD

Strengthen me, O God, by the grace of your Holy Spirit; grant to me to be strengthened with might in the inner man, and to put away from my heart all useless anxiety and distress... Amen.—Thomas À Kempis

As we’ve seen, prayer is communication with our loving Father--the means by which we know Him better and bring before Him our concerns and desires. But prayer is also a way that God changes us.

Ephesians 4 tells us to put off the old life apart from God and put on “the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness” (vv. 22–24). Prayer and God’s Word, through the work of the Holy Spirit, are the primary ways this transformation occurs.

One way that prayer changes us is by increasing humility. Whether we are praying for “daily bread” or interceding for others, prayer increases our awareness of being totally dependent on the Lord.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Most of us earnestly desire to put on the new self, just as we desire to see more of the Spirit’s fruit in our lives. It’s surprising, then, how often we try to bring about spiritual growth on our own and forget to pray for it! Why not take time today to do just that?

You may want to begin by assessing hindrances to inner growth in your life. The aim of this exercise is not introspection, but rather the opportunity to prayerfully consider how each item in the following list either strengthens or weakens God’s new creation within you. Think of it as a “spiritual spring cleaning.” As you pray through this list, you may want to write down thoughts that the Lord brings to your mind.

- * the books you read and the movies and TV shows that you watch
- * the anecdotes and jokes that are shared where you work
- * the focus of your imagination or thought life
- * the friends you spend time with

Ephesians 4:17-19; Romans 8:5-8

You must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. - Ephesians 4:17

TODAY IN THE WORD

People born in the United States often take their citizenship for granted. A conversation with an immigrant can illumine the challenges that must be overcome to gain citizenship, including long lines at immigration offices, paperwork, and exams. The official process of citizenship is just one hurdle—many people must also learn a new language or work skills in order to become established in their new country.

Since those of us who were excluded from citizenship with God’s people have now been brought near to God when we were included in Christ, it is not surprising to find Paul telling us that we must no longer live as the Gentiles live. This is simply another way of restating what Paul has been telling us all along. We are now members of God’s chosen people and we have an obligation to live lives worthy of this calling.

Paul describes "Gentile living" as living that follows from a darkened understanding, separated from God and constantly driven to satisfy one's own selfish desires (4:18-19). Before we were included in Christ, we were ignorant. This ignorance has little to do with our intelligence. Rather, Paul is talking about our ignorance with respect to God. We used to orient our lives around the goals and prizes that we thought were important. Our sense of what was valuable was driven primarily by our own selfish desire. Based on our darkened understanding, we thought that gaining money, fame, power, or any of the other things we strove after were the most significant goals we could achieve.

God's call changed all of that. Now that we belong to Christ, we know that our lives ought to be oriented not around our selfish desires, but around the good works that God has prepared for us to do. Yesterday we saw that these good works concern using the gifts Christ has given us for the good of the church. Since we have a new identity, we must no longer live as if we are still Gentiles. God has reoriented our lives toward service within His family.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

In the middle of a hectic work week, it can be difficult to imagine taking the time to think through your life goals! If we don't plan some time for reflection, however, it usually never happens. Make plans now for some extended time of prayer and evaluation of what goals are driving your life. If you need to reorient your priorities to reflect the reality of your spiritual citizenship, pray for the boldness to forsake your selfish desires in exchange for fulfilling service for God.

Ephesians 4:20-24; Romans 8:9-17

You were taught ... to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. - Ephesians 4:22-24

TODAY IN THE WORD

Last November, doctors at the Cleveland Clinic gained approval to proceed with the world's first face transplant. While they project that it may take as long as two years to find a suitable donor, many victims of severe burns, tumors, and gunshot wounds have hope that perhaps their scarring could someday be replaced by surgery to put on a new face that could give them a new freedom.

Earlier in this letter Paul showed that Jesus' death resulted in Jews and Gentiles being brought together and one new person being created (2:15). In our reading for today Paul exhorts us to put on this new self, which is far more transformative than just a new face. Living in God's gracious call means living out the reality of our new identity in Christ Jesus. Just as we have seen in 1:4 and 4:1, Paul tells us plainly in 4:24 that God called us to live holy lives. That is, the reason that God saw fit to create this new self was so that we would be like Him in true righteousness and holiness. How can we possibly do this? Paul has already made it clear in this letter that when God calls us He also equips us. Our sins have been forgiven (1:7), the Spirit dwells within us (1:13-14), and the resurrection power of God is at work for us (1:18-19). Nonetheless, it may be helpful to reflect for a few minutes on another passage in which Paul speaks about our obligation to live holy lives.

In Romans 8:9-17 Paul tells us clearly that the Spirit's presence within us is the power that enables us to live holy and blameless lives. If we belong to Christ, then the Spirit of God controls us (v. 9). The Spirit that brought Jesus back from the dead gives new life to our bodies (v. 11). The complete fulfillment of this promise will occur when we are resurrected bodily, but even now the transforming power of that Spirit is at work within us enabling us to resist our sinful desires and do the work God has called us to do. We have become children of God. Our lives ought to bear His family's resemblance.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

In our battle against sin, we can easily become discouraged at what feels like our constant failure. Keeping God's Word close at hand is one way that we can be reminded that the battle belongs to the Lord! On notecards or post-it notes, write down the list of promises that we have as children of God. For instance, as we saw above, the Spirit of God controls us and gives life to our bodies. Keep this list with you and refer to it when you find yourself in the middle of temptation so that you can live in the victory of truth.

LIFE TOGETHER

Read Ephesians 4:25-28

How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity! Psalm 133:1

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German theologian and pastor who was imprisoned and eventually executed for his opposition to Adolph Hitler. For a time he led an underground seminary and during that period formulated the ideas for a book about the nature of the church entitled Life Together.

Paul continues to describe what new life in Christ is like by offering his guidelines for the church's life together. His directives follow the basic pattern of "putting off" and "putting on" outlined in the previous verses. He concentrates on three basic areas of congregational life: our speech, our attitude, and our treatment of one another.

Our speech toward one another should be marked by truth. In order to do this, we must "put off falsehood" (v. 25). Lying is not only deceitful, it is also self-destructive. When we deal falsely with someone else we damage ourselves. We should speak the truth because we are "all members of one body." The self-destructive nature of lying is even clearer in the Greek text, which literally says that we are "members of one another" (cf. 1 Cor. 12:12–18).

Our speech should mirror our inner attitude, which is to be one of patience toward others. Paul admits that it is possible for anger to arise in our midst but it must be dealt with promptly. Allowing anger to fester provides Satan with a foothold in the community. It is not necessary to deny or ignore our anger, but neither can we afford to cultivate it.

Finally, the church's life together should be marked by a spirit of generosity. Instead of taking advantage of one another, we must work to provide for our own needs and share with others.

APPLY THE WORD

Congregational life is not perfect. The commands found in this passage all imply a potential for ongoing struggle. Which of the three areas mentioned in this passage do you need to concentrate on most today? Does it involve speech or unresolved anger? Or is there some way that you can demonstrate generosity to other believers?

Ephesians 4:25 Romans 12:3-5

TODAY IN THE WORD

When Dwight L. Moody was in London during one of his famous evangelistic tours, several British clergymen visited him. They wanted to know how and why this poorly educated American was so effective in winning throngs of people to Christ. Moody took the three men to the window of his hotel room and asked each in turn what he saw. One by one, the men described the people in the park below. Then Moody looked out the window with tears rolling down his cheeks. "What do you see, Mr. Moody?" asked one of the men.

"I see countless thousands of souls that will one day spend eternity in hell if they do not find the Savior."

Obviously, D.L. Moody saw people differently than the average observer does. And because he saw eternal souls where others saw only people strolling in a park, Moody approached life with a different agenda.

As believers in Jesus Christ, we need to see people differently, too. That's true of how we view the world and people, and it's also true of the way we view one another in the body of Christ.

The New Testament often uses the metaphor of the body to describe the vital unity believers have in Christ. We are not simply members of the same organization. We are members of the same body, the living body of Christ. That makes us as much a part of one another as are the members of a physical body. We belong to Christ and to one another.

God's Word builds upon this basic truth of unity. Because we as believers belong to one another, we need to treat others with special honor and respect. That's why the New Testament is filled with commands to show a Christlike attitude toward one another. This month, we'll be studying these commands with the goal of learning better how to live as Christ would have us live. We're the body, He's the Head!

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Sometimes the most difficult people for us to get a clear focus on are those closest to us.

For a few minutes, think your way through the names of those members of your Christian family with whom you spend the most time. Is there someone in that group who makes you "see red," a person who is difficult to deal with? This would be a good day to ask God to help you begin seeing that person through the eyes of Christ.

Ephesians 4:25-28

Each of you must ... speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. - Ephesians 4:25

TODAY IN THE WORD

That staple of television crime dramas—the lie detector test—has been under assault as an unreliable method of determining someone's veracity. An American Medical Association expert testified before Congress that the lie detector (or polygraph) "cannot detect lies much better than a coin toss." The main problem is not whether someone is a good liar, but whether the person evaluating the polygraph suspects the test-taker of being guilty.

Telling the truth isn't always easy, as Paul no doubt understood. In today's passage he is about to discuss extensively some specific behaviors that have no place in the body of Christ. We would probably all be a lot more comfortable if he had not bothered to give such clear examples of how we ought not to live. It is much easier to think about general goodness and general badness. We can all affirm it is better to be good than bad and still feel comfortable with ourselves. Paul, though, is modeling truth-telling for us, and as a truth teller he will not let us get away with agreeing with him in principle, but not changing in practice.

So, what does it mean to live as one of God's people? We must not lie, especially given our oneness in the body (v. 25). We need to speak the truth in love (see 4:15), but we must speak the truth. We must not remain angry at one another (vv. 26-27). Paul is not suggesting that we will never get angry, rather he is suggesting that we need to resolve our anger before the sun goes down (i.e., very quickly!) so as not to allow the Devil to gain any influence on us. Additionally, we must not steal. Instead, we must do our best to work to support ourselves and to support those who have needs (v. 28). In short, we need to live with the needs and interests of others in mind. We are part of the body of Christ. We do not live for ourselves any longer.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

If you felt the conviction of the Holy Spirit during today's reading, now is a good time to thank Him! His prompting means that He wants to do some work in your life to make you more like Jesus. This may be difficult, but you have the assurance that it results from being in Christ. As you prayerfully confess your sin and shortcoming in the area He's brought to your attention, thank Him for the forgiveness He's promised and the power to live a changed life.

GETTING ALONG

Read Ephesians 4:29–32

You must also rid yourselves of . . . anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Colossians 3:8

According to an Associated Press poll taken a few years ago, most Americans believe that profanity has increased. Nearly 75 percent of those questioned said that they had heard profanity used in public frequently or occasionally. Two thirds were convinced that people swear more now than twenty years ago.

The Apostle's concern in today's Scripture reading includes but is not limited to the use of profanity. The new life we have experienced in Christ is powerful enough to transform the tongue. This is clearly a work of God's grace, since James 3:8 declares the tongue to be untamable. Thankfully, what is impossible with us is possible with God.

In the original Greek text the word that is translated "unwholesome" in verse 29 was used to refer to spoiled food or rotten vegetables. The alternative to such language is speech that "is helpful for building others up according to their needs" (v. 29). It is clear from this description that Paul is concerned with more than the kind of language we usually think of as swearing. Our words are to be measured by their overall effect upon those who hear them. Do they build them up? Are they suited to the needs of others?

Unwholesome speech reflects our disposition toward others. It is not enough simply to pay attention to the vocabulary we use. We must first root out the bitterness or malicious intent that led to our unedifying words. We should expect those who have experienced God's grace to speak in a way that extends His grace to others. We will not have any trouble finding the right words to use if our motives for speaking are marked by compassion and forgiveness. The Christian's basic rule of speech and life is to treat others the way God has treated us.

APPLY THE WORD

A few years ago it was common for many to wear a wristband with the letters WWJD on it. These stood for the question: "What would Jesus do?" In view of today's lesson, we can add another question: "What would Jesus say?" Before you speak, reflect prayerfully on whether what you are about to say ministers the grace and compassion of Christ.

Ephesians 4:29-32

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. - Ephesians 4:32

TODAY IN THE WORD

The story is told of a woman who sat in the front pew during a summer revival. As the preacher denounced drinking and smoking, she loudly shouted "Amen!" The next night, the preacher spoke out against immorality and immodesty, and again she gave a hearty "Amen!" The third night, the preacher condemned gossip and feuding. The woman was heard to huff, "Preacher stopped preaching and started meddling!"

It was just a little gossip. The joke was only slightly off-color. It's not a big deal, right? Yesterday we may have cringed as Paul pointed to some specific behaviors that have no place in the body of Christ. In our reading today he lists a few more examples of the way Gentiles live—things that tear down rather than build up those in the church. He starts off focusing on how we talk.

If we are new people in Christ, no unwholesome thing should come out of our mouths. What does Paul mean? The standard by which we can judge our speech is whether it "builds up" and "benefits" (to give a more literal translation, gives "grace" to) others in the church (v. 29). Paul is exhorting us to measure our actions by the way in which they contribute to the health of Christ's body (see 4:16). When we do or say things that tear down rather than build up, we are not living lives worthy of our calling. These sins harm the body and therefore grieve the Holy Spirit (v. 30).

Peace ought to reign in the church (see 2:14-18). Bitterness, rage, anger, brawling, slander, and malice threaten to break apart the church that God has joined together. As God's children we are to be kind and compassionate to one another. Indeed, we have an obligation to forgive one another. Peace will only be a reality in the church when we, the members, take seriously the extent of Christ's forgiveness of our own sins. Jesus shed His blood for us. He paid the penalty for our sin so that we could be reconciled to God. In light of this amazing grace, how can we dare not to be reconciled one to another?

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Scripture doesn't get any more practical for our daily lives than our passage today. We can all relate to the challenges of trying to get along with other people! How can you take some positive action to build up others in your church? First, ask for the Lord's help in resisting gossip and anger. Second, actively pray for God to bless those people you find difficult. And third, look for ways to express compassion and kindness through your words and your actions.

Ephesians 4:32; 1 Thessalonians 5:15

TODAY IN THE WORD

Depending on your calendar or your memory of school history lessons, you may have noticed that today is Abraham Lincoln's birthday. Stories of Lincoln's honesty, gentle spirit, and kindness abound.

One such story concerns Lincoln's ride through Richmond after it had been abandoned by Confederate troops near the end of the Civil War. An old ex-slave approached the President's carriage, took off his hat, and, bowing, said: "'God bless you, Mr. Lincoln.'" In response, Lincoln removed his hat and bowed silently.

Such a gesture of kindness and respect must have spoken volumes to that man. Without ever saying a word, we too can accomplish the same by our acts of kindness.

Our being kind to one another pleases our Lord, who was kind not only to those who loved Him, but also to the ungrateful and wicked (Luke 6:35). One character trait that should definitely mark us as Christians is kindness.

Why? Because we have been forgiven through the kindness of God. God's kindness toward us is more than just the gifts of common grace: rain, sunshine, food, etc. These are wonderful gifts, but God's kindness reached beyond that to lead us to repentance (Rom. 2:4).

Once we have tasted His forgiveness for sin, how can we withhold our forgiveness from a brother or a sister who has wronged us? Extending forgiveness to one another is one way we can practice kindness. In 1 Thessalonians 5:15, Paul gives us another perspective on this quality. To show kindness is not to seek revenge, not to pay back the other person wrong for wrong, but instead to return good for evil.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

One important truth about most acts of kindness is that they can be done in the time it takes to write about them. Yet the benefit and blessing can last far longer.

We give you plenty of daily challenges every month and try to make them something achievable in the course of your daily activities. In that spirit, you might plan to do an act of kindness today for a fellow Christian--perhaps a note, a phone call, a small gift, or an invitation to lunch. Your kindness may meet a particular need in that person's life.

FORGIVEN IN CHRIST

Read Ephesians 4:17-32

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Ephesians 4:32

In 2014, photographer Pieter Hugo traveled to Rwanda for a remarkable project: photographing perpetrators and victims of the 1994 genocide—together. Each photo includes a Hutu who has been forgiven by a Tutsi survivor. One survivor, Viviane Nyiramana, said: “He killed my father and three brothers. He did these killings with other people but he came alone to me and asked for pardon. He . . . helped me build a house with a covered roof. I was afraid of him—now I have granted him pardon, things have become normal, and in my mind I feel clear.”

We struggle to imagine the immense courage and strength it takes to forgive the murderer of your family—and yet our sins against God were even greater. Our entire beings were oriented toward rebellion against Him. And still, in Christ, the Lord has offered us His forgiveness. Our text today explores what it means for us to locate our identity as forgiven people in Christ. First, we see a description of what our lives used to look like: sensuality, greed, bitterness, anger, and selfishness. Our hearts were opposed to God and our minds were ignorant of Him.

Because we are forgiven, our lives should be different now. Now that we know Christ and are in Him, we should replace lies and slander with truth and encouragement; instead of stealing we should be productive; instead of expressing rage and holding grudges we should offer kindness and compassion.

Finally, we are instructed to forgive others—not because it feels good or makes a nice story but because God has forgiven us. Our sin was great, but His love was greater. We have been “made new in the attitude of your minds” and we are to follow God’s righteousness and holiness (Eph 4:23–24). We have no excuse to withhold forgiveness.

APPLY THE WORD - As Pieter Hugo says, “Forgiveness is not born out of some airy-fairy sense of benevolence.” It is both free to give and costly to offer. If you struggle to forgive someone in your life, consider reading *Choosing Forgiveness: Your Journey to Freedom* by Nancy Leigh DeMoss (Moody Publishers), available online and in local Christian bookstores.

Ephesians 4:32 Matthew 18:10-35

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. - Ephesians 4:32

TODAY IN THE WORD

If you watch almost any talk show or read popular magazines, you’ll sometimes hear advice like this for resolving conflict: try once to resolve the misunderstanding, and if you’re rebuffed, wait for the apology that you deserve. Don’t let people take advantage of you. You shouldn’t be too nice or too forgiving. Otherwise, you’re giving people license to walk all over you.

Biblical principles differ radically from this advice, and how churches resolve conflict reveals their spiritual health. Will we listen to the voice of the world or the voice of Christ when it comes to the practice of forgiveness?

The Bible says that we must always take the initiative when a relationship is suffering. Like Dr. David Jeremiah has said in his preaching, “When it comes to forgiveness it’s always your turn.” We can’t wait for an apology. We can’t hope that the conflict will resolve itself. If we have been sinned against, we must go to the person who has offended us and “show him his fault” (v. 15). This isn’t an adversarial confrontation, because the goal is to win our brother over. We are respectful about the way in which we confront; the confrontation should be private so as to avoid embarrassment, and also specific, so as to be helpful.

Second, if need be, we go multiple times to the person who has offended us. We don’t stop when we’ve tried once and seen no success. We try two more times with witnesses, and even if these steps fail, we still love and pray for our brother or sister (vv. 16-17, cf. Matt. 5:43-48). If Christ cannot let even one sheep stray from the pasture (v. 14), how can we give up easily on those who have hurt us? How can we bear to let the fellowship of the church be fractured by personal conflicts?

Our forgiveness reveals the extent to which we have grasped the significance of God’s forgiveness (vv. 32-35). Just as today’s key verse reminds us, we must forgive as Christ freely forgave us.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Do you have a broken relationship with a brother or sister in Christ? Do as Christ requires of you. First, go to this person alone in a spirit of love and with the purpose of restoration. If this person refuses to listen, take another believer along with you a second time.

If this fails, take yet another brother or sister with you. Pray fervently for unity and fellowship in Christ to be restored.

EPHESIANS 5

Ephesians 5:1-2; John 17:20-26

Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children, and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us. - Ephesians 5:1-2

TODAY IN THE WORD

One of the greatest joys of parenting toddlers and preschoolers is that they want to be just like Mommy or Daddy. They carefully observe their parents and then try to imitate putting on lipstick or mowing the grass. The phrase “when I get big like Daddy ...” signifies the pinnacle achievement of life for a three-year-old boy!

Living a holy and blameless life, a life worthy of the calling we have received, means looking like our Father. Throughout Ephesians Paul has reminded us that in Christ we are new people. We have a new identity. As members of God's chosen people, sons and daughters in God's family, He has given us His Holy Spirit to enable us to live as His people. Through us, God is redeeming His rebellious and fallen world by renewing His presence within that world. By raising Jesus above every other earthly and heavenly power, and by establishing the church, the body of Christ on earth, God has reasserted His claim and authority over fallen creation.

Our responsibility as those called by God into this new creation is to be His renewed image bearers on earth. We are to manifest the presence of Jesus in the world. How do we do this? We imitate God. Yesterday Paul urged us to imitate the forgiveness that Jesus has extended to us (4:32). In our reading today Paul calls us to embody the love that God has shown us in Christ. Jesus gave His life as a fragrant offering to the Father on our behalf (5:2). As imitators of God, we are called to love one another just as God and Jesus have loved us. When we love one another, the world senses the presence of God. God is made known by our love (see John 17:20-26). By loving, we are imitating our Father, acting as He has acted, showing ourselves to be His dearly loved children. People will take notice of our behavior.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Living out sacrificial love is one of the highest and most difficult callings that we have as children of God, especially in a culture that teaches us to demand our rights. Even in the church we can get caught up in wanting everything to revolve around our preferences. By voluntarily surrendering our own desires—even our rights—for someone else, we are imitating Christ. This has consequences beyond our own spiritual life, for God uses this kind of love to attract unbelievers to Himself.

THE IMITATION OF CHRIST

Read Ephesians 5:1–7

Anyone who does what is good is from God. Anyone who does what is evil has not seen God.³ John 1:11

When a child looks or acts like a parent, people say, “The apple doesn’t fall too far from the tree.” It is reasonable to expect children to resemble their parents. The same is true in the spiritual realm.

But this family resemblance is not automatic. It is something that must be learned through imitation. We should not be surprised by this. We learned our former way of life by imitating those around us, especially our family and friends. Now that we have become children of God through the work of Christ, we should follow the example of our heavenly Father.

This command is grounded in the theology of grace outlined in the previous chapters. The imitation of God is not something we can accomplish by sheer human effort. We must first experience the transforming grace of Christ and be empowered by the Holy Spirit.

We follow God’s example by imitating Jesus Christ. He is the one who was incarnated to be fully human, and He “puts a face” on what it means to be like our heavenly Father. Imitating Christ is our response to the grace that we have received. We “walk in the way of love” because Jesus Christ loved us and sacrificed Himself on our behalf (v. 2). We have received His righteousness as a gift and now seek to practice it by following His example.

In verses 3 through 5, the letter outlines the broad contours of what this means in practical terms. Our moral life, finances, and speech are all affected by the grace we have received. Those who claim to be Christians but whose lifestyle is incompatible with their faith should examine themselves to see if they really have experienced the grace of God.

APPLY THE WORD

As you reflect on the example of Jesus Christ, take stock of your lifestyle. Is there a “family resemblance?” Would others who see your life conclude that you partner with those who are disobedient? Give thanks today for the transforming grace of God. If you see something that needs to change, what concrete first step can you take to follow God’s example?

Ephesians 5:2, Hebrews 9:1-14

Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. - Ephesians 5:2

TODAY IN THE WORD

Dr. G. Campbell Morgan (see the April 9 study) said this about believers who are reluctant to commit themselves wholeheartedly to Christ: “When our convictions are yielded to Him completely, He is able to give Himself to us in all His fullness. Until that is so, He cannot trust us. How true it is that we often miss the joy and strength of our Christianity because, by withholding ourselves from Christ, we make it impossible for Him to give Himself to us in all the fullness of His grace and truth.”

What an accurate description of the spiritual loss the recipients of Hebrews were in danger of bringing upon themselves! By pulling back from their commitment to Christ--perhaps under persecution from certain Jewish elements or the threat of it--they were risking the loss of unspeakable blessings.

The first half of Hebrews 9 spells out clearly the two choices facing these believers in terms of their commitment. They could go back to the familiar--the old covenant with its repeated sacrifices offered by imperfect priests. Or they could go on with Christ to enjoy the blessings of the new covenant.

We have hinted at this several times, but it becomes very obvious in today’s text: if you ever have reason to doubt the advantages we enjoy in Christ, turn to these verses immediately. The contrast could not be greater.

Notice, for example, the difference between the “earthly sanctuary” of the old covenant and heaven’s “greater and more perfect tabernacle,” in which Christ offered His sacrifice (vv. 1, 11). And this is just the beginning.

The priests under the first covenant had to offer sacrifices “regularly,” while the high priest had to go into the “inner room,” the Holy Place, every year (vv. 6-7). But Jesus entered the Most Holy Place in the heavenly tabernacle “once for all” (v. 12), one of the key phrases in Hebrews. Also, the Old Testament priests brought the blood of animals (vv. 7, 12-13), while Jesus came into the Holy of Holies on the merit of His own sacrifice (vv. 12, 14).

And here’s the best part. Although the blood of sacrificial animals could not make a final cleansing for sin, the blood of Christ has washed away sin’s stain forever (vv. 10, 14)!

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Notice that everything about the old system required human effort.

The tabernacle was built by human beings, someone had to raise the animals for sacrifice, and the blood was offered by human priests. But Christ’s sacrifice and present priestly ministry are divine; the writer even says the heavenly tabernacle was “not man-made.”

The point? The work of redemption has been done for us. We are free to “serve the living God” (v. 14). Where has He called you to serve Him today, or this week? Serve Him with all your heart!

Ephesians 5:3-10; Colossians 3:5-10

Be on your guard against all kinds of greed. - Luke 12:15

TODAY IN THE WORD

There once was a very wealthy man. His farmland was very productive. In fact, his crops were so abundant that his barn couldn’t hold the harvest. He wasn’t quite sure what to do. Finally, he decided to build a bigger barn for the extra grain. Then he could just sit back and relax, knowing that he didn’t have to worry about a thing—he had more than enough. But God was displeased with this plan, and said to the greedy man, “You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?” (Luke 12:20).

You may be wondering what the Parable of the Rich Fool (Luke 12:13-21) has to do with today’s readings. At first glance, it seems as if these two passages primarily concern sexual immorality. But a closer reading shows that greed is an important part of each

passage as well. What Luke 12, Ephesians 5, and Colossians 3 all have in common is that they show that greed is a failure to recognize that every good gift comes from God and to be thankful for what God had provided. In the parable, the rich fool fails to see that his harvest is a gift from God. In Paul's exhortations to the Ephesians and Colossians, problems with sexual immorality are linked with a failure to be thankful for what God has given.

The connection between sexual sin and greed goes back to the tenth commandment, which forbids coveting the wife of one's neighbor. As our previous study showed, covetousness is a failure to be thankful for what God has provided, which leads to looking elsewhere (see November 9). We also noted that thanksgiving was part of God's calling for His people. Paul may have had these covenant commandments in mind when he wrote Ephesians. Notice also the clear connection that Paul draws between "God's holy people" (v. 3) and thanksgiving.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

It may be surprising that Paul links greed with idolatry in Colossians 3:5. But recall that the first commandment forbids having any other god apart from the Lord God. Greed can easily lead to idolatry because we're focused on the gift, such as sexual intimacy, rather than the Giver of the gift and His purposes for the gift. Once again, thanksgiving is the key. As Bible scholar Walter Liefeld writes, "Thanksgiving ... not only expresses satisfaction but, in a sense, can even create satisfaction within us."

Ephesians 5:3-7; Galatians 5:16-25

No immoral, impure or greedy person ... has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ. - Ephesians 5:5

TODAY IN THE WORD

The old saying goes, "Talk is cheap." In our passage today, Paul wants us to understand very clearly that both words and actions matter—and empty words have no place in the kingdom of God.

For several days now Paul has been presenting examples of negative behavior for us to avoid. The Gentiles, that is, those to whom the Ephesians used to belong before they were included in Christ, live by following their own desires. God's children, by contrast, are to live for the good of the church. All the negative examples Paul has listed starting in 4:25 are intended to show us how not to live. Those who live in these ways reflect the fallen order, not the image God wants His children to bear.

But is Paul really serious here? Does it really matter how we live? According to Paul, it's a matter of life and death. This is not the only place we find Paul drawing lines between those who inherit the kingdom and those who do not. In Galatians 5:19-21 Paul says much the same thing. The key is that those who are truly God's children demonstrate that they are God's children. Paul has already told us that God's holy people have God's Holy Spirit dwelling in them enabling them to live holy and blameless lives (see also Gal. 5:24-25). If we claim to be in Christ, but our lives are characterized by sins like sexual immorality, coarse joking, and greed, our claim amounts to empty words and we stand to face the wrath of God (Eph. 5:6).

Grace is free, but it is not cheap. Jesus did not die so that the old order of the fallen world would remain intact. He died so that the redemption of creation could begin. We are the vanguard of that redemption, the body of Christ on earth. Our call is actually to live as Christ lived. To live any other way is to call into question whether or not we truly are children of God.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

In the United States, where we can easily find churches that will develop programs and messages around making us feel better about ourselves, we can lose sight of the cost of God's grace. To help give you a proper perspective, read *The Cost of Discipleship* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German pastor who resisted the Nazi regime. Unlike the message of our society, "easy" does not always mean "good." As Christians, we want to run the good race, even when that path is difficult.

OUT OF DARKNESS

Read Ephesians 5:8–17

You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness.¹ Thessalonians 5:5

Few of us live far from an artificial light source. Whether it is the table lamp, the streetlight, or the neon sign from a nearby building, we rarely experience absolute darkness. We might forget the contrast between pitch-black dark and the illuminating rays of light.

The lifestyle of one who belongs to Jesus Christ should have that kind of contrast with someone whose actions are marked by "the

fruitless deeds of darkness” (v. 11). Such a lifestyle can be a message in itself, exposing the true nature of those who are “disobedient” (v. 12). A lifestyle of walking in the light does not substitute for the words of the gospel, but it is a powerful confirmation of the gospel. Paul’s language in verse 8, which affirms that those who are in Christ “are” light rather than merely being “in” the light, testifies to the profound change in us effected by the gospel.

It is also clear, however, that this gospel transformation involves a learning curve. God’s forgiveness and the gift of righteousness are immediate. We receive them the moment we trust in Jesus Christ. Our practice of righteousness, on the other hand, is a process. We must “find out what pleases the Lord” in order to practice it (v. 10).

This means that we can expect the light of God’s Word and the searching ministry of the Holy Spirit to expose aspects of our lives that need to be changed. We should not be discouraged when this happens. This kind of conviction is evidence that our citizenship has been transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light. In order to find out what pleases the Lord we must exercise care in the way that we live. Discerning the Lord’s will begins with a knowledge of His Word.

APPLY THE WORD

Our concerns about discerning God’s will usually involve questions of direction. What job should we take? Which schools should we attend? Whom should we marry? It is a good thing to ask for God’s guidance in such matters. But the real question about God’s will is whether our actions are consistent with those who are “light in the Lord” (v. 8).

Ephesians 5:8-14; Philippians 2:14-16

Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you. - Ephesians 5:14

TODAY IN THE WORD

A favorite biology class experiment for schoolchildren traces the effects of light on plant growth. Over the course of the experiment, different plants are given different amounts of light, and the students chart the results. The connection between light and life applies spiritually as well.

Back toward the beginning of this letter Paul spoke about the resurrection power of God at work in us (see 1:18-19). Here he develops this a bit further by comparing our old lives to darkness and our new lives in Christ to light (v. 8). We want to look closely at the way in which he compares resurrection life to light.

Paul first sets out a contrast between the “fruit of light” and the “deeds of darkness” (v. 9-11). From the rest of the letter we know that the fruit of light refers to the good, holy works that God has prepared for us to do, while the deeds of darkness point back to our old lives and the very sins he has just been denouncing. We used to do these things when we were dead in our sins. God, in Christ Jesus, called us out of that darkness into His marvelous light. We now know what God desires—goodness, righteousness, and truth—in short, holy and blameless lives (5:9-10, see also 1:4; 4:1).

When God called us, He awakened us from our state of sleep. Sleep was and still is a common euphemism for death, which is what Paul means here. God brought us out of the realm of the dead and brought us into the realm of Christ’s resurrection light. In other words, God has given us the resurrection life of Jesus whose life is the light of the world (see John 1:1-10). Paul is still considering the way in which we bear the image of Christ. Jesus is life and light. As those in Christ, we have begun to share in the light of His resurrected life. When we bear the fruit of that light by living holy and righteous lives, that light shines forth into the darkened, fallen world like stars or a city set upon a hill (Matt. 5:14)

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

We cannot shine in the darkness if we are not in the light. Psalm 119:105 says, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.” One important way that we are formed in Christ’s resurrected life is through reading, studying, memorizing, and meditating upon His Word. Reading Today in the Word is a good start, but don’t let your relationship with Scripture end here. Through memorizing verses and doing in-depth Bible study, you’ll discover great growth in your spiritual life.

Ephesians 5:15-20

Thanks be to God-through Jesus Christ our Lord! - Romans 7:25

TODAY IN THE WORD

During the Great Depression, around 25 percent of working-age Americans were unemployed, and many others were barely employed. Even Hollywood felt the effects of this economic crisis. In 1933, box office revenues fell by 40 percent. Even so,

Hollywood still churned out movie after movie, and around 60 to 80 million Americans went to the cinema every week. Although some Depression-era movies addressed serious issues, many films depicted a wealthy, glamorous world far beyond the reach of movie-goers. As historian Dixon Wecter writes, "The content of the motion picture ... was designed for escape ... [for] tired or jaded adults seeking a never-never land of luxury and melodrama, sex and sentiment."

For many people today, movies and television continue to offer a means of escaping the realities of everyday life. For others, alcoholic beverages offer a similar means of escape. Some of these things may not be inherently wrong; for example, it's not necessarily a sin to watch television. Today's passage ultimately concerns wisdom and how to live a pure and purposeful life in the midst of evil days (v. 16). Instead of going along with the crowd, trying to escape the evil world around us, we're to be filled with the Spirit and with gratitude. The passive voice, "be filled," indicates that we're to allow God to do the filling, which also means that we aren't to be distracted by things, such as alcohol or entertainment, that distort our thinking. In other words, we're to be controlled by the Holy Spirit, and not by anything else.

The rest of today's passage develops this idea. Whereas being controlled by some chemical substance often leads to inappropriate behavior, being controlled by the Spirit leads to praise, worship, and thanksgiving. As Galatians 5:23 says, "Against such things there is no law." Notice also the exhortation to praise the Lord with other believers (v. 19), indicating the importance of Christian fellowship.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Wisdom is essential for the Christian life. Clearly, some movies should be avoided and there are good reasons to abstain from drinking. But this passage isn't saying that anytime we watch television, read a romance novel, or go to the movies that we're avoiding reality. That thinking ultimately leads to legalism. Instead, this passage shows us that sober thinking and pure living are only possible through the Spirit. This passage shows that thanksgiving, together with praise, is a natural outflow of the Spirit-filled Christian life.

Ephesians 5:15-20

Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise. - Ephesians 5:15

TODAY IN THE WORD

Robert Downey Jr., considered one of the most talented actors in his generation by critics, has seen his career devastated because of his drug addiction. During the trial for one of his drug-related arrests he told the judge, "It's like I've got a shotgun in my mouth and my finger on the trigger, and I like the taste of gunmetal." Even though he was aware of the dangers of his habit, Downey was controlled by his desire for drugs.

In our passage today Paul examines this matter of control. As those who live in the glorious resurrection light and life of Jesus Christ, we of all people are able to understand what the Lord's will for us is—holy living. Those who are apart from Christ continue to live in their darkened understanding (see 4:18), but as part of becoming new people in Christ, our understanding has been transformed. We live in the light and are able to see what God desires.

The key to this wisdom is living in the fullness of the Spirit. Paul compares and contrasts being filled with wine, that is, being drunk, with being filled with the Spirit. Drunkenness is a state in which the power of alcohol controls our actions. In a sense Paul uses the image of drunkenness as yet another picture of our state of sleeping, or death (see 5:14). When we were dead in our sins we were under the control of the ruler of this age and of our sinful desires (see 2:1-3; 4:19). When we were included in Christ, we were finally and joyously released from those rulers and authorities. In the place of those old powers, God gave us His Holy Spirit. The Spirit ought now to be the controlling influence in our lives.

Whereas our old selves were controlled by the deadly wine of our selfish desires, our new selves overflow with the thankfulness and joy of the Spirit. Instead of unwholesome and empty speech, we are able to build each other up and give each other grace by testifying to one another in psalms, hymns, spiritual songs, and thanksgiving to God (vv. 19-20).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

What's controlling you? You may not struggle with addictions like alcohol or drugs—but what about selfishness and a critical spirit? These are just as deadly to our spiritual health and ability to live fully in service to others.

If we are not living under the control of the Holy Spirit, we are wasting the great potential that God has given us to glorify Him and to shine His light to others.

Ephesians 5:15-18 Colossians 4:5-6;

Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. - Colossians 4:5

TODAY IN THE WORD

The days between Christmas and New Year's are unlike any others. It usually takes several days for the glitter, the gifts, and the guests from Christmas to find their place. And just when we've dealt with that, we are faced with a new year. Since the holidays often leave us a little fatigued, it's easy to coast through the final days of the year without giving them much thought.

We suggest another way to approach this important time of preparation: making the most of every opportunity God gives us to serve Him this week and strengthen our hearts for 1999.

We have some good studies ahead to help you do that, starting today as we turn back to the book of Colossians and finish Paul's powerful teaching on the supremacy of Christ. We'll stay with Paul the rest of the way, closing out the year with two special challenges from his writings. Who better to spend time with this week than the great apostle?

In the final chapter of Colossians, Paul is showing how Christ's Lordship in our lives should impact our relationships. His concern in verse 5 is the way our faith impacts outsiders, unbelievers who are not yet members of Christ's body, the church.

Since Christians in Paul's day were a relatively new minority in a distinctly pagan world, it was critical for believers to make the teaching about God our Savior attractive (Titus 2:10). That's important in every generation, of course, because our lives are either a magnet or a repellent when it comes to our witness before non-Christians.

The opportunities to communicate the gospel to those who don't yet know Christ and serve others in the body are abundant. We don't have to search for them. Our challenge is to make the most of the openings God brings our way.

Since God's kingdom opportunities can come at any time, we need wisdom to recognize them and react accordingly (see Eph. 5:15, 17). It's interesting that Paul mentioned our speech as a primary example of wise living (Col. 4:6). If we can use our tongues wisely in 1999, we're on our way to a great year!

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

While many people struggle to control their speech through their own efforts, we have a divine helper who is ready to take control of our lips and our hearts.

Be filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18) is a foundational command and principle that can revolutionize your life in 1999. Notice that the very next words in verse 19 deal with the way we talk. The Holy Spirit can help us make our words full of grace. Why not submit your heart to Him today, asking God to fill you with His love and power in the year ahead?

Ephesians 5:18-20

TODAY IN THE WORD

Neither the stress of failing eyesight nor the threat of a debtor's prison hanging over him deterred composer George F. Handel as he furiously composed his masterpiece, The Messiah. In an inspired flurry of musical creativity, Handel completed the entire oratorio in approximately three weeks. Handel said later that as he wrote, he felt as if his heart would burst with joy at what he was hearing in his mind and heart.

For more than two hundred years since, the hearts of countless believers have burst with joy at performances of The Messiah. The glorious music stirs us, and the words are almost entirely from Scripture. The Messiah is a teaching and learning experience straight from God's Word!

This exemplifies what God intended whenever we are filled with His Spirit. One of the traps we can fall into in our churches today is treating music as a "mood setter," a prelude to the sermon. But according to Paul, worship is one of the results of being filled with the Spirit, that is, under the Spirit's continual control.

This is why we are exhorted to speak to one another in various forms of music. We can teach, admonish, encourage, remind and warn one another of God's truth as we sing in community.

This is why the "one another" command we are studying today follows immediately after the command to be filled with the Spirit. A Spirit-filled person cannot help expressing that joy in music. In the process, he or she brings glory to God and ministers to the rest of the body of Christ.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Matthew 26:30 reminds us that as Jesus was on His way to the cross, He and the disciples sang a hymn.

If Jesus could sing in the shadow of Calvary, we can sing in the face of any trial. Are you up against something right now that is robbing you of joy? Choose your favorite hymn of praise and adoration to the Lord, and sing it today in your devotions. Are you rejoicing over some victory or an answer to prayer? Let a song of thanks be your offering of gratitude to God.

UNDER THE INFLUENCE

Read Ephesians 5:18–20

Teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns and songs from the Spirit. Colossians 3:16

In June lawmakers in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, approved six bills designed to curtail drunken driving. The problem of public intoxication is a national epidemic. Over one million people are arrested yearly for driving under the influence.

The abuse of alcohol can also be a problem for the church. As Paul concludes his series of directives on what our new life in Christ should look like, he addresses the problem of drunkenness. Instead of telling his readers to “just say no,” the Apostle offers an alternative. Believers should not get drunk on wine, but are to “be filled with the Spirit” (v. 18). This command not only prohibits drunkenness, it sheds light on the way the Holy Spirit operates in the life of the believer. **(ED: SEE DISCUSSION OF THE FALLACY OF THE PHRASE "JUST SAY NO")**

Both wine and the Holy Spirit have the capacity to influence our behavior. Yet these two influences result in opposite effects. Drunkenness leads to dissolution. The Greek word that is translated “debauchery” in verse 18 is one that speaks of wild or unrestrained behavior. In other words, the influence of alcohol can lead to a loss of control. The influence of the Holy Spirit means being “controlled” by the Spirit (Rom. 8:9).

Singing could come to the Apostle’s mind because of the contrast between those who are drunk and those who are filled with the Spirit. Instead of drunken songs, the influence of the Spirit results in praise and worship. Those who are under the influence of the Spirit are infused with a spirit of thanksgiving. They express their gratitude to God and encourage one another to do the same. Whether we proclaim our joy through psalms, hymns, or spiritual songs, it is clear that the influence of the Holy Spirit produces worship.

APPLY THE WORD

Alcohol is not the only influence that can have a destructive impact on us. Even healthy things like work and food can control us to an unhealthy degree. If you are in bondage to anything like this you may be able to find help in a support group. Ask your pastor if he can recommend one. God’s indwelling Spirit can help you regain control of your life.

Ephesians 5:18-21

TODAY IN THE WORD

After the civil war in seventeenth-century England had ended and Oliver Cromwell was leading the nation, he ordered all troops in the British army to carry a Bible.

One young soldier bristled. He had joined the army for good times, not to be a “Bible-toter.” But he submitted to the order and stuffed the Bible in his pocket. Later, after a battle, he discovered that the Book had stopped a bullet aimed at him. The bullet had penetrated to Ecclesiastes 11:9, a warning of God’s judgment on youth. The message was too plain for the young soldier to miss, and he put his faith in Christ.

We can’t guarantee that if you practice biblical submission to authority you will be spared from all of life’s “bullets.” But we can promise you, on the authority of Scripture, that obedience to this “one another” command will bring blessing. God always honors obedience.

If there is one word that causes discomfort and spurs resistance within human nature, it is “submission.” From the world’s point of view, the name of the game is power. Battling for control and position is what is valued. Who would willingly place himself under someone else’s authority?

While the idea of submission makes no sense to the world, obeying Ephesians 5:21 is an opportunity for believers to show reverence for Christ. Submission to one another is the way the church of Jesus Christ is designed to function. We are all under authority to God-appointed spiritual leaders; and our leaders are called to exercise loving, servant leadership.

The world's idea of submission is a caricature of the biblical concept. Biblical submission is not a ticket to weakness and defeat. Neither is it meant to be one-sided or heavy-handed. What keeps submission from being one-sided is its mutuality. What keeps it from being heavy-handed or authoritarian is the example of Christ, who "loved the church and gave Himself up for her" (Eph. 5:25).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Everyone in the military knows that an officer is not qualified to give orders until he or she has learned to take orders.

Ministry in the body of Christ is not just about giving and taking orders. But as God's people we must offer willing, joyful submission to those who lead us, in the church and in the home, for their sake and our own (Heb. 13:17).

Ephesians 5:19–20 Psalm 136; Luke 17:11-19

Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs ... always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. - Ephesians 5:19–20

TODAY IN THE WORD

Almighty God, Father of all mercies, we thine unworthy servants do give thee most humble and hearty thanks for all thy goodness and loving-kindness to us ... and we beseech thee, give us that due sense of all thy mercies, that our hearts may be unfeignedly thankful ... through Jesus Christ our Lord ... Amen.—The Book of Common Prayer

It seems that one of the hardest things to teach children—and adults—is to say “thank you.” Modern advertising doesn’t help. Have you ever considered how ads usually prompt dissatisfaction with what we have and direct our focus on what we don’t have?

Ingratitude characterizes the fallen human condition. Consider the account of the ten lepers whom Jesus healed in Luke 17:11–19. Although Jesus healed ten men, only one returned to thank Him—a fact that Jesus found quite remarkable (vv. 12–18). Even though the other nine were healed physically, they missed the spiritual blessing that came to the one with a grateful heart.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Someone once said, “The key to life is to be thankful.” There’s much truth in these simple words!

Thankfulness can correct bad attitudes and redirect our focus to God. Yet, like many other disciplines, gratitude must be cultivated. Ole Hallesby suggests that believers begin with tangible things, such as food and clothing. “Begin with these things and you will notice that it will become easier for you to see and to give thanks for the spiritual gifts.”

With this in mind, thank the Lord for at least ten things in your life today, including things that you might take for granted, such as good health or a steady job. As you consider His material blessings, also thank the Lord for all that is in your life because of His gift of salvation, such as forgiveness of sins and assurance of eternal life.

Gratitude often has the effect of increasing our faith. As we thank the Lord for answered prayer, we are strengthened to bring more things to His throne of grace. Why not start a prayer “log” today, if you don’t already keep one. As you list specific prayer requests, leave room for future answers to these prayers.

Ephesians 5:20; Colossians 3:15-17

Giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. - Ephesians 5:20

TODAY IN THE WORD

Several recent books stress the power of gratitude, such as *Seasons of Grace: The Life-Giving Practice of Gratitude* by Alan Jones and John O’Neil. On the back cover of this book, one reviewer writes, “Most people are grateful because they’re happy; wise people are happy because they’re grateful. Thank you, Alan Jones and John O’Neil, for reminding us of this happy fact.” In *Attitudes of Gratitude: How to Give and Receive Joy Every Day of Your Life*, M. J. Ryan writes, “All we need is an attitude of gratitude. Gratitude creates happiness because it makes us feel full, complete; gratitude is the realization that we have everything we need, at least at this moment.” But remarkably, neither book indicates to whom we should be grateful. It’s one thing to say “thank you,” but it’s also very important to know the “You” whom we’re thanking!

Throughout this month’s study, we’ve seen that gratitude ultimately is directed toward God. It’s always a good idea to say thank-you to someone for a specific gift or kind act. But a lifestyle of gratitude flows from the knowledge that God has extended His grace

toward us. The most powerful example of this is the fact that God the Father sent God the Son to pay the price for our sin so that we might be reconciled with our loving heavenly Father.

Perhaps no other biblical author captures this as well as Paul. We have seen his clear understanding of gratitude in several of our studies. In Colossians 3, Paul shows that we are to give thanks to the Father, through Jesus Christ.

Notice the focus on Christ in this short passage. First, the peace of Christ is to rule our hearts; second, the word of Christ is to dwell within us. And in everything, we are to give thanks in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Notice also the strong link between thanksgiving and worship.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Perhaps this is the first time that you've considered the connection between praise and thanksgiving. To see this more clearly, look up the words thanks, thanksgiving, and praise in a Bible concordance. You'll find many entries in the Psalms. As you look up a few of these entries, you'll see that many times the psalmist moves back and forth between praise and thanksgiving. When our gratitude is focused on the One whom we should thank, praise is a natural response.

MARRIAGE AND HUMILITY

Read Ephesians 5:21–24

Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Colossians 3:18

Samuel Johnson, the eighteenth-century English author, said that marriage was “the best state for man in general; and every man is worse in proportion as he is unfit for the married state.” Over 200 years later, many today believe that marriage is outdated or undesirable. And they think that marriage—at least as it is described in the Bible—is a raw deal for women.

One point of contention is the command in verse 23 of today's reading. The expectation that wives should submit to their husbands seems like an archaic and even embarrassing stipulation in today's egalitarian culture. The comparison between husbands and the Lord hardly helps matters. Is Paul saying that husbands are “lords” over their wives?

The language of headship makes it clear that the Apostle is talking about the structure of authority in the home. To say that the husband functions as head does not mean that he is superior to his wife. Submission to his leadership is not a sign of inferiority. One who submits is not necessarily subordinate. It is possible to submit to someone and still be equal. The fact that Jesus, although equal with the Father, will one day “be made subject” to the one who put everything under His feet, is proof of this (1 Cor. 15:28).

If husbands are to relate to their wives in the way that Jesus Christ relates to the church, then the context of this submission is not domineering abuse but nurturing care. This kind of leadership desires the best interest of one's spouse. Decisions will be made after considering the point of view of the other partner. This is the kind of leadership described by the apostle Peter, when he tells husbands to be “considerate” as they live with their wives and to “treat them with respect” (1 Peter 3:7).

APPLY THE WORD

Submission is never easy, especially when the one to whom we must submit is a peer. Yet according to verse 21 of today's passage, every believer is in some kind of relationship that requires submission. Look for some way to express your appreciation today to others, perhaps by offering a word of encouragement for something you have seen them do well.

Ephesians 5:21; Philippians 2:5-11

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. - Ephesians 5:21

TODAY IN THE WORD

During the funeral services for Ronald Reagan, former President George Bush shared a story illustrating Reagan's humility. Bush described him in the hospital after he was shot in an assassination attempt: “Days after being shot, weak from wounds, he spilled water from a sink, and entering the hospital room aides saw him on his hands and knees wiping water from the floor. He worried that his nurse would get in trouble.”

The model for complete humility and gentleness is Jesus Himself. As Paul spells out the kind of lives God has called us to in Jesus, lives that imitate Him and bear His image, he tells us that relationships in the household of God are to be characterized by mutual submission. Preserving the bond of peace in the family of God demands the kind of humility and submission that Jesus has already shown. To see how Jesus showed humility and submission, let's look at another of Paul's letters.

In Philippians 2 Paul speaks of Jesus' incarnation and suffering unto death on a cross as the ultimate act of humility and submission. Though Jesus is God in His very nature, He submitted to the will of the Father. Jesus had every right to refuse the Father's will—after all, He too is one of the persons of the Godhead. He even prayed three times in the Garden of Gethsemane that the Father would allow the cup of death to pass from Him (Matt. 26:39-44). Nevertheless, He submitted Himself to the will of the Father.

If Jesus, our Lord, had the humility to submit Himself to death, how much more ought we to live in humility and submission toward one another? Relationships in the church are not to be characterized by people lording authority over one another. That, in fact, is how the Gentiles interact with each other (see Matt. 20:25-28). Maintaining peace in the body of Christ depends on our willingness to serve one another and build each another up with the gifts we have been given. When this is our first concern, we will easily submit to one another and follow the example set by our Lord.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

We've mentioned earlier that our culture emphasizes claiming our rights and privileges. In the church, God calls us to surrender our will and desires to serve others. If you struggle with wanting recognition and credit, make it a point to choose some behind-the-scenes ministry. By choosing to serve in a way that won't bring you visibility and acclaim, you can learn to live first and foremost before God, seeking His approval alone.

Ephesians 5:22-33

The wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. - Revelation 19:7

TODAY IN THE WORD

King Edward VIII of England shocked the world when he abdicated from the throne in order to marry the divorced American socialite Wallis Warfield Simpson. Some years later he gave marital advice to a group of his close friends about how to stay on good terms with one's spouse. "Of course, I do have a slight advantage over the rest of you," he admitted. "It does help in a pinch to be able to remind your bride that you gave up a throne for her."

Believers also have a vivid reminder of what it cost Jesus Christ to make the church His bride. He did not give up His throne forever, but He did lay aside the prerogatives of divinity and took upon Himself a human nature (Phil. 2:5-8). Being fully human and fully God, He submitted to a brutal death on the cross in order to purify the church and present it to Himself as a spotless bride (Titus 2:14).

In many ways, this is also the drama played out in the biblical book Song of Songs, also called the Song of Solomon. One of the most mysterious and controversial books of the Bible, its message has something to say about both human marriage and the divine love God has for His church.

Its frank description of the delights of human love has caused some people to wonder why it was included in the Bible. However, the Jewish writings known as the Mishnah quote the second-century Jewish rabbi Aquiba as saying, "All the ages are not worth the day on which the Song of Songs was given to Israel; for all the Writings are holy, but the Song of Songs is the Holy of Holies."

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Do you know a couple who reflect the biblical picture of a loving relationship? Ask them to tell you their story. How did they meet? What was it like to fall in love? What kinds of challenges have they had to overcome in order to keep their love for one another strong?

Ephesians 5:22-24; Proverbs 31:10-31

Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the savior. - Ephesians 5:23

TODAY IN THE WORD

Having set out mutual submission as the characteristic that pervades all relationships within the church (5:21), Paul now discusses some specific relationships within the household of God. In our reading for today he begins to talk about marriage, speaking first about the way a wife should submit to her husband in Christ.

Given that Jesus is the model of humility and submission for all relationships within the church, it's not surprising to find Paul comparing the marriage relationship with that of Jesus and the church. We can learn much about what submission means by reflecting on the relationship between Jesus and the church. As we have already seen, the church represents the presence of Jesus on earth. Everything the church does ought to be directed toward furthering and strengthening that presence. As the head of the

church, Jesus joins and unifies the whole body (see 4:16).

When Paul draws an analogy between the husband as head and the wife as body, he is thinking of headship in these terms. That is, the wife lives for the larger good of the whole family, not for herself alone. She is in no way inferior to her husband, just as Jesus, though He submitted to the Father, is in no way inferior to Him. Notions of submission that imply inferiority or limit God-given gifts must be banished from the church because they actually reflect the darkened abuse of power and authority found among the Gentiles.

Proverbs 31:10-31 makes it very clear that a good wife freely uses the skills and gifts God has given her. She conducts business (vv. 16-18). She supervises the affairs of the household (vv. 26-27), and she enjoys the full confidence and respect of her husband and children (vv. 11, 29-31). The key is that she does what she does for the good of the household (vv. 12, 15, 21). Just as the members of the church work together to strengthen and further the cause of Christ, the head of the body, the godly wife submits to her husband by working to strengthen and further the good of her family.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Mention the word submission at the next social function you attend and see what sort of reactions you get! Even in the church we sometimes allow cultural notions about wifely submission to define the marriage roles rather than the full picture presented in God's Word. For further discussion on this topic, read *Rocking the Roles: Building a Win-Win Marriage* by Robert Lewis. It's published by NavPress and available at your local Christian bookstore or through Web sites like www.christianbook.com or www.amazon.com.

THE AIM OF LOVE

Read Ephesians 5:25–27

Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect. 1 Peter 3:7

In November 1930, Harry Havens went to bed wearing a blindfold and stayed there for the next seven years. He was angry because his wife had criticized the way he helped with chores around the house. He finally got out of bed because it started to feel uncomfortable.

Harry Havens would have risen from his bed sooner had he understood the significance of today's passage. The leadership role assigned to husbands in the home is not a license for self-indulgence. It is a responsibility. The mark of this leadership is sacrificial love. Husbands are to love their wives in the same way that Christ loved the church.

The key distinctive of this model of leadership is not a desire to "get my own way" but to "lay down my own life." The comparison with Christ also indicates that husbands have a spiritual responsibility toward their wives. Teaching about marital roles in the home is often imbalanced, concentrating on the role of the wife in submission and giving little attention to the husband's obligation to sacrifice himself for his wife. In Paul's marriage paradigm the husband is as much a servant to the wife as the wife is to the husband. Indeed, in view of the parallel with Christ's sacrifice for His church, it might even be said that the husband's responsibility to serve is greater. He is to be like the Savior, who "did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:28).

Only Jesus' sacrifice can atone for our sins. But husbands can help their wives to grow in grace and holiness. If they are to be successful in this, they must seek the same thing for themselves. Husbands can lead their wives effectively only if they are followers of Christ first.

APPLY THE WORD

Husband, do these verses describe your leadership style in the home? Why not ask your wife for some input about the things you do well? You may also want to ask for feedback about one or two things you could do better to lead more like Christ. The first step, of course, is to be devoted in your own walk with the Savior.

Ephesians 5:25-33

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. - Ephesians 5:25

TODAY IN THE WORD

In 1990, Dr. Robert McQuilken resigned as president of Columbia Bible College and Seminary. He voluntarily stepped away from a career that he loved in order to care for his wife Muriel, who needed constant care due to Alzheimer's disease. In explaining his decision, Dr. McQuilken wrote, "To put God first means that all other responsibilities he gives are first, too."

Today we will examine the command to husbands found in today's verse. As we saw yesterday, Paul uses the model of Jesus and the church to describe the marriage relationship. Not only is Jesus and the church an image of Christian marriage, but also a good Christian marriage presents the world with an example of Jesus' love for His church.

The husband is to love the wife with the same self-sacrificing love that Jesus has for the church (v. 25). Thus he ought to care for his wife as he does for his own body, even sacrificing his own self for her benefit (vv. 28-29). This is the very kind of mutual submission that Paul spoke of earlier. There is no room for self-aggrandizement, authoritarianism, or any type of abuse in this relationship. The main distinction between husbands and wives is that, like Christ, the husband is responsible for caring for and nurturing his wife.

The great mystery in all of this is that when a godly husband and wife live together in peace and unity, truly living as one flesh and not two individuals, they provide the world with a tangible demonstration of the relationship between Christ and the church. That is, while Jesus' relationship with the church is the model that believing spouses are to imitate, when they do so they actually reflect that model out into the darkened world. Indeed, Paul suggests that all the "marital counseling" he has just given in 5:22-33 is not really about marriage at all, but about the relationship Jesus has with His bride, the church (v. 32). Nevertheless, he adds, husbands and wives ought to live together in the ways he has just spoken about (v. 33).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

The importance of healthy Christian marriages goes far beyond the couple involved. If you are a believer, you have a stake in the witness of marriage—even if you may not be married yourself. If you are married, what does your marriage say to a watching world about the way that Christ loves the church? All of us as the bride of Christ should pray fervently for strong Christian marriages that would illustrate divine love in our darkened world.

Ephesians 5:25 Song of Solomon 4:6-7

Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. - Ephesians 5:25

TODAY IN THE WORD

A popular bumper sticker from a few years ago read, "Christians aren't perfect, just forgiven." Its point is well taken. Those who know Christ share many of the same weaknesses and failings as unbelievers. But this slogan is not entirely accurate.

In today's reading Solo-mon summarizes his impression of the bride by declaring that there is no blemish in her. In human relationships, we can conclude this only by looking at another person through the eyes of love. For Christ's bride, however, perfection is both a gift and responsibility.

When it comes to our standing before God, there is a sense in which Christians are already perfect. Those who know Jesus as Savior have been reconciled to God through the death of Christ. God sees them through the lens of Christ's perfections. As a result, they will be presented to Him "without blemish and free from accusation" (Col. 1:21). According to the writer of Hebrews, "By one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy" (Heb. 10:14).

As far as the believer's practice is concerned, there is still room for improvement. The apostle Paul's goal in ministry was to present believers to Christ as "a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish" (Eph. 5:27). Similarly, Christians are commanded to "aim for perfection" in the way that they live (2 Cor. 13:11).

What, then, are the disciplines that lead to perfection? One of the most important is the discipline of studying God's Word. The apostle Paul wrote that one of his chief aims in preaching God's Word was to "present everyone perfect in Christ" (Col. 1:28). The one who studies the Bible will be "thoroughly equipped" (kjv: "perfect") for every good work (2 Tim. 3:17).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Use a concordance or Bible study software and do a search on the word perfect. In what sense can perfection be described as a goal in the Christian life? When can we expect it to be a state of being?

Ephesians 5:25 Song of Solomon 8:5-9

Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. - Ephesians 5:25

TODAY IN THE WORD

"We are all made for marriage, as our bodies show and the Scriptures state," Martin Luther noted. On this point, however, Luther was wrong. Scripture does not actually say that we are all made for marriage. Jesus taught that being married and being single were

both callings from God. While some marry, others have been called to be single for the sake of the kingdom of God.

Likewise, the apostle Paul pointed out that single people enjoy certain advantages when it comes to serving God. They have the potential to minister without the distractions of married life. The determining factor is a matter of divine purpose for the individual. Paul favored the single life because of his own personal experience; he admitted that “each man has his own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that” (1 Cor. 7:7).

Paul also recognized that one’s marital state is also a matter of choice. When he was asked by a group of singles in the Corinthian church whether it was appropriate for them to marry, Paul left the decision up to them (1 Cor. 7:25–28). They had the freedom to marry whomever they pleased, as long as they married another believer (cf. 1 Cor. 7:39).

In today’s reading the bride speaks of a similar freedom. She compares what she has to offer with the vineyard in Baal-hamon that Solomon already possesses. Just as Solomon had the right to let his vineyard out to tenants, she has the right to give herself to the one she chooses. The Song of Solomon concludes with her offering herself to the one she loves, as a treasure unequalled.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

During the wedding ceremony both husband and wife are asked to make a commitment. In a sense, the same is true of the believer’s relationship with Christ. Jesus has already spoken His vows. He has promised to receive all who come to Him in faith (John 6:37). He sealed this vow by offering Himself on the cross as a payment for sin. All that remains is for us to respond.

THE LOVE DIVIDEND

Read Ephesians 5:28–33

That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh. Genesis 2:24

Self-mutilation is a disturbing trend among troubled youth. Instances of what is often called intentional self-harm appear to be on the rise. Sometimes a symptom of other forms of mental illness, intentional self-harm involves acts like stabbing, cutting, or burning. It is not merely a form of attention-getting behavior and should always be taken seriously.

The apostle Paul observes that “no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church” (v. 29). We might say that a husband who fails to love his wife the way Christ loved the church is engaging in a spiritual form of “self-harm.” Or to express it more positively, a husband who loves his wife sacrificially reaps a dividend in return.

The reason for this is because the husband and wife are really “one flesh.” This language reflects the statement of Genesis 2:24, our verse for today. After Eve was created, Adam acknowledged that God had united the two of them in a way that was as mysterious as it was intimate. Alluding to the fact that Eve had been created out of his rib, Adam called Eve bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh (Gen. 2:23).

What is even more amazing is that the relationship between the husband and wife is really intended to mirror the relationship between Christ and His church. This enables us to understand one of the reasons God has assigned different roles to the husband and wife. He has not done so arbitrarily; rather, these roles are intended to help the world see the gospel more clearly. A Christian marriage that follows the biblical pattern serves as a kind of living parable of Christ and the church.

APPLY THE WORD

Husbands who love their wives as Christ does the church serve their own best interests. Wives who submit to their husbands with respect paint a beautiful picture of what it means to yield to Christ. Today’s culture may not see these as virtue—but Christ does. This kind of love and obedience will not go unrewarded.

EPHESIANS 6

Ephesians 6:1-4

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. - Ephesians 6:1

TODAY IN THE WORD

Pastor and author Joseph Stowell relates a story from a road trip when his children were young. Exasperated with his son in the back seat, he shouted at him to behave. His son sat quietly for a few moments and then responded, “Daddy, that’s not ‘be ye kind.’”

Our obligations to live lives worthy of our calling extend not only into our personal lives and our relationships with others in the church, but also into our households. It may sound obvious, but we need this reminder since we can sometimes deal more lovingly and gently with people in the church than we can with our own family members. God's Word will not let us think that the practice of our faith is exempt from our family, however. For the past few days Paul has told us how the husband/wife relationship ought to be a reflection of the relationship between Jesus and the church. Today Paul has a word for children and parents.

Appealing to the Ten Commandments (see Deut. 5:16), Paul exhorts children to honor their mothers and fathers. This command, Paul observes, is the first command with a promise—God has promised to bless children who honor their parents. Parents, though, are also exhorted by Paul not to use their authority over their children in an abusive way. Children need discipline and direction, but parents must be careful not to exasperate them.

At the surface level these seem like plain commands for children to obey their parents and parents to raise their children with love. That is, godly parents are not responsible simply to teach their children how to be good people. They are responsible for teaching their children how to be godly people. Christian parents have the obligation and the opportunity of bringing their children up “in the training and instruction of the Lord” (v. 4).

Moreover, the fact that Paul qualifies parents with “in the Lord” shows that he is thinking more broadly here than just the physical relationship of child and parent.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

For some of us, our “parents in the Lord” may not be our biological family but rather spiritual leaders who nurtured us in faith. We aren't exempt from the command to honor our parents even if they aren't believers. But we should also honor our spiritual parents, those who—like Paul and Timothy—took the time to invest in our lives and fan into flame the gifts of God (see 2 Tim. 1). If possible, let these parents of faith know how much they have impacted you, and look around for someone you can nurture as well.

HOUSE RULES

Read Ephesians 6:1–9

Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you. Exodus 20:12

Nearly every child who has pushed against the rules has heard a parent say something like this: “As long as you are living under my roof, you will follow my rules.” It is normal for a family to have “house rules” that guide behavior.

This section of Ephesians provides guidelines for Christian households, especially relationships that involve submission. Today's passage focuses on the relationship between children and parents. It also includes a directive for Christian slaves. Paul's words should not be taken as an endorsement of slavery. To the contrary, he urges slaves who are able to obtain their freedom to do so (see 1 Cor. 7:21).

A child's obligation to submit to his or her parents is rooted in God's law. Indeed, this is included in the Ten Commandments. The command to honor one's father and mother is the first commandment with a promise of blessing attached (see Ex. 20:12; Deut. 5:16). But it is also clear from what Paul says about parents that submission is a two-way street. The Apostle's warning that fathers not “exasperate” their children is proof that God is interested in more than bare obedience. He is deeply concerned about the environment in which submission takes place. The Greek term that is translated “exasperate” in verse 4 is rare. Its only other occurrence in Scripture is in Romans 10:19, where it connotes anger and jealousy.

Slaves were to submit to their master for a different reason. For the child it was a matter of divine order. Parents were owed obedience. Slaves were to submit for the sake of their testimony and are told to look beyond their earthly master to Christ. The respect they showed was a reflection of their reverence for Christ.

APPLY THE WORD

Sometimes we must submit to those who do not warrant our respect. If you have done everything you can to change the dynamics of the relationship and have been unsuccessful, remember that God is aware of your service and values obedience that is rendered in His name. Those to whom you submit must also give an account to God.

Ephesians 6:1-4

Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. - Colossians 3:20

TODAY IN THE WORD

Civil rights leaders had planned a march in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1963. The sheriff, Bull Connor, was legendary for his brutal methods, and few people at the organizing meeting were volunteering—until the children stood. When some said they were too young, Rev. James Bevel asked, “Are they too young to go to segregated schools? Are they too young to be kept out of amusement parks? Are they too young to be refused a hamburger in a restaurant? Then they are not too young to want their freedom.” Over one thousand children marched in Birmingham, facing fire hoses, police dogs, and imprisonment. Their courage was captured by television cameras and began to reshape national views on civil rights.

In our reading, Paul was giving instructions to the church in Ephesus on how to live together as the body of Christ. And he included children in his discussion of Christian relationships. Children are not too young to receive instructions about holy living, nor should they be excluded from life in the church.

This teaching would have been rather revolutionary at the time. First, for children to be addressed at all was shocking, since they had no rights or privileges in society. Second, the book of Ephesians instructs children to obey their parents, but the command includes the provision “in the Lord.” This obedience doesn’t stem from the parents’ “ownership” of the child, but rather because this obedience brings glory to God. He ordains the structure and relationships of the family, and obedience is ultimately an act of submission to Him.

Next, Paul connected this command back to the Law given by God to Moses (see Deut. 5:16). Obedience is connected to being blessed by God and being in a position for Him to work through us. Finally, Paul addressed fathers with an exhortation on parenthood. Parents have authority, but the point is not to browbeat or “exasperate” their children. It is to “bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord” (v. 4).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

If you came from a godly home, these verses may bring warm, comforting memories. But if you didn’t—or currently live in a dysfunctional family—you might feel frustrated knowing that your family doesn’t measure up to these standards. We’ve seen unhealthy families throughout our study, and one thing is consistent: God works despite our failures. He cares about families, and He has the power to heal bruised and broken relationships. You can trust Him to heal the pain of your past or repair the damage in your present family.

Ephesians 6:4, Hebrews 10:24-25

TODAY IN THE WORD

William McGuffey loved to learn. Born in Youngstown, Ohio, in 1800, McGuffey learned the “three R’s” from his mother and attended classes taught by the local minister. He began teaching other students at the age of 13, furthering his own education by borrowing books from neighbors. McGuffey became a college professor at the age of 26; but he is best remembered for his series of readers, which were used by generations of American school children. The McGuffey Readers urged students to adopt virtues such as truthfulness, kindness, hard work, thrift and sobriety.

William McGuffey was very successful at motivating others to practice virtuous behavior. He used interesting examples to make his point, knowing how important it is for people to see virtue in action.

McGuffey was not the first person to understand the value of a good example when it comes to helping people do what’s right. The writer of Hebrews wanted his readers to make a deliberate effort to find ways they could spur one another forward in their Christian walk.

In the original Greek, the word “spur” is as strong and sharp as a cowboy’s spur. It is used in Acts 15:39 to describe how sharp the disagreement was between Paul and Barnabas. And Paul uses it in Ephesians 6:4 to warn fathers not to “exasperate” their children.

Why did the author of Hebrews use such a potent term? Considering that these Jewish believers were wavering unsteadily in their faith, they needed a jolt to wake them up to the seriousness of their plight and the importance of remaining true to Christ.

How could the readers of Hebrews get spiritual strength? By fanning the flame of their love and by helping one another do the good works that are the mark of true Christians (Eph. 2:10). By meeting together faithfully, they would maximize their opportunities for mutual encouragement.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

How do you spur another believer to love and good deeds? Several ways come to mind. For example, a word of encouragement and

support to someone who is serving Christ can be a real boost. Offering a hand is another way to help ensure that good deeds get done.

Ephesians 6:5-9

You know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether slave or free. - Ephesians 6:8

TODAY IN THE WORD

Many Americans think of slavery as a horrible institution that was abolished over a century ago. Sadly, though, nonprofit groups and governments agree that more people are enslaved today than at any time in history. According to Anti-Slavery International, a British-based human rights organization, the most common contemporary form of slavery is bonded labor, afflicting some 20 million victims, who accept “employment” as a means of repaying a loan. But as the interest skyrockets, the loan can never be repaid and the “employer” subjects the victim to unreasonably grueling hours, as well as physical or sexual abuse.

Unfortunately, our passage today has been used to defend slavery and to compel slaves to submit to their masters. When these verses are read carefully in light of Ephesians 5:21, we can see that for Paul, the gospel message radically altered human relationships. Living at a time when institutions such as slavery could not be completely overturned, Paul did understand that uses of power and authority within their system were to look dramatically different for believers. If the individuals in those relationships are “in Christ” and no longer Gentiles, then love and peace rather than force and threats ought to characterize the relationship.

Paul explicitly inverts the traditional notion of authority in this passage. He does call slaves to obey their masters, but the reason is to earn favor with the Lord (v. 8). The source of authority is not the master, but God Himself. More remarkably, Paul uses this same conviction to exhort masters to treat their slaves with kindness rather than with violence and threats (v. 9). They are subject to the same ultimate authority, and unlike humans, God shows no favoritism. The master's earthly power will mean nothing in the final judgment if it has been misused. Paul's teaching actually begins to undermine the institution of slavery as it existed in his own day. All authorities are subject to Christ and will answer to Him for the ways that authority was exercised.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Christians have put modern slavery on the agenda of governments around the world. This follows a long history of Christians fighting against slavery, including William Wilberforce who led the movement to ban slavery in Great Britain in the 1700s. It's consistent with Paul's exhortation for Christians to represent different models of power in the world.

Ephesians 6:5-9 1 Peter 2:18-21;

Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect, fear, and sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. - Ephesians 6:5

TODAY IN THE WORD

Earlier this year, the city council in the small town of Argyle, Texas, outside Dallas, rescinded a controversial policy after a week of national media attention and plenty of barbs. The policy prohibited municipal workers from making negative comments about city officials and from spreading rumors.

The people in Argyle made an honest attempt to improve relationships among city workers. But no ordinance can deal effectively with the snarled relationships that human sin has introduced into the workplace.

There are powerful and effective written instructions for handling this problem, but they aren't on any city's books. They are in the Book. The need for guidance from God's Word is obvious from the fact that the most common working relationship in the biblical world was that of masters and slaves. But such slavery was a product of sinfulness, not godliness.

God never condoned slavery, but Paul also recognized that there was a bigger issue at stake for believers than their social status. That issue was obeying and pleasing God in whatever role a person was serving (1 Cor. 7:17-24).

Both Paul and Peter instructed slaves to work for their masters as if they were working for Christ. That brings God glory and results in a reward (see the August 10 study), but it doesn't mean that obeying will always be easy.

Peter suggested this when he acknowledged that some masters were “harsh” and could inflict unjust punishment on their workers. But by bearing up under this treatment for the sake of Christ, a Christian slave (or employee) would honor God and free Him to deal with a harsh boss.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

If you have worked anywhere for any length of time, you have seen people who work with one eye on the clock, and the other on the door or hallway in case the boss suddenly shows up.

THE ARMOR OF GOD

Read Ephesians 6:10–20

Let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet.¹ Thessalonians 5:8

Scan the titles of today's best-selling fiction and you will find vampires, zombies, and other supernatural terrors. Some readers seem to be obsessed with the powers of darkness.

In our reading today, the Apostle shows that the Christian faces spiritual forces far more terrible and powerful than any vampire or zombie. Scripture speaks of rulers, authorities, and powers of this dark world. These are spiritual forces and not creatures of flesh and blood. What is more, they are directed by an even greater power, because all their efforts are intended to further Satan's schemes.

The fact that these cosmic forces are spiritual and not made of flesh and blood means that our natural defenses are useless in defending against them. With enemies like this, only spiritual defenses will do. Fortunately, God in His grace has provided us with a complete suit of armor that can enable us to stand against these powers of evil. Truth, righteousness, faith, and the Word of God equip us to defend ourselves and will protect us against the onslaught of the enemy. Although we may seem to lose an occasional skirmish, the fact that God has already provided us with salvation guarantees that we will ultimately win the war. Satan can oppose us but he will never be able to defeat us.

The strategy we use to engage the enemy is as singular as the weapons God has provided. In a sense, we might describe it as a war of words. This conflict is carried forward through prayer, as we pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests (v. 18). We pray not only for ourselves but for others who are engaged in the struggle. This is a war that we wage on our knees.

APPLY THE WORD

Spiritual warfare seems very mysterious and may even frighten us. We wonder how we can engage the enemy without going to unbiblical extremes. A good place to start may be *Victory Over the Darkness* by Neil T. Anderson (Multnomah), which focuses on our victory in Christ and uses a Scripture-oriented approach to spiritual warfare.

Ephesians 6:10-18

The sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. - Ephesians 6:17

TODAY IN THE WORD

The samurai warriors of medieval Japan believed their swords had spiritual reality and power. These swords were always with them, from birth to death, whether in the bedroom or on the battlefield. Those who made the swords approached their craft as a spiritual endeavor, fasting, praying, and even wearing priestly white robes. They mixed and hammered layers of hard and soft steel to forge swords that excelled in both sharpness and strength. To the warriors, these swords represented their honor.

We should take the "sword of the Spirit" with equal seriousness, for its truth and power come from God. Today's reading describes the "armor of God," by which we put on His strength rather than relying on our own (v. 10). Spiritual warfare is real, for the Devil is scheming how to put stumbling blocks in our path, and if we trust in ourselves to fight these battles we will surely fall (vv. 11-12).

The sole offensive weapon in Paul's extended metaphor is "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (v. 17). Under house arrest at the time that he wrote Ephesians (v. 20), he may have been using his guards as a visual reference as he described the belt, breastplate, shield, sandals, helmet, and short sword.

While a typical Roman soldier also carried a spear, these guards wouldn't have needed one for this assignment, which probably explains why there's no spear in Paul's picture.

Hebrews 4:12-13 uses the same vivid comparison. In these verses, we understand that God's words are dynamic, purposeful, and powerful. They penetrate and judge us accurately, leaving no room for hiding or self-deception. They wound us with razor-sharp edges when we harbor sinful attitudes or actions.

Because God is the Author, His Word is effectively linked to His omniscience, wisdom, and right to judge. This truth should inspire in

us humility, respect, and gratitude. The live words of a live God are a very great gift!

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

If you have never before memorized Hebrews 4:12, today is a great time to start! If you feel overwhelmed with idea of Scripture memory, try at least one phrase a day.

The verse reads: "For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."

Ephesians 6:10-12

TODAY IN THE WORD

Armor in its various forms was a major component of military strategy and warfare for many centuries. Animal skins and metals such as bronze and steel protected warriors from the earliest days of recorded history. But according to one source, the invention of firearms made armor obsolete. Armor that was strong enough to protect the wearer against gunfire was so heavy that it became impractical.

As believers in Jesus Christ, we are facing some pretty heavy firepower, the "fiery darts" of Satan (Eph. 6:16, KJV). We can be grateful that the armor God gives us with which to combat and defeat Satan will never weigh us down while giving us divine protection!

Today we begin a three-day study of the classic biblical text on spiritual warfare. Paul's exhortation to put on the full armor of God suggests that we do in fact have a battle to fight and that we have supernatural resources with which to do it.

Notice that our strength and power for warfare are found in the Lord (v. 10). We're not guerrilla warriors on our own out in the jungle, fighting and surviving by our wits. And this is a good thing, because none of us can match wits with the devil and expect to win.

Even though we may not fight as guerrillas, the devil's schemes often resemble guerrilla tactics such as hit-and-run movements and sneak attacks. Satan seldom hits believers with blatant, frontal attacks. These are so obvious that we can sometimes defend ourselves against them.

Whatever strategy the enemy may use, our battle with the spiritual forces of evil is very real. One of the objections often raised against studying a topic such as spiritual warfare is that it amounts to little more than "looking for a demon behind every bush."

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Today is Memorial Day, a time when we honor those who have worn the "armor" of our nation's military and have died defending our freedoms.

Ephesians 6:10-12; Romans 8:31-39

Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but ... against the powers of this dark world. - Ephesians 6:12

TODAY IN THE WORD

In Shakespeare's play Othello, the villain Iago hates his boss Othello because he was passed over for a promotion. To seek revenge, he convinces Othello that his wife Desdemona has been unfaithful. Tragically, Othello believes Iago and murders his wife. By not knowing who his real enemy was, at the end of the play Othello has lost everything, even his own life.

Paul doesn't want us to be confused about who our real enemies are. Earlier he told us that all powers are under the dominion of Jesus, although not all have yet submitted to His rule (1:20-22). The battle of these rebellious forces against God continues despite their defeat at the Cross. God is winning back His darkened world through Christ's death and resurrection. The presence of His Holy Spirit in the world represents a reassertion of His ultimate authority over His rebellious creation.

Everything Paul has said about our responsibility as those called and chosen by God to bear the image of Christ in this dark world concerns our role in this cosmic battle. The enemy we fight against is not one of flesh and blood. Our enemy is none other than the Devil himself. But how are we to discern this spiritual enemy and his cohort?

One way to distinguish between what comes from God's light and what comes from the Devil's darkness is to see how power and authority are handled. Where power is in the service of God, peace, love, gentleness, and unity will be present. Mutual submission will mark those relationships. Where power is in the service of the Devil, anger, abuse, threats, and violence will abound. To live as

the Gentiles live is to continue to fight on the side of the Devil. We advance the cause of redemption by living holy and blameless lives worthy of our calling, and through the power of the Spirit, we can live this way. We can serve God and Christ as faithful soldiers in this battle, even becoming more than conquerors over the dark forces of the Devil (see Rom. 8:37-39).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Everyone is in some sort of authority relationship. If you're in charge, do you berate or belittle those under you? Do you treat them respectfully and fairly? And how do you respond to those who are in authority over you, whether your boss, government officials, or church leaders? Do you undermine them, or pray for them? The ways that we live in these relationships reveal much about our overall spiritual health. God has called us to live in peace, love, gentleness, and unity.

Ephesians 6:12 Daniel 10:10-21

Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against ... the spiritual forces of evil. - Ephesians 6:12

TODAY IN THE WORD

Not long ago, an American citizen returning to Florida from the Netherlands became the victim of a bizarre incident. As the man was preparing to board his flight in Amsterdam, a Dutch officer secretly put two explosive devices in his luggage to test airport security. Unfortunately, the officer was called away and forgot to remove the devices. The American flew to Orlando with his extra ""baggage"" and was detained when the explosives were found. The mess was straightened out, and Dutch officials were told to stop their ""bombs in the baggage"" tests.

Imagine how much different the story would have been if this passenger had been made aware of what was happening. Chances are he would never have boarded that plane without definitely knowing that the explosives had been removed from his bags.

There's someone trying to put bombs in our luggage too, only this isn't a test. Satan is trying to bring us down spiritually, as he did with Peter (see yesterday's study). The difference is that we are not ""unaware of his schemes"" (2 Cor. 2:11). God's Word clearly instructs us that we are in a spiritual battle.

What does this have to do with our prayer lives? Everything, judging by this intriguing incident in the life of Daniel. The setting for the story is the visions given to Daniel concerning the future. The prophet prayed intensely for wisdom to understand the awesome and overwhelming things he was seeing.

The angel sent to communicate with Daniel revealed to him the reason for the three-week delay in the answer. This angel had been withstood by an evil spirit called ""the prince of the Persian kingdom."" The conflict was so intense that the archangel Michael had to come and clear the way.

Someone might read this and say, ""Well, I'm no Daniel receiving heavenly visions. My prayers aren't important enough to attract this kind of heavenly attention.""

Really? The Bible doesn't say that. Every time the Word mentions spiritual warfare, we are included in the battle. We need to pray with persistence and power because the devil hates our prayers and would shoot them down if he could. But he can't!

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Daniel 10 seems so far removed from our daily experience that it's hard for us to identify with the prayer battle described there.

But don't miss the point of the lesson. Prayer is not a private exercise we do to make ourselves feel better. Our prayers are not just little sentiments and requests we shoot up toward heaven. When we pray, we assault Satan's kingdom and arouse his opposition. So if you encounter resistance in your prayer life, that's a signal to keep at it instead of giving up.

Ephesians 6:13-15

TODAY IN THE WORD

We observed yesterday that as weapons became increasingly destructive, armor gradually disappeared from the world's battlefields. While that's true, we want to add that we still have some of armor's modern cousins with us today. A police officer's bullet-proof vest is one example, as are the helmets and pads worn by athletes in sports, including football and ice hockey.

The purpose of protection that gave rise to armor has been adapted to the needs of various ""warriors"" today. Our spiritual armor is perfectly suited to us, too. There isn't one unnecessary piece or an ounce of coverage we don't need. That's because the designer of our armor is the Lord Himself.

In verse 13 Paul repeats our primary responsibility in warfare: to "put on the full armor of God" (see v. 11). Wearing the armor our almighty God has designed, we are called to take our stand. His armor is meant to protect us in active battle, not to prop us up.

Today's text covers a good portion of the Christian's armor. The "belt of truth" pictures the belt that held all the pieces of a Roman soldier's armor together. Last Saturday we learned about the power that God's truth has to defend and protect us. Since lies are Satan's weapon of choice, the truth of God's Word is indispensable in our spiritual warfare.

The breastplate protected a soldier's heart. Because we are covered in the righteousness of Christ, no "flaming arrow" of the enemy can attack our relationship with Him. Our hearts are secure in Christ!

The third piece of armor we need to put on is footwear that gets us ready for travel. In Romans 10:15 Paul talks about the "beautiful feet" of those who bring the gospel to others (see Isa. 52:7).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

We hope that throughout this month we have conveyed this crucially important truth: Satan is the one "on the run" in spiritual warfare, not us. And he has already lost the war.

The elements of the armor we have studied today reflect this truth. We have God's truth that no force on earth or in hell can deny. Our salvation is secure in Christ. And we are prepared for action by the "shoes" of the gospel.

Ephesians 6:13-18

Therefore put on the full armor of God. - Ephesians 6:13

TODAY IN THE WORD

Visitors to the Art Institute in Chicago can walk through a long gallery filled with suits of armor from centuries ago. They can see the progression of the "latest inventions" such as chain mail and sophisticated helmet visors. As impressive as this display is, however, not one of these suits of armor would be helpful on a modern-day battlefield. It would be the wrong weapon at the wrong time.

Yesterday we saw that we are part of the battle to redeem the fallen world. In our reading for today, Paul continues this metaphor of serving as a soldier for Christ. We will see that we do not fight this battle alone. Rather, in keeping with the idea that the body of Christ is made of many individual members who all work together for the body's good (see 4:1-16), Paul here refers to the many members as if they were one soldier, one new man, equipped to fight against God's enemies.

Much of the armor that Paul says to "put on" comes from Old Testament descriptions of the promised Messiah who will arise and bring light to the dark earth (see Isa. 11:4-5, 52:7, 59:16-60:3). As the body of the Messiah, it is not surprising to find Paul here telling the church to put on the armor of God's Messiah—truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, salvation, and the Spirit.

We tend, though, to read these verses as if they instruct individual Christians to don their own armor. But Paul is speaking to the whole church at Ephesus. His references to "you" (v. 13) are not addressed to individuals. He is really saying "you all" must put on the armor. That is, the many members of the body must put on the one belt of truth, the one breastplate of righteousness, and the one helmet of salvation. They bear the one shield of faith and wield the one sword of the Spirit. We do not stand against the powers and authorities as individuals. Rather, we are all members of the one body of God's Messiah. By working together for the body's good, we manifest the bright presence of God's Messiah to a dark and fallen world.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Do you have on the right armor? Or are you on the twenty-first century battlefield wearing a coat of mail? We are not alone in our battle; not only do we have the gift of the Holy Spirit, but we also have the gift of the people of God. Certainly regular church attendance encourages us in our Christian walk, but we should be intimately involved with other believers in order to support one another in spiritual war. Great growth and spiritual power can come from small groups, Bible studies, and accountability partners.

Ephesians 6:16-18

TODAY IN THE WORD

Jonathan Edwards, the great preacher and theologian we heard from earlier this month, was a scholar whose keen mind deserves a place among the most influential leaders of the Christian church. One secret to Edwards's ministry was the way he wielded "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." He spent as many as 13 hours a day in Bible study and sermon preparation.

Talk about a well-prepared spiritual warrior! Jonathan Edwards did not wait for the enemy to carry the battle to him. Whether in the pulpit or in the study, he went on the offensive with the Spirit's sword.

Men and women such as Jonathan Edwards are examples worth imitating, even if we are worlds apart from them in time and culture. The armor of God fits every believer no matter what our generation or situation.

Today we finish putting on the full armor of God that Paul lays out for us. Aren't you thankful for the shield of faith? Without it, we would be spiritual ""target practice"" for Satan's ""flaming arrows."" Even in the case of Job, Satan could not penetrate that patriarch's shield of faith.

The helmet of salvation completes the armor we are to put on. Like the breastplate of righteousness, the helmet speaks of the spiritual protection afforded us by our salvation. With our minds and hearts covered in this way, we are ready for the enemy's attacks of doubt and disbelief.

The sword was the main offensive weapon of the well-equipped Roman soldier. It's an appropriate image for the Word of God, which is even sharper than a sword (Heb. 4:12). The same weapon that destroys our foe also cuts into our own lives, but for the purpose of healing and blessing. Only God could design such a sword!

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Now that all of our armor is in place, it's time for an inspection.

Ephesians 6:18; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. - Colossians 4:2

TODAY IN THE WORD

O my God, since thou art with me, and I must now, in obedience to thy commands, apply my mind to these outward [tasks], I beseech thee to grant me the grace to continue in thy presence; and to this end do thou prosper me with thy assistance, receive all my works, and possess all my affections.—Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*

It's easy to dismiss Colossians 4:2 as a nice ideal but an impossible reality. For many the idea of praying unceasingly may call to mind desert hermits or medieval monks—an image hopelessly out of sync with everyday pressures. Today's prayer, however, was uttered by a very busy man who wanted to experience God's presence, even in his work place.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Brother Lawrence's approach is simple. Having first filled his mind with thoughts of God in private prayer, he proceeded to his work in the monastery's kitchen. "There ... he spent all the intervals of this time, as well before and after his work, in prayer... As he proceeded in his work he continued his familiar conversation with his Maker, imploring his grace, and offering to him all his actions."

Although his first attempts were difficult, Brother Lawrence eventually developed a "habitual, silent, and secret conversation of the soul with God." Many others, such as Oswald Chambers, Frank Laubach, C. S. Lewis, and Mother Teresa, have described similar approaches.

Why not conduct a "prayer experiment" over the next few days? Using external prompts, such as your favorite color or notes posted throughout the house, utter short, one-sentence prayers of thanksgiving to your Heavenly Father each time you see the prompt.

When you become aware of needs or feel anxious about something, try one-word prayers, such as "safety" or "health." As you proceed, try to become more aware of Jesus' presence. Keep note of what

Ephesians 6:19-23

Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love. - Ephesians 6:24

TODAY IN THE WORD

Experiencing Christian fellowship that transcends all the barriers of our world is a great foretaste of resurrection. One young man described his time on a mission trip with a tribe in Papua New Guinea this way: "I'm a white middle-class American teenager worshiping with tribes in the jungle. I didn't know their songs, but I recognized the hope and joy on their faces. I didn't know their language, but I recognized when they were praising Jesus. It was the most profound worship experience in my life."

Throughout this letter Paul explains the mystery of God's calling both Jews and Gentiles into His chosen people. The two are now made one new person. All those who are included in Christ are reconciled not only to God, but also to each other. As this new person, the many members of Christ's body are responsible to live lives that are holy and blameless, lives that are worthy of this gracious calling.

When we who are "in Christ" live up to our calling, we participate in God's plan to redeem His fallen creation. Because of the equipping power of Jesus' resurrection and the Spirit's presence in our lives, we the redeemed are able to work together as members of Christ's body to bring the light of Christ into a dark world. We indeed represent the renewal of God's presence, the restoration of His image, in a world largely given over to the darkness of rebellious powers and authorities.

All of these elements are a part of God's grace. That is, God's calling, equipping, and redeeming action in Christ Jesus come to the fallen creation not because of its inherent goodness and worth, but solely because God loved His creation and His creatures enough to fight to bring them back into a right relationship with Him. "Oh, the depth and the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" (Rom. 11:33). Having given us a fuller glimpse of God's wisdom and knowledge, Paul's parting prayer for us is that this wonderful grace would continue to abound to all of us who have been joined to God's chosen people.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Paul's prayer is a wonderful way to end this month of studying the book of Ephesians; in fact, it's a wonderful prayer to pray on behalf of ourselves, our families, our churches, and indeed our extended family of believers that spans the globe. We will move next to an in-depth study of the relationship between grace and good works, the perfect context to remember the message of this book: God has called us and equipped us through Jesus Christ.

A FAITHFUL SERVANT

Read Ephesians 6:21–23

[Tychicus](#) will tell you all the news about me. He is a dear brother, a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. Colossians 4:7

The sponsors of a large Christian conference put up a "graffiti wall" for participants to write on. Someone penned this question: "Did Paul know he was writing the Scriptures?" Just below it someone else wrote: "Did Barnabas know he wasn't?"

This humorous exchange underscores an important principle. Ministry is a team effort. The apostle Paul is the author of this epistle, but he was not the only one responsible for the success of his ministry. In the concluding verses of Ephesians he pays tribute to Tychicus, "the dear brother and faithful servant in the Lord" (v. 21). Tychicus was probably already known to many of the readers of this epistle. He was from Asia and was a colleague of Trophimus who was from Ephesus (see Acts 20:4; 21:29).

Tychicus carried this letter from Paul to Ephesus, and he often served as a messenger. He delivered the letter to the Colossians (Col. 4:7–9), and was selected to be one of those who accompanied the collection gathered for the poor to Jerusalem (2 Cor. 8:19). When Paul sent the slave Onesimus back to his master Philemon, Tychicus accompanied him with Paul's personal letter requesting his freedom. Tychicus was also one of those Paul regarded as competent enough to stand in for him in Crete.

Without the aid of servants like Tychicus, who were willing to stand in Paul's place and act as his eyes and ears, the Apostle's ministry would have been severely curtailed. Paul wrote this letter from prison, serving as "an ambassador in chains" for Christ (v. 20). Faithful messengers like Tychicus not only extended Paul's ministry across borders but across generations. We would not have the letter of Ephesians to study today if Tychicus had not been faithful to his task.

APPLY THE WORD

The work that God has given you to do for Him today may seem menial. There is no outward glory in it. Do you feel as if you are little more than an errand runner for the kingdom? Then be encouraged. You are in very good company. You will not know until eternity how far reaching the effects of all your small acts of obedience have been.

THEODORE EPP EPHESIANS DEVOTIONALS

LIFE, ETERNAL AND ABUNDANT - THEODORE EPP

Ephesians 1:1; John 3:13-21

Eternal life is procured by the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. By His death Jesus paid the penalty for sin; by His burial He took sin away; by His resurrection He lives in the believer.

This is all involved in the new birth. On the other hand, the abundant life is procured for the believer through the living, ascended Christ, who is seated at the right hand of the Father.

The believer who lives on the basis of what he possesses in Christ has an abundant life. He realizes the indwelling Christ is able to meet any need.

Eternal life is objective in the sense that a person obtains it by placing faith in the fact of Christ's shed blood for the remission of sins. The abundant life is subjective in that it is a personal response to what a believer has in Christ.

The one who knows that Christ is able to meet every need and who lives accordingly has the abundant life.

Eternal life is the same for all believers, regardless of their sinful past. It does not matter whether the person was guilty of gross sin, as society measures sin, or whether he was a person of high moral standards.

All who receive Christ have eternal life. However, not all believers have abundant life. The abundant life varies in believers according to their individual responses to Jesus Christ.

"He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life" (1 John 5:12).

THE KEY TO THE TREASURY -THEODORE EPP

Ephesians 1:2,3; John 15:1-10

The believer's resources--all spiritual blessings--are "in Christ" (Eph. 1:3). Christ is the life of the believer and thus provides for him all that he needs.

Before salvation the individual was in Adam, but after salvation he is in Christ. In Adam the individual possessed only a sinful nature, but in Christ he possesses a divine nature. The divine nature of the believer causes him to want to do the will of God.

Apart from Christ, a person has no relationship to God and God has no relationship to him. Before a person receives Christ, he is unable to benefit from the spiritual blessings God has provided.

Only after a person becomes "in Christ" are all the resources of God available to him. God's wealth for the believer is deposited in Christ, and it is only when a person receives Christ that this spiritual wealth becomes available to him.

Without Christ one has no spiritual strength, but in Christ he is able to achieve any spiritual victory. However, even the believer must rely on spiritual provisions if he is to experience spiritual victories.

Jesus told believers, "I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5).

Because Paul knew his spiritual resources he said, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:13).

In Christ a person has position--where He is, the believer is; privilege--what He is, the believer is; possession--what He has, the believer shares. The two words "in Christ" open up all God's treasures for the believer.

"He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5).

YOU WERE BORN WEALTHY - THEODORE EPP

Ephesians 1:3; Romans 8:35-39

The individual who has received Christ as Saviour has been united to Christ, but he is traveling through a world that has an ungodly, hostile atmosphere. Thus, the believer needs a spiritual atmosphere in which to breathe.

Just as astronauts have to take along their own atmosphere when they go to the moon, the believer needs spiritual atmosphere to sustain his spiritual life while on earth.

The believer needs spiritual food, spiritual companions, spiritual exercise, spiritual strength and spiritual weapons.

God has blessed believers with "all" spiritual blessings (Eph. 1:3). Many of these are mentioned in Paul's letter to the Ephesians.

God has withheld nothing in providing benefits for the believer--all spiritual blessings are available. God has not just given out of His riches, but He has provided for the believer "according to" His riches.

There is not a single benefit that God wants to provide for the believer that He is unable to provide.

Every blessing that is needed for the spirit, soul and body; every blessing that is needed for past, present and future; every blessing that is needed for salvation, sanctification and service; and every blessing that is needed for time and eternity has been provided in Christ for the believer.

As is seen from 2 Corinthians 9:8, God is able to make His grace overflow to the believer so that the believer has everything he needs to meet any spiritual problem.

"According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness" (2 Pet. 1:3).

See more at <http://www.backtothebible.org>

CHARACTER COMES FIRST -THEODORE EPP

Ephesians 1:4; 1 Peter 1: 13-21

There is much talk today about "working for Christ" but little about "being like Christ."

Being like Christ means more than just following Him as a good teacher or example; it refers to the believer's being molded into the image of Jesus Christ. This is accomplished only as the believer yields to the work of the indwelling Christ.

The term "without blame" in Ephesians 1:4 means "without blemish"; that is, "free from faultiness." The believer is to live above reproach.

This is the potential of every believer because he is in Christ, but it is true of the believer only as he appropriates the resources God has made available to him.

The believer possesses a nature that is blameless, and he is to live accordingly. Believers are to be holy and blameless "before him" (v. 4).

Notice that this verse is not referring to a future time, such as the believer's judgment, but to the present. The believer should allow God to work in his heart so that his practice might measure up to his position--holy and blameless.

As the refiner can see his image in the purified gold, so God works with a believer until He sees His image. Each believer's prayer should be, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Ps. 139:23,24).

"Who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 1:8).

- See more at: <http://www.backtothebible.org/>

CLAIM YOUR INHERITANCE -THEODORE EPP

Ephesians 1:7-15

An inheritance is something that a person comes into possession of because of his relationship with another. It is not something that is earned; it is a gift.

The believer's inheritance includes life itself. By receiving Christ as Saviour, the believer inherits eternal life.

Jesus said, "He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life" (John 5:24).

The inheritance of the believer also includes everything he needs for his life. The believer is actually a citizen of heaven who is on a pilgrim journey on earth. However, God has made all spiritual blessings available to the believer.

Paul told believers, "All things belong to you, and you belong to Christ; and Christ belongs to God" (1 Cor. 3:22,23, NASB).

God's riches made available to the believer are also emphasized in Romans 8:32: "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"

Our present blessings are only a small part of our spiritual inheritance, which is to be received in full in the future.

The moment one receives Christ as Saviour he is placed as a mature son into the family of God and becomes an heir of an inheritance that is beyond human comprehension.

We are to let Christ reign in our lives now, but our full spiritual inheritance includes being with Christ and reigning with Him throughout eternity.

"To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you" (1 Pet. 1:4).

- See more at: <http://www.backtothebible.org/>

YOU ARE PART OF HIS TREASURE -THEODORE EPP

Ephesians 1: 16-18

From Ephesians 1:18 it is apparent that we are more than a mere inheritance of Christ.

Paul emphasized the kind of inheritance we are to Christ in the words "riches of the glory of his inheritance." Believers are an inheritance of glorious riches to Christ.

This reveals to us what God considers to be of greatest value in the universe. It is not the planets or stars; it is people. God created the universe by His might and power, but He purchased mankind by His precious blood.

This universe will someday pass away, and God will create a new heaven and a new earth. But man, who has been redeemed by Christ, shall abide forever! This reveals how important believers are to God.

No wonder God is going to display the exceeding riches of His grace through us in ages to come (2:7). This is why Jesus desires to present the Church "to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (5:27).

When we consider the marvelous truths of what God thinks of us as believers, it causes us to be filled with praise because of our wonderful Saviour.

Although there are times when, humanly speaking, there is only despair, we are able to lift our eyes to Christ and know that He is working in us to accomplish that which will bring glory to Him.

So it is important that we do not become discouraged with circumstances; these are the very tools that God uses to make us more like Christ.

"Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ" (Col. 3:24).

- See more at: <http://www.backtothebible.org/>

POWER FOR YOU-TODAY! - THEODORE EPP

Ephesians 1: 19-23

The Scriptures frequently refer to God's power as it relates to the believer.

Ephesians 6:10 says, "Be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might."

Philippians 1:6 says, "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."

Colossians 1:29 records Paul's testimony: "I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily."

God's power is sufficient for our every need. None of us has to live a defeated life. But those who do not make use of God's available power live miserable, defeated lives.

There's more than enough power to break the hold of all sinful habits; more than enough to give deliverance from temptation; more than enough to enable the believer to live above circumstances. Paul said that God's power is "to us-ward who believe" (Eph. 1:19).

God's power is made available to us by His indwelling presence. Paul referred to this when he told the Colossians that God's power "worketh in me mightily" (Col 1:29).

So the dynamo of Christian living is within the believer because God is within the believer. Hebrews 13:21 records the prayer, "Make you perfect [mature] in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight."

The person who has received Christ is a new creation. Referring to himself as a believer, Paul wrote: "I am [have been] crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20).

"Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us" (Eph. 3:20).

- See more at: <http://www.backtothebible.org/>

ENTHRONED AND ENABLED - THEODORE EPP

Ephesians 2:1-10

Because we are seated in the heavenlies in Christ, we should have spiritual rest and relaxation. However, many who know Christ as Saviour are characterized by worrying.

The Bible says, "Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity" (Ps. 37:1).

The believer is commanded, "Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him: fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass. Cease from anger, and forsake wrath: fret not thyself in any wise to do evil" (vv. 7,8).

We need not worry, "for our conversation [citizenship] is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil. 3:20).

Paul was writing these great truths from a dungeon in Rome, but he was deeply conscious of his position in Christ. This was the secret of his victorious living. He realized what his spiritual resources were in Christ.

Christ has been set "far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come" (Eph. 1:21).

He has been raised far above everything and everyone else. He is not contaminated by the things of this world. As we live according to our heavenly position in Christ, we will not be contaminated by the world either.

This involves having a proper attitude of the heart and mind and living by faith. As we appropriate what we have in Christ, we will share in the power and conquests of that exalted position.

"In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

- See more at: <http://www.backtothebible.org/>

GOD HAS ENDED THE WAR BY THEODORE EPP

Ephesians 2:11-18

God has reconciled both Jews and Gentiles to Himself. Therefore, when the Jew and the Gentile receive Christ as Saviour, they can be at peace with each other because they are at peace with God.

Once God has become their Father, they can gladly call each other "brother." And it is only when individuals are in right relationship with God that they can be in complete harmony with each other.

This means that our deepest racial problems can never be completely solved until those involved come to know Christ as their Saviour and yield their lives to His control. Only the Christian has the basis for truly solving the problems that people face.

Jesus Christ reconciled both Jew and Gentile to God "in one body by the cross" (Eph. 2:16). The moment they were united to God through faith in Christ, they were united to one another. They became members of the same body--the Body of Christ.

So all the redeemed of this age are spiritually united on earth as the Body of Christ; and the risen, ascended Christ is in heaven as the Head of the Body.

As the Head, He gives life and direction to the members of the Body. Each believer is to no longer consider what he was in the

natural realm but is to consider what he is in Christ.

Regardless of one's nationality, color or denominational preference, he becomes one in Christ with every other believer when he receives Christ.

"For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free" (1 Cor. 12:13).

- See more at: <http://www.backtothebible.org/>

GOD IS BUILDING A TEMPLE - THEODORE EPP

Ephesians 2:19-22

Jesus Christ is building His Church. When He was on earth, He said, "I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18).

We are living stones within God's building, and we also have a part as co-builders as we take the Gospel to others so they can receive Christ as Saviour.

Christ came and preached peace; now we who know Him as Saviour are to preach the Gospel to others so they may have this peace. Jesus told the Father, "As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world" (John 17:18).

Just before Jesus ascended to the Father, He gave believers the Great Commission: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (Matt. 28:18-20).

Those who receive Christ as Saviour become living stones, precisely fitted into the building of God. Just as there are many shapes and sizes of stones, so individual believers vary from one another, but God has a special place for each in the building.

Those in Paul's day knew that it took much work to shape stones so they would fit precisely in a building. So Paul was emphasizing not only that believers are stones in God's building but also that it takes the shaping work of God to make them fit properly into the building.

The harder the stone, the longer it takes the builder to make it what he wants it to be. As living stones we sometimes find the process painful, but the end result is good.

That's why Romans 8:28 says, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

"Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" (1 Cor. 3:16).

- See more at: <http://www.backtothebible.org/>

DOES CHRIST FEEL AT HOME IN YOUR HEART? -THEODORE EPP

Ephesians 3:14-17

Paul referred to his relationship to the indwelling Christ when he wrote: "I am [have been] crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. 2:20).

Thus, as Paul prayed for the Ephesians, he prayed that Christ might dwell in their hearts in the sense of being enthroned in their lives--that He might be truly at home, not just a guest.

He will be completely at home in our lives to the extent that He is truly Lord of our lives. When we received Him as Saviour, He came to permanently indwell us, but our need now is to put Him first in everything so that He will be at home in us.

When we come to this point, our desire will be the same as Paul's when he said, "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death" (Phil. 3:10).

Notice that the place of Christ's dwelling is "in your hearts" (Eph. 3:17). Christ dwells in the inner man and desires to control the person He indwells.

Of course, Christ indwells every person who receives Him as Saviour, but this does not necessarily mean He is in control of the

person's life.

In order for Christ to control our lives, we must give up the self-life--we must desire to please Him rather than ourselves. This means we will have to say no to our own desires when they conflict with His.

We will have victory in our lives only as we submit ourselves to the Lord and by faith live in dependence on Him. We must not underestimate the importance of denying ourselves when our desires conflict with His.

Jesus said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it" (Luke 9:23,24).

"Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me" (Rev. 3:20).

- See more at: <http://www.backtothebible.org/>

WHOSE PRISONER ARE YOU? - THEODORE EPP

Ephesians 4:1,2; Acts 16:25-31

It is interesting to note the difference between the ways Paul referred to himself in the first half of Ephesians and the last half.

In beginning the first half, or doctrinal portion, Paul referred to himself as "an apostle of Jesus Christ" (1:1).

Paul emphasized his apostleship because he had a special message to give believers, and that message was given in the first three chapters.

In the last half of Ephesians, which emphasizes the practice of Christians, Paul referred to himself as "the prisoner of the Lord" (4:1).

This last section of Ephesians is an intense appeal by Paul for believers to walk worthy of their calling, and Paul underscored his appeal by calling himself a prisoner of the Lord.

How interesting that Paul should have this viewpoint. He was a prisoner of Rome and was in a damp dungeon because of preaching the Gospel, but he really considered himself to be a prisoner of the Lord.

Paul recognized that the Lord could use him where he was, and this is precisely what the Lord did. During this imprisonment, Paul wrote letters to Philemon, the Colossians, the Ephesians and the Philippians.

These letters are now contained in the Scriptures and have had great impact on the world down through the ages.

It is good to ask ourselves, Whose prisoner am I? Do I consider myself a prisoner of circumstances or of the Lord Jesus Christ?

"Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?" (Rom. 6:16).

- See more at: <http://www.backtothebible.org/>

SPIRITUAL UNITY IS NOT AUTOMATIC - THEODORE EPP

Ephesians 4:3-7

The unity referred to in Scripture is a spiritual unity of everyone within the Body of Christ; that is, all who have received Him as personal Saviour.

This means that our unity must always be based on the truth of the Scriptures, which tell who Christ is and what we are in Him. Any unity that compromises the teaching of the Scriptures regarding Jesus Christ is not a unity that has God's approval.

However, the ecumenism of our day seems far more concerned about unity for unity's sake, than it does about adhering to the truth of the Scriptures.

In fact, the teaching of the Scriptures is sometimes de-emphasized so much that for the sake of unity some groups do not even have doctrinal statements.

Such groups tend to emphasize God's love and the need of working in harmony with those with whom we disagree. It is naive, however, to emphasize love at the expense of truth--to emphasize God's love but not His holy standards and justice.

Organizational unity is not necessarily wrong if only believers are involved. However, it is wrong--no matter how good the cause may be--for believers to compromise their message in order to work with unbelievers.

When Paul said we are to be "endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit," the word he used for "endeavouring" was a word that originally meant "to make haste" and then came to mean "to be zealous or eager, to give diligence."

Each believer is to give his utmost attention to see that harmony is preserved within the Body of Christ. It is a spiritual unity, or oneness, that exists among all who know Christ as Saviour, but it can be maintained only as we walk in fellowship with Him.

"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (Ps. 133:1).

- See more at: <http://www.backtothebible.org/>

WHAT TO DO WITH ANGER -THEODORE EPP

Ephesians 4:17-27

It is apparent that we should be angry with sin and come to hate that which would separate us from God or cause loss of fellowship.

This means there will be times when we will hate what others do because it goes contrary to the Word of God. Such anger may be referred to as "righteous indignation."

However, when self becomes projected into the matter, it is possible for a believer to sin, at least in his attitude toward others.

In Ephesians 4:26 Paul was warning against permitting smoldering fires of resentment to remain in anyone's heart: "Let not the sun go down upon your wrath."

We should make it our practice never to retire without first being sure that we have confessed known sin of actions and attitudes, "for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God" (James 1:20).

Jesus was angry with those who withstood God. He called the Pharisees and Sadducees a "generation of vipers" (Matt. 3:7). The scribes and Pharisees He called "hypocrites" (23:14).

On another occasion He made a whip of small ropes and drove the money changers from the temple (John 2:13-16).

Although the Lord Jesus Christ was able to be angry without sinning, it is difficult for us. That is why Paul gave the command as he did in Ephesians 4:26.

Our anger should be stirred when God's name is taken in vain or when He is blasphemed, but we must be careful that we do not sin in the way we react to these incidents. If we speak unkind words or are embittered toward others, we have sinned and it needs to be confessed to the Lord.

"Every one must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God" (James 1:19,20, NASB).

- See more at: <http://www.backtothebible.org/>

DON'T ROB YOURSELF! - THEODORE EPP

Ephesians 4:28-32

In our relationships with others, we need to be sure that we do not steal from them. We need to be honest in business transactions and be faithful in giving service for which we are paid.

If we are paid for a full day's work, we steal from our employer if we do not give him a full day's work. Even such a relatively small matter as taking too long on coffee break is a way of stealing from one's employer.

The Bible says, "Provide things honest in the sight of all men" (Rom. 12:17). Each believer needs to examine himself to be sure that he is not stealing from God or others.

The Bible says, "Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:9,10).

We cannot expect to be rewarded by the Lord if we have stolen time and money that should have been spent for Him.

In contrast to stealing, Paul said, "But rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth" (Eph. 4:28).

Notice that there is a purpose for the work, and that purpose is that the believer might be able to help others. The Christian is one who should genuinely care about others; and the more he cares, the more he wants to give to help them in their need.

"Thou shalt not steal" (Ex. 20:15).

- See more at: <http://www.backtothebible.org/>

LEARNING TO LOVE - THEODORE EPP

Ephesians 5: 1-5

Does the standard of God's love seem too high to attain? Having received Jesus Christ as Saviour, we have been born of the Holy Spirit and have become members of God's family. We have become partakers in, or sharers of, the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4), and the essence of the divine nature is love. It is the kind of love that loves even when there is no response, always seeking the highest good for the other person. That God loved us when there was no response is evident from Romans 5:8: "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." But it can be said that because of our having received Jesus Christ as Saviour, "the love of God is [now] shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us" (v. 5). Since it is His love that is in our hearts, we are able to attain God's standard of love by letting Christ live His life in us as He desires. The expression of this love in us is one of the strongest proofs that we really are the children of God (1 John 4:7-16).

When Paul urged believers to "walk in love" (Eph. 5:2), he was emphasizing that our life is lived one step at a time. As we rely on the Lord for the step we are now taking, we need not worry about the steps that are ahead. Of course, Paul was referring to a person's way of life. First John 3:18 says, "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth." It is easy to talk, but it is costly to walk.

"A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another" (John 13:34).

- See more at: <http://www.backtothebible.org/>

KEEP YOUR EYES OPEN! - THEODORE EPP

Ephesians 5:7-17

Because of the subtle works of darkness and the importance of being a witness for the Lord, Paul said, "See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise" (Eph. 5:15).

The word translated "see" means "to look, to consider, to take heed." It was as if Paul was waving a sign before them that said, "Stop, look and listen." Paul wanted believers to make a thorough check of the way they were living to be sure they were walking as they should be.

Paul wanted them to make sure they were walking "circumspectly," which means "looking around" or "being cautious." The Greek word Paul used means "accurately" or "exactly."

One of the reasons believers should live carefully is that unbelievers are observing them. To live carefully, believers must have an intelligent purpose in living. If we do not have such a purpose, our lives will not be as effective as the Lord desires.

Paul's purpose in living is seen in 1 Corinthians 2:2: "For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified."

To the Philippians, he wrote: "According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (1:20,21).

"Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established" (Prov. 4:26).

- See more at: <http://www.backtothebible.org/>

TOGETHERNESS BY THEODORE EPP

Ephesians 5:25-33

No believer lives a spiritually isolated life. Together, we are members of Christ's Body (Eph. 5:30) and have responsibilities to each other.

Ephesians 4:25 says, "We are members one of another." Therefore, Spirit-filled believers treat fellow Christians as they would treat themselves.

We are not to be domineering, but recognizing that Christ is the Lord of all, we are to have a submissive spirit. As we mutually desire to do the will of God, the Holy Spirit will give us a harmonious relationship with each other.

We are to submit ourselves to others "in the fear of God," which is a reverential fear lest we displease or dishonor God.

Because of all that Christ has done for us, our desire should be to please Him in everything we do. As we submit ourselves to Him and to others, the Devil is given no opportunity in our lives. Ephesians 4:27 tells believers, "Neither give place to the devil."

God gives the grace that is needed to resist the temptation to disrupt the harmony of believers: "But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:6,7).

When we maintain this kind of relationship with Christ, through the Holy Spirit, we have the proper basis for the various relationships in life, some of which are mentioned in Ephesians 5.

"Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular" (1 Cor. 12:27).

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KEEP THE ARMOR ON! BY THEODORE EPP

Ephesians 6:10-18

The armor is not to be put on and taken off periodically but to be put on and left on. The armor is actually an attitude of faith; therefore, it is something that is put on by an act of the will and left on.

As we mature in the Christian life, we will discover areas in our lives where our faith is not as strong as it should be; that is, the armor is weak in a certain place.

At such a time, our responsibility is to go to the Word of God to study His promises concerning our area of weakness so that our faith will be strengthened.

Notice the parallel between Ephesians 6:11, "Put on the whole armour of God," and Romans 13:14, "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ." God's provision for victory is in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ and through the Word of God.

In putting on the Lord Jesus Christ, we need to remember that the living Word (Jesus Christ) is revealed through the written Word (the Bible).

In His prayer for His own, Jesus prayed, "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth" (John 17:17). We put on the Lord Jesus Christ as we study the Word of God and obey what it says. The believer's armor, then, is not physical protective equipment, but is Jesus Christ Himself.

Putting on Christ is similar to what we are told in Ephesians 4:24: "Put on the new man." This new man is Christ formed in the believer. Paul was greatly concerned that this be true of every believer, and he told the Galatians: "I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you" (4:19).

"And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph. 4:24).

- See more at: <http://www.backtothebible.org/>