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To God Be the Glory: Ephesians' Call to Unity

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Harding University's 71st Annual
Bible Lectureship

*To God Be The Glory:
Ephesians' Call To Unity*

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Harding University's 71st Annual
Bible Lectureship

*To God Be The Glory:
Ephesians' Call To Unity*

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FOREWORD

The first century was a time of great excitement. On the day of Pentecost, following the resurrection of Jesus, the church was established in Jerusalem. During the next half century the great apostle Paul, and others, travelled throughout the Roman Empire preaching the good news and baptizing believers who formed the nascent churches.

As Christians from diverse cultural, ethnic, and social backgrounds struggled to form bonds of brotherhood problems arose. Threats to the unity they experienced in Christ were many and varied. The apostles and elders dealt with these problems. Much space is devoted in the New Testament letters to helping Christians overcome barriers to true oneness in Christ.

The lectureship committee chose the study of Ephesians for the 71st Annual Lectureship because of its importance for the church today. As winds of division and mistrust sweep across the brotherhood, it is important for Christians to heed "Ephesians' Call to Unity." Over forty speakers have been chosen to present lectures on the letter to the Ephesians. Their greatest compensation will be your attendance in their classes and your careful reading of this book.

I express my gratitude to Marilyn Dowdy for her efficient work in typesetting this book. I thank Rod Brewer for helping edit it. David Crouch and his staff in the Public Relations Office have done their usual excellent job in advertising the lectureship. I thank them for it.

It is my prayer that this lectureship will be a blessing to those who attend and to you who read this book.

Don Shackelford, Editor

PREFACE

The basic purpose of this work is to call Christians' attention to the great mystery of God and the greatest challenge man faces: namely, that in Christ people of all ethnic backgrounds can live as a unified body of believers. May God's richest blessings rest on those who diligently take up this noble spiritual purpose. My deepest thanks to Don Shackelford who gave his greatest talent to edit this volume and to Marilyn Dowdy who typeset the manuscripts.

Allan Isom
Lectureship Director

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THEME LECTURES

one, and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall." The barrier between Jews and Gentiles was the law of Moses. When Jesus took away "the Law of Commandments" (2:15), he took away the barrier between the two groups and so made one new man, "thus establishing peace."

Paul is probably alluding to the temple in Jerusalem. The court of the Gentiles was separated from the temple area with a wall and signs on the wall warning any Gentile not to go beyond that point. Two such stones were found in 1935 with the wording, "No alien may enter within the barrier and wall around the temple. Whoever is caught [violating this] is alone responsible for the death [penalty] which follows."²

At the close of his third missionary journey, Paul was accused of violating this rule by bringing a Gentile into the temple area. This sparked a riot which would have cost Paul his life had not the Chief Captain saved him from the mob (Acts 21:27-33). How well Paul was made aware of the wall that divided the Jews from the Gentiles at the temple!

Jesus' dying request that all disciples should be one (Jn. 17:18-20) was made possible when he broke down the wall of division. Earlier, Jesus had said, "And I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they shall hear my voice, and they shall become one flock with one shepherd" (Jn. 10:16).

Not only did Jesus break down the wall that divided Jews and Gentiles, but he also removed all barriers that separated people. Marcus Barth titled his work on the book of Ephesians, *The Broken Wall*.³ Barth said that the main theme of Ephesians was that Jesus broke down all barriers between man and his fellow man, as well as between man and God.

Jesus is our peace. He helps to bring peace among mankind in two ways. First, he has changed the way we regard one another, and, secondly, he has shown us how to treat each other.

A CHANGE IN HOW WE REGARD ONE ANOTHER

"Therefore from now on we recognize no man according to the flesh" (2 Cor. 5:16). Ephesians 2:14-18 is preceded with a discussion of how we are all saved by grace. "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9). Since we all stand in need of the grace of God and must come to God in the same way, through Christ, we all stand on equal footing before Him.

Paul speaks to this theme in both Galatians and Colossians. In Galatians 3 Paul points out that we are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus, whether we are Jew or Gentile. He further says, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). The same idea is expressed in Colossians 3:11, "...in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all and in all."

In Christ there is no barrier between the Greek and the Jew. It does not matter whether one is circumcised or uncircumcised, or even whether he is a slave or a freeman, or male or female. Even a barbarian is accepted by Christ. A barbarian by strict definition was one who could not speak Greek. It came to mean the uncivilized. Among the most uncivilized of all must have been the Scythians, who lived near the Caspian Sea. If even a Scythian became a child of God, he would stand on equal footing with the learned Greek or self-righteous Jew in the body of Christ.

Jesus' openness to all people is apparent in the way he treated them while he was on earth. There were the Zealots, who advocated the violent overthrow of the Roman government; there were the publicans, who were Jews who collected taxes for the Roman government. There were the Herodians who were supporters of Herod; there were the Romans, such as the centurion whose servant

Jesus healed. There were the Pharisees and Sadducees in direct opposition to each other. There were also the hated Samaritans, such as the woman at the well in John 4. Yet Jesus reached out to them all.

Among the twelve apostles were found Simon the Zealot and Matthew the publican. Their relationship with Jesus made it possible for them to work together.

Jesus attended a feast at Matthew's house and was criticized for eating with sinners and publicans (Mt. 9:10-11). He was often accused of receiving sinners and eating with them (Lk. 15:1-2), or even of allowing sinners to touch him (Lk. 7:39).

In spite of the teachings and the example of Jesus, it was not easy for his disciples to accept the fact that the barriers between people had been removed. It was with great difficulty that Peter finally understood that God wanted him to preach the gospel to Gentiles. It was quite a breakthrough when Peter announced to the house of Cornelius, "I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right, is welcome to Him" (Acts 10:34-35).

Even though Peter seems to have understood this in Acts 10, he still yielded to the pressure of his Jewish brethren when he refused to eat with the Gentiles at Antioch. Paul said that he opposed Peter to the face "because he stood condemned" (Gal. 2:11-12).

The Jerusalem Council brought to a head the question as to whether Gentiles could be admitted into the church without being circumcised (Acts 15). It was concluded that the yoke of the law, including circumcision, should not be put upon Gentiles who turned to Christ.

Even today it is difficult for children of God to live in peace with one another. It is ironic that the church of Christ began as a unity movement and yet has experienced so many divisions over diverse issues. Of course, we cannot have peace at any price. There are points of faith that cannot be compromised. But we need to

look seriously to see if some of the issues that divide us are really worth the damage they do to the Lord's Church.

There are many walls that some brethren have erected between themselves and others. Some of these are culturally based. Some are based on geographical boundaries. Others are even based upon material possessions. James warned the brethren that they should not show favor to the rich man with a gold ring who was dressed in fine clothes and then treat the poor man with disdain (Jas. 2:1-6).

Christ brings peace by removing the barriers that are divisive. We all stand in need of the grace of God. We all are saved by his grace, and no one has the right to set at naught his brother. The ground is level at the foot of the cross.

A CHANGE IN HOW WE TREAT EACH OTHER

"Do we not all have one father? Has not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously each against his brother so as to profane the covenant?" (Mal. 2:10).

Jesus has taught us not only how we ought to regard each other, but also how we should treat each other. When we understand that in Christ we have a different relationship with others, it should change the way that we treat them.

In Ephesians Paul first discusses how Christ had broken down the middle wall of partition that divided Jew and Gentile (and for that matter any other artificial barriers that divide God's children). Then he exhorts them to walk "with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:2-3).

Paul follows this by listing the seven unities of the spirit. He then shows that there is a diversity of gifts, functions and abilities among the individual members of the church. Some were apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors, and teachers (4:11).

Not only are there different nationalities and social strata in the one body, there are also those with varying abilities as diverse as human nature can make them. Yet in Christ they can work in peace with each other.

Paul pursues the theme of peace throughout the book of Ephesians. In the last two chapters he discusses how peace can exist between husbands and wives (chapter 5). In 6:1-4 he discusses the relationship between parents and children. He even deals with employer/employee relationships in the discussion of slaves and masters and their responsibilities to each other (6:5-9).

We are all members of the same family. God is our father, and we are all brothers and sisters in Christ. Paul exhorts the Ephesians in 4:25 to speak the truth with each other, "for we are members of one another." It should make a great difference in the way we treat our brother to realize that we are all members of the same family, the same body.

In Christ, true believers have found a fellowship, a family. Jesus promised the disciples that they would not leave their families for the sake of the kingdom without receiving a hundred fold, "Brothers and sisters and mothers and children" (Mk. 10:30).

It is not easy to live and work closely with all the members of God's family. "To live above with those we love: Ah, that will be the glory. To live below with those we know: well, that's another story."

But Jesus said, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself" (Jn. 12:32). We cannot draw nearer to the Lord without drawing nearer to each other. He is the focal point that binds the body together.

He is our peace.

CONCLUSION

The main emphasis in Ephesians 2:16 is that Christ gives us peace with one another. But in a beautiful way Paul continues by

pointing out that all of us in the one body can have peace with God "...that in Himself He might make the two into one new man thus establishing peace and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross...and He came and preached peace to you who were far away, and peace to those who were near" (Eph. 2:15-17).

Through Christ we can have peace with God (Rom. 5:1). Through Christ we also can have peace with one another.

"And this One will be our peace."

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NOTES

1. All Biblical quotations are from the New American Standard Version.
2. Merrill F. Unger, *Archaeology And The New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1962.
3. Marcus Barth, *The Broken Wall*. Valley Forge, PA: The Judgeson Press, 1959.

OUR MAGNIFICENT GOD

Jim Bill McInteer

It was a memorable class assignment--freshman Bible, Jim Cope the teacher--and first crack out of the box he said, "I want you to write a short theme, your subject: 'Describe God.'" This 17-year-old country boy had taken tests at Middleton, Kentucky, as with 15 other pupils he finished high school. He had written a few book reports--but "theme"--that is something new. And what a subject--"Describe God." (That could have been done with the same ease one could outline the Einstein theory of relativity!) But had I just known, Paul with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, had earlier done just this. The purpose of this address is to study his description, believing it will greatly enhance our love for the Lord, will strengthen our faith, and will increase our security and joy. This passage is certainly not all that is said about God, but still our concept of the Righteous One can never be less than this.

The Scripture states: "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, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end" (Eph. 3:20-21). From these words we gain a sublime description and are blessed with a most lofty statement about Christ and the church.

NOW

As we examine its "component parts," we begin with the word "Now." For some strange reason not one single commentator I read even mentioned the word. To me "now" is an arrow of identification. Coming to you will be a grandiose statement of unparal-

leled beauty about the Lord. The Holy Spirit wants you to notice this. Further it is a statement of timeliness. Not one moment is to be lost in the acknowledgement of God. Recognition is imperative; and urgent is the need to see what God can do to your life. The recognition of his power will not leave you as He found you--"now" you will be changed for the better. You have not a second to lose!

UNTO HIM

Our next phrase is "Unto Him." There is a purpose in all of this. Paul has just called for one of the most sweeping hopes that spiritually can come to man. The catholicity of the gospel for all men, the invading of principalities and powers by the church's proclamation of Jesus' truth, the bearing of tribulations, the steadfastness of every saint--all the hopeful subject of accomplishment presently--and as Dummelow wrote, "to explain the audacity of prayer" gives reason for the words "unto Him."

Man is a dependent creation--he needs to pray a lot. The question is "Will God hear?" And the next one is "Will he act?" The final one is "Is he able to do something about these spiritual dreams and ambitions?"

Saint, sense your needs. State them. Glory in the one who can supply the answers. Contrast his greatness with our littleness. William Carey's motto was "Expect great things from God." Better still, the Psalmist wrote: "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved" (Psalms 55:22). In great faith go "Unto Him."

This "Him" is "Able."

John Wesley wrote "adapted to strengthen our faith that we stagger not at great things the apostle has been praying for" this statement of God's ability comes to us.

Question: "Can we ask more than God can do?" Matthew Henry spoke of "an inexhaustible fullness of grace and mercy in

God which the prayers of all the saints can never draw dry." Vaughn invites you to "glory in the boundless reach of God's power." Turning to the Scriptures one reads:

"Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began" (Rom. 16:25).

"Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy" (Jude 24).

"I know that thou canst do every thing, and that no thought can be withholden from thee" (Job 42:2).

"For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day" (2 Tim. 1:12).

"And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work" (2 Cor. 9:8). It is one thing to be "able" and another thing to willingly exercise this ability. The God we serve is "able to do." God is different from his children. We have our hands on our pocketbooks, with resources commensurate to most any task.

We have "ability"--we lack the "doing." Contrast with the Lord. Adam Clark said, "He has the ability coupled with the willingness"--that is the "do" part. Do we not sing "Great things he has done"? His omnipotence is ever ready to be focused on our rightful needs, and he will make no mistake in exercising this power. Paul earlier said, "Be careful for nothing: but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your

requests be made known unto God" (Phil. 4:6). God's manner of working is constant. We are privileged to worship one who acts.

EXCEEDING ABUNDANT ABOVE ALL YOU ASK OR THINK

But that raises the question: "How much can He do?" Hear the answer: "exceeding abundant above all you ask or think." "Immensely more" finds other Biblical appearances--1 Thessalonians 3:10; 5:15. "God's capacity to meet our needs far exceeds anything we can request in prayer" (Expositors). Think of what you have asked for: pardon, wisdom, support, protection, guidance--did you not get it? The Pulpit Commentary gives wisely this parallel. It said thinking of God is similar to thinking of space--however far our concepts may travel there is still infinity beyond. "So small our vision, so comprehensive is His" (Elwell).

Note it is *above* all we ask or think. We are reminded Paul uses "above" three times more often than all the rest of the New Testament writers. As one observes, it shows the warm exuberance of his spirit. Brother R. C. Bell felt that "Paul is anxious that saints carry all the voltage of God's almighty power they are capacitated to carry." Another wrote, "The possible with God will always be greater than the actual." John Calvin paid a compliment to the word "all" by stating "the *all* shows God will not withdraw his hand--one act of liberality toward us does not exhaust him."

There is a difference between the intensity of "ask" and "think." Ask "exhausts the power of language then stretches the imagination" (Simeon). There is no limit to his power; only our language.

When "think" enters the picture, it is the excess of "ask." We can think more than we can ask. I liked it when one advised, "Stretch your thoughts, enlarge your desires, multiply your petitions because God is there to meet them."

But you know there is a "voltage restriction." It all is "according to the power that worketh in us."

In my life is anything God-driven going on? Do I truly have a God to praise by virtue of what he has done for me? Am I mute? If the extra voltage is to be comprehensible to what is already at work, will there be any "charge?" Do I restrict with a minitransformer and have a 10-watt glow rather than a 200? There is a dynamo, a dynamite that is intended to be alive in every Christian--is mine low voltage? If a survey were conducted relative to what has he done and what is he doing for me, what would the record reveal? Is there any statement from me stating, "This my God has done?" Do we go into the fields, walk and talk as good friends, and then report what the journey meant to us? Are we a new creature? Are we steadfastly continuing? I was recently asked, "Is Jimmy Allen still alive?" After reporting the grateful news that he very much is, came the next question, "Is he still teaching Romans at Harding?" and the answer "Is the Pope still Catholic?" There is a power--external and internal, and it is mine. "This power determines the nature and manner of spiritual aspirations and cravings" (Lipscomb). If there is a proportionate giving of future power akin to what I am currently using, will it come with severe restrictions--turn God loose to the full usage. What is that power? God, Christ, the Holy Spirit in you. It is the power that raised Jesus from the dead (Eph. 1:20). It is God and the Spirit alive within you. Read these words:

"Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered" (Rom. 8:26).

"For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13).

UNTO HIM BE GLORY IN THE CHURCH

What is the end result of all this? "Unto Him be Glory"--just stop there now. Literally "to him the glory." Glory is admiration, confidence, thanksgiving. It belongs inherently to him. It radiates majesty, splendor, and power. You are to live so all mankind can see it. Sing with the youth "I will glorify his name." "Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord." We will see his kingdom spread if we properly glorify him. Jesus told us how: "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples" (John 15:8).

It astonishes many that the church, which some trash, is even mentioned, but lo and behold it is first! "To Him be glory in the church."

Bruce states, "The church is the vehicle for the display of all the glories of Christ." The "church is the theater for the manifestation of the glory in Christ" (Fawsett, Jamison, Brown). "The honor of Jesus is in the hands of the church" (Thompson). The church's task is to glorify God forever (Eph. 3:11). "The church is instrumentally formed for his praise" (Lipscomb). "Always there will be some people left to be a mirror in which folk can behold the inestimable mercy of God" (Calvin). Though it speaks of the church universal, it still is the task of every individual in it to concur in this magnification of the Lord. It is not the duty of a few but the joy of every single member.

Next it states that glory is to be found in Christ. All gifts to man come through his hand, and all praise passes back to God through this redeeming Mediator. He is the brightness of the Father's glory. Without him, we are nothing; with him, we offer tribute to God.

But note the affinity of the Church and the Christ. The relationship is pointedly seen in the Scriptures: Bride and Bridegroom; Redeemed and Redeemer; Brethren--Firstborn Brother; Body and Head. Unity is clearly proclaimed. All in Christ are in

the church. It is not two spheres of praise operations but one. "Christ and the church are complementary parts of an organism--head and body--they form the sphere where the glory of God is manifested and the medium through which the praise of the creation is rendered to the Creator" (Interpreters Bible). God's glory has the human touch: man and his Son born of a woman.

How long is this praise to be--"throughout all ages, world without end." Literally "unto all the generations of the age of the ages." Eternity is conceived of as consisting of ages--all endlessly succeeding one another. This song of praise begins on earth, protracts through all generations of men, and then continues forever in Heaven. If you are not now grateful for God and speak your praise and thanksgiving for him, how could you later spend joyously an eternity doing it? Ellicott reminds us that each generation adds its peculiar thanks. It is akin to each graduating class from Harding doing something for the school another class has not done. Glory piles on top of glory. This ascription of praise is not transitory--it is never obsolete but it is forever--worlds without end.

I found this little poem from an unknown author:

"Through all eternity to thee
A joyful song I'll raise
For oh, eternity's too short
To utter all thy praise."

God is forever, the church will be forever praising him, and forever and ever there will be reason to do so.

Finally, let all say "Amen." God should be praised--so be it and so will it certainly be. Surely there is not a soul that cannot say "Amen." We adopt as our own this glorious doxology--now and until we see him face to face and tell the story saved by grace, we will praise him and glorify his name. Amen!

Jim Bill McInteer is president and publisher of the 21st Century Christian, Power for Today, and 20th Century Graded Bible Lessons. He serves on the board of trustees of Harding University and is chairman of the Harding Graduate School Committee. He served as minister for the West End church of Christ in Nashville for thirty years before his retirement.

Paul Faulkner

BACKGROUND

Where does Christ stand in relation to the evil forces of the world? The pagan world was *weak* because it was the individual against the powers, the "critters." Belief in gods, demons, spirits, and other forms of supernatural powers was a prominent characteristic of the first century world view, with pagans as well as Jews (Acts 19:18-19; Eph. 2:1; 4:14; 6:11-12). There are many testimonies to Jewish involvement in magical practices in the apocrypha, pseudepigrapha, Qumran documents, writings of Josephus, and the earliest traditions within the Talmud and the Midrashim.

The term Paul uses for the powers reflects the wide array of vocabulary shared by people in all religious traditions during the New Testament era, i.e. the *stoicheia* or "elemental spirits of the world."

The pagan world was *weak* because there was no community, little "us-ness." In general, Greek religion was not organized around a set of coherent doctrines, but rather centered in observance of traditional rituals such as processions, prayers, libations, sacrifices, and feasting. The Greeks were very open to new deities and cults and often identified their own deities with some of the major foreign gods.

The influx of former pagans (who had little information about Christ, community, or Israel) into the church created real problems. Thus, the letter to the Ephesians called for two things: power in Christ and power in unity.

OUR POWER IS IN CHRIST

The eternal purpose of the church is found in Ephesians 3:10-12. Through the church all the rulers and powers in the heavens will know God's wisdom. In contrast to the self-serving attempts to use divine power in magic, Ephesians stresses the believer's reception of divine power (Eph. 3:16-17) which enables him to show selfless love to others (Eph. 5:2).

Paul *dares* us to focus on Christ. When we do:

1. Divisions dissipate. In contrast, when we focus on issues they multiply.
2. Christ becomes the top of the pyramid or the center of the target.
3. An example from business is the company which focuses on its mission and has a vision for its future.
4. An example from families is the family which focuses on its mission and has great intentions. There is mutual submission (Eph. 5 and Eph. 1:2,3,17). There is focus on the potential and the issues dissolve.
5. Focusing on Christ's model is focusing on the primary. There are non-negotiables that are differentiated from issues. Paul's model is to point to what *ought* to be: the ideal, the ultimate, the potential, not what or where we actually are.

OUR UNITY IS IN CHRIST

The Godhead itself is a model of unity.

Ephesians is a relevant book:

1. Because when it was written, brokenness was spread all over the world: Jew against Gentile, Roman against Greek; the list could go on and on. And today, there is hardly a bone in the body that has not been broken or bruised in jobs, schools, church, family, or country. The whole world seems "out of joint" or limping in pain. The "ethnic cleansing" in Bosnia and Rwanda, the genocide in East

Timor, the division being preached by Louis Farrakan--all signify the lack of international unity on moral issues.

2. Because it gives what was needed then, and what is needed now. The *secret truth*, the mystery, is the indivisibility of the body (Eph. 3:6). *Reconciliation* comes from him (Eph. 2:14-16).

Christ raises the question to another level. A paradigm shift is necessary. The paradigm needs to shift from issues to Christ. When we focus on Christ and his power, unity is the end result. This is bull's-eye theology. Baptism does not mean getting wet but dying to self and living to Christ. The Lord's Supper does not mean a card punched but a memory of one common source which binds and heals. The dynamics of a church and a family are similar. We start with agreements. Biblical priorities mean that we seek first the kingdom of God. There is a first commandment and a second commandment. The first half of the New Testament is Christ and him crucified--it is the good news. Love really does precede faith and hope.

Unity in the Body follows the biblical direction: Ephesians 1:10; 2:5-6; 3:6; 4:3; Galatians 3:26-29; 1 Corinthians 12:12-13; and John 17:20-23.

Man's direction for unity results in futility. In 1910 at the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh, a delegate from the Far East decried the detrimental effect which denominational divisions had:

You have sent us your missionaries, who have introduced us to Jesus Christ, and for that we are grateful. But you have also brought us your distinctions and divisions; some preach Methodism, others Lutheranism, Congregationalism, or Episcopalianism. We ask you to preach the Gospel to us, and to let Jesus Christ himself raise from among our peoples, by the action of his Holy Spirit, a Church conforming to his requirements and also the genius of our race. This church will be the church of Christ in Japan, the church of Christ in China, the church of Christ in India; it

will free us from all the sins with which you color the preaching of the gospel among us.¹

WHAT DOES THIS SAY TO THE CHURCH TODAY?

Thank God we differ! We have differences and imperfections, and there is room for difference and imperfection in God's family. The hard question has to do with disagreements. How do we determine what to do with disagreements? Do we use what is fair and legal as our standard? Israel was never very good at this unity business either. Some example of biblical disagreements may be helpful to us: Acts 15; 1 Cor. 12; Acts 16:3 and Gal. 2:3-4. How can we reconcile unity vs. pure doctrine, grace vs. works, justice vs. compassion, rights vs. responsibilities?

Logic puts up barriers and slows us down. Some things must stay unsolved. The "slippery slope" argument is a fear of the uncertain, a lack of faith in the word.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

We must focus on prayer. We have the power of his Spirit inside (Eph. 3:16-17). We have the power of his love (Eph. 3:18).

Grasp the big picture--how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ.

Prioritize, put first things first. When you walk in the room, you turn on the light first. We must prioritize love (Eph. 3:18,19). We must go back to the foundation of love, or we can never make the shift.

Never get discouraged. We are always incomplete, but somehow in Jesus incomplete is *complete* (Col. 3:10).

Believe that *this will work*. Remember his promise in Ephesians 3:20. Leaving issues dangling may seem not to work, but by focusing on the cross, we are better able to resolve the issues because the heart issues are right.

To Christ be the glory!

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NOTES

1. Maurice Villian, *Unity*, 29.

THE POWER OF CHRIST

Ephesians 1:18-21

G. P. Holt

As we talk about the power of Christ, our minds run to that great statement in Matthew 28:18, "And Jesus came and spake unto them saying, 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, Son, and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things, whatsoever I have commanded you, and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the age."

In our text of Ephesians 1:18-21, verse 18 states, "The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints." The eyes of your understanding (the mind), be enlightened (free of ignorance or wrong attitudes), that ye may know (to have full evidence--to be fully informed, to recognize).

What is it, Paul, that you want us to be fully informed about? What is it that you want us to have full evidence of? What is it that you want us to have the right attitudes about?

HOPE

The answer is, "The hope of His calling." The word "hope" carries with it the idea of expectation and desire. Sometimes we hear people say, "I want to go to heaven." They desire to go, but do not expect to go because they know they are not living right; hence, they do not really hope to go.

Hope is further defined as a confident, favorable desire or expectation, a happy anticipation of that which is to come. The Bible describes hope in Romans 8:24-25, "For in hope were we saved. But hope that is seen is not hope, for who hopeth for that which he seeth? But if we hope for that which we see not, then do we with patience wait for it."

Hope is an anchor. "Which we have as an anchor of the soul" (Heb. 6:19). Hope, then, is both sure and steadfast. Hope is that stabilizer that keeps us going when the going gets tough. Hope makes us hang on in there, when it seems we cannot. Hope will not let us be ashamed. Paul says, "And hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God hath been shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy Spirit, which was given to us" (Rom. 5:4-5). God will never let us down.

Hope gives an answer. Peter wrote, "But sanctify in your hearts, Christ, as Lord, being ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason for the hope that is in you with meekness, and fear" (1 Pet. 3:15). Our hope in Christ will be questioned, even challenged. At times, we will be called upon to defend our hope.

Hope motivates. Soldiers serve, in hope of winning. Farmers plant, in hope of reaping. Shepherds feed, in hope of having meat. Oxen tread, in hope of receiving (1 Cor. 9:7-14). Our hope for the incorruptible crown will motivate us to control ourselves (1 Cor. 9:24-26). Therefore, we should rejoice in hope (Rom. 5:2). We should not be ashamed (Rom. 5:5). We should remember that hope is abiding.

INHERITANCE

Paul points out the glorious inheritance. To receive an inheritance, we must be heirs. "And now, brethren, [this is God's family, the Church], I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified [set apart]" (Acts 20:31). Ephesians 1:11 states, "In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will." "Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light" (Col. 1:12). Only saints are heirs of God and will get the inheritance. "And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son unto your hearts, crying Abba Father, wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ" (Gal. 4:6). "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our Spirit that we are the children of God. And if children, then heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. If so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified, together" (Rom. 8:16). In Hebrews 1:14, Paul tells us that we are heirs of salvation. In James 2:5 we read, "Hearken my beloved brethren, hath not God chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which He hath promised to them that love Him?"

I may not have an inheritance of houses or land, or even money, down here. But, in my Father's home, there are many mansions, and one of them belongs to me.

POWER

Paul points out the greatness of His power. This power is directed toward us who believe, according to the working of his mighty power in Christ. Just look at the power of Christ. Jesus has "All power in Heaven and in earth" (Mt. 28:18). Look at his power

to transform. We read in John 2 of the marriage in Cana of Galilee. Somebody has fallen in love. Well, I hope so. For love is the only foundation for a good marriage. Jesus, his mother and his disciples were invited to the marriage. (If you are thinking about getting married, be sure and invite Jesus to your wedding. Put him on your guest list.) His mother was with him. Young people, could your mother go with you to the places you go? If not, maybe you should not go, either. The wine ran out. In this life, something, or somebody is always running out. This is a "running out" world, in which we live. Everything we pile up around us will run out on us, or we on it. But, in this, Christ proves his power to transform by turning water into wine. Oh, the great power of Jesus. Christ is still in the transforming business (Rom. 12:2). He transformed Peter, Paul, and the woman at the well.

Christ has power over nature. (cf. Mark 4:39) Jesus invited his disciples to cross over to the other side of the sea with him. All life is a crossing over from this side to the other. Some make the crossing early in life. Others at mid life, and others in old age. But, we must all cross over. In Mark 4:37, a great storm of wind and waves began to beat upon the ship, so that it was now full. Jesus arose and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "peace, be still." The wind ceased, and there was a great calm. Thus, Jesus proved his power over nature.

Jesus has power over death. The story of Lazarus is found in John 11. He was raised from the dead. I shall also be raised from the dead. In 1 Corinthians 6:14 Paul says, "And God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise us up, by His own power." Death is not the end; it is only the beginning of greater things (1 Cor. 6:19). What great power we have in Christ expressed by Paul: And what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us that believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him

from the dead, and set him at His own right hand in the heavenly places. For 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, and hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his holy body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all (Eph. 1:19-23).

Christ has power over sin. In Acts 13, Peter speaks of Christ. Verse 37 says, "Be it known unto you, therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins. And by Him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the Law of Moses." Again, in Ephesians 1:7, we read, "In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace." In Colossians 1:14, Paul says, "In whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins." Only through the power of Christ can sins be forgiven. Thank God for the blood of Christ and the power of Christ to cleanse us of our sins. Thank God for the power of Jesus to give us a better life on this earth and a more abundant life in the world to come, where tears will be wiped away, and every day will be Sunday. TO GOD BE THE GLORY!

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THEME CLASSES

WHAT WE LEARN ABOUT GOD IN THE LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

Jack P. Lewis

The Letter to the Ephesians praises the God who used Jesus Christ as his agent and the church as his instrument in accomplishing his eternal plan.

EPITHETS OF GOD

Father. It is no new God that the writer is extolling. The epithet "father" occurs eight times and is used in three senses. In the Old Testament. God is a father to Israel (Jer. 31:9; Mal. 2:10), and the nation is his son (Ex. 4:22).¹ Common in the language of Jesus is the term "Father." The prayer in the garden began "Abba, Father" (Mk. 14:36) which expresses an intimacy not paralleled in contemporary Judaism. God is not remote, formidable, and unknowable, but is near, friendly, lovely, and known through the Son.

Jesus, in a unique relationship, is confessed as the beloved Son at his baptism and transfiguration (Mt. 3:17; 17:5). He speaks of "my Father" and "your Father," but not to people of "our Father."² He is declared the Son of God with power by his resurrection (Rom. 1:4). However, the explicit term "Son of God" occurs in the Ephesian letter only at Ephesians 4:13.

In addition to "Father" being used to describe God's relation to the Christ, he is also called the "Father of glory" (Eph. 1:17). This epithet which only here in the New Testament but is comparable to "the God of glory" (Acts 7:2). This genitive phrase may mean "the glorious Father." Glory and power are synonyms with Paul

and describe God's action; the resurrection of Jesus was by the glory of the Father (Rom. 6:4; cf. 1 Cor. 6:14).

"Father" expresses the relation of God to the believer: "God our Father" (Eph. 1:2), "one God and Father of us all" (Eph. 4:6), and "God the Father" (Eph. 6:23). The New Testament knows no universal fatherhood of God, but believers by adoption are in that close relationship which expresses itself in "Abba! Father!" (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6). There is no encouragement in this letter for the Father-Mother God concept of the feminists.

Jews in the Roman empire followed the practice by which one might enter another family by adoption. Old debts and obligations were extinguished; the adopting father was in authority and had discipline responsibilities. In Paul's use of this metaphor,³ children of wrath (Eph. 2:3) have become children of God (cf. Jn. 1:12).

The father image challenges thought concerning what a father ought to be. Paul plays on the words *pater* and *patria* (Eph. 3:14-15). The verse declares that the concept of fatherhood in perfection derives from God; he is the archetype of parentage. Human fatherhood is ennobled by the comparison.

The question "What is God like?" finds its answer in the simile that God is like a father. However if one knows only a cruel, abusive father, the communication becomes distorted. If God is like a father, then it is sobering to be reminded that one's children relate to God as they relate to him.

Human characteristics are often described under Semitic influence by the genitive construction "son of" A wicked person is a "son of the devil" (cf. Jn. 8:44; Acts 13:10) or a "child of hell" (Mt. 23:15). One who reflects the likeness of God in his behavior is a child of God. Peacemakers, those who love enemies, and those in a right relation with God are "children of God" (Mt. 5:9, 45; 1 Jn. 3:1) without age implication. "Children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3) and "children of light" (Eph. 5:8) are described by this idiom. Sonship and heirship are open to all races by means of righteousness.⁴

The One God. Paul had inherited the oneness of God from earlier training in the synagogue with its daily confessions (cf. Deut. 6:4). Jesus on the cross had cried "My God, My God" (Mk. 15:34) and later had spoken to the disciples of "my God and your God" (Jn. 20:17).

In his list of seven things, Paul includes "one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all" (Eph. 4:6). Ancient Israel had been surrounded by nations, each with its own god: Chemosh, Milcom, El, or Baal, and some nations revered more than one. Roman culture was polytheistic. Ephesus with its temple to Artemis, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, needed an affirmation of one God (cf. 1 Cor. 8:5-6; 1 Tim. 2:5).

This one God, "able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think" (Eph. 3:20-21), knows no limits on what he can do. He hears and answers prayers. That God is Father assures his kindness; that he is able assures that his power will not be frustrated; and that he is one makes all aspects of unity depend on manifestations of his will.

Lord. The variety of uses of "Lord" in Greek raises the question of its import in any single instance. Its use in the mystery-religions and in the emperor cult suggests divinity; but there is also an implication of mastership. The early Christian confession becomes "Jesus is Lord" (1 Cor. 12:3). "The Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph. 1:2,3,17; 6:23), as well as "Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph. 3:11), becomes a common title in the writings of Paul.

Under the influence of Septuagint usage, "Lord" can also be used for the Father; and in some New Testament passages it is uncertain which is intended. In Ephesians, what is pleasing to the Lord (Eph. 5:10) likely speaks of the Father. The admonition to understand what the will of the Lord is (Eph. 5:17) fits well with the writer's emphasis on the will of God (Eph. 1:5,9,11; cf. Col. 1:9; 4:12). The admonition to make melody with the heart to the

Lord (Eph. 5:19) has as its parallel singing "spiritual songs to God" (Col. 3:16).

GOD IN ACTION

Blessed be the God who has blessed. Worship is the grateful human response for what God has already done. The term "blessed" is used in the Old Testament for God, for objects, and for people, but in the New Testament is always for the praise of God (cf. Eph. 1:3) and is never used for people. Spiritual blessings contrast with material blessings such as those promised Israel for obedience (Deut. 28:1-14). Paul in the context details the blessings of being chosen, destined, and a recipient of grace. Paul describes these blessings as being in heavenly places, a unique New Testament phrase he uses four additional times in this letter (Eph. 1:20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12).

The Merciful God of Love (Eph. 2:4). The verb "love" (*agapein*) occurs five times in the letter, one instance of which is "God's love with which he loved us" (Eph. 4:2) given as the basic motivation for what God has done. In occurrences of the noun, whether "in love" (Eph. 1:5) goes with verse 5 (as RSV; NIV) by which it would be divine love or with v. 4 (as NRSV; REB) by which it is human love has never been determined conclusively. The Ephesians are urged to be imitators of God as beloved children (Eph. 5:1).

The Grace of God. As in his other letters, Paul uses "grace from God" in the salutation of the letter (Eph. 1:2). We have redemption through his grace (Eph. 1:7), and God shows the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:7).

Salvation is by grace through faith (Eph. 2:5, 8). The antecedent of the following pronoun "it" is salvation, not "faith," making

salvation which is not of works the gift of God. The boundless riches of God's grace (Eph. 2:7) are shown in his pardoning Jew and Gentile, raising them to share the place Christ occupies. Paul's own mission is of God's grace that was given him (Eph. 3:2, 7, 8). It has not been merited, and it was not for Paul's personal benefit. He was a servant (*diakonos*) by God's grace given (Eph. 3:7).

God's grace also extends to the Ephesians. Each was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift (Eph. 4:7). Paul then details the various gifts in the church.

The God of Prayer. Though prayer is not frequently mentioned in the Letter to the Ephesians, Paul bows his knees unto the Father (Eph. 3:14) which may be a gesture either of homage (Rom. 14:11; Phil. 2:10) or of prayer. After his great benediction at the beginning of the letter, Paul continues with a prayer for the Ephesians, not ceasing to give thanks for them (Eph. 1:15-22). He urges that thanks be given always in all things in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father (Eph. 5:20). Using the word "all" four times in the verse, he urges them to pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication (Eph. 6:18-19). Rather than prayer for success or release from danger, he wants boldness in proclaiming the gospel.

The Creator who Recreates. God is the creator of all things (Eph. 3:9), but the verb "create" in its four occurrences is used in the letter also in a second sense. God has created of Jew and Gentile one new humanity (Eph. 2:15). The believer is created in Christ Jesus for good works (Eph. 2:10). The new nature which the Ephesians should put on is created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness (Eph. 4:24).

Our task is to regain the divine image which has been have lost. We are to be imitators of God (Eph. 5:1), a word never used in the Septuagint for imitation of God,⁵ though Israel is called on to be holy as the Lord is holy (Lev. 19:2). The idea of imitation,

but not the term, occurs in sayings of Jesus, and the imitation motif lies back of Eph. 4:24, where the new self is "according to the likeness of God" and is also seen in the admonition to be strong in the Lord and the strength of his might (Eph. 6:10-20).

God's Own People (Eph. 1:14). Paul does not in this letter elaborate on the doctrine of the election of Israel, but those in Christ both Jew and Gentile have become God's people. Though Gentiles have in the past been children of wrath (Eph. 2:3), alienated from the life that God requires, they have been called to hope (Eph. 4:4). A new life worthy of the calling to which they have been called must be led (Eph. 4:1). They must engage in good works (Eph. 2:10) and discharge the various gifts they have been given (Eph. 4:11-16). The respective duties of husbands and wives, parents and children, and slaves and masters are a part of this new life.

The Kingdom of Christ and of God (Eph. 5:5). The "kingdom of Christ and of God" is a unique phrase in the New Testament though the "kingdom of our Lord and his Christ" occurs elsewhere (Rev. 11:15). "Kingdom" appears only once in Ephesians, but "church" occurs nine times. Paul does not confuse Christ with God. The present administration of the kingdom has been committed to Christ who is at God's right hand. Christ reigns until everything is put under his feet, and then he renders the kingdom up to God that God may be all in all (1 Cor. 15:24-28).

The Master in Heaven. In a culture where a large percentage of the population was enslaved without rights, Paul calls on the slave to render his service as though rendering it to the Lord and not to men. He is to do the will of God from the heart (Eph. 6:5-6). Paul assures the slave that whatever good he does he will receive the same again from the Lord.

Paul calls on the slave master to refrain from threatening knowing that in heaven resides Master of both slave and owner in whom there is no partiality. The word *kuriōs* is used both for the slave owner and for the Master in heaven.⁶

The Forgiving God. Paul calls on Christians to forgive each other as God in Christ has forgiven them (Eph. 4:32). In forgiving they are imitators of God (Eph. 5:1), showing themselves to be children of the Most High (cf. Lk. 6:35-36).

The Holy Spirit of God. Without giving a dogmatic treatment of the teaching of the Spirit, Paul affirms that the Ephesians were sealed by the Holy Spirit which is a guarantee (*arrabon*) of our inheritance until we acquire it (Eph. 1:13, 14). Both Jew and Gentile have access to God by one Spirit (Eph. 2:18). Paul wants them strengthened with might through God's Spirit in the inner person (Eph. 3:16). There is one Spirit, and the Ephesians should keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:3, 4). They are to be filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18) but are not to grieve the Spirit (Eph. 4:30) which falling short of their obligations would undoubtedly do.

The Armor of God (Eph. 6:11, 13). The armor of God may be either that which God wears or more likely that which he supplies. The pattern is set by Isaiah's description of the Lord (Isa. 11:5; 59:17) and by the equipment of a Roman soldier. Paul cautions against the wiles of the devil (Eph. 6:11). The purpose of the armor is to equip the Christian to stand against great opposition (Eph. 6:13-14; cf. Jas. 4:7; 1 Pet. 5:9).

The Wrath of God.⁷ Using a Semitism, Paul threatens that the wrath of God comes on the sons of disobedience, meaning upon disobedient people, and he gives a list of possible sins (Eph. 2:2; 5:6). In another passage he describes the Ephesians in times past

as being by nature "children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3). Paul makes clear that freedom from the law does not imply freedom to sin (cf. Rom. 6:1). He is concerned that the Ephesians not be deceived (Eph. 5:6).

The Will of God. There are more references to the will of God, a term rare outside the Septuagint and the New Testament, in Ephesians than in any other New Testament book except the Gospel of John.⁸ The letter does not support the idea of impersonal fate or chance. God's will is the source of the whole work of salvation.⁹ Paul is an apostle through the will of God (Eph. 1:1). Christians are designated sons through "the good pleasure of God's will" (Eph. 1:5), and there is "the mystery of his will" and "the counsel of his will" (Eph. 1:9, 11). The Ephesians are admonished to try to understand what the will is, and slaves are to do his will from the heart (Eph. 5:17; 6:6)--all concepts that contrast with doing the desires of the flesh (Eph. 2:3) which previously characterized the Gentiles.

GOD'S ETERNAL PURPOSE

In the most distinctive teaching about God in the Epistle to the Ephesians, Paul affirms that God has acted according to the good pleasure of his will, the mystery of his will, and the council of his will (Eph. 1:5, 9, 11) to accomplish his eternal purpose. Before the foundation of the world, God decided that he would be served by a redeemed humanity which plan he has carried out in the uniting of Jew and Gentile in Christ Jesus. Behind all the events of Old Testament narration, God has been active in accomplishing his plan.

God created one world into which division entered by sin. The Gentile world is described in terms of alienation (Eph. 4:18). It is without hope and without God in the world (Eph. 2:12). It has also been separated from the commonwealth of Israel, the covenants,

and the promises (Eph. 2:12). The dividing wall of the temple becomes a symbol of the alienation of Gentiles (Eph. 2:14).

Those Jews who are now Christians had been little better off as they lived in the passions of their flesh (Eph. 2:3), making them like the rest of mankind.

God's purpose is to bring all things in heaven and earth together under one head, even Christ. It was not to bring all people under Judaism as some rabbis, knowing Old Testament promises about Gentiles, supposed. It was to create out of the two one new humanity, without Gentiles submitting to the requirements and practices of Judaism or Jews becoming Gentiles. Neither is submerged in the other. Both are reconciled to God through the cross (Eph. 2:15-18). Gentiles become fellow heirs, fellow members, and fellow partakers of the promises in Jesus through the Gospel (Eph. 3:6).

There was a time when God's plan had not been revealed. Its details were unknown to prophets, angels (1 Pet. 1:10-12), and to the rulers of this age (1 Cor. 2:6-11). Paul calls it a mystery, a term meaning once secret but now made known.¹⁰ It is not the information of only the initiated. Knowledge had come to apostles and prophets (Eph. 3:5), as well as to Paul, by revelation. It is now made known to principalities and powers in heavenly places (Eph. 3:10) as well as to the Gentiles.

History is neither circular nor "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." History is linear, moving to God's plan, a plan for the fullness of times--when time was right--and realized in Christ Jesus. The plan included redemption that one be freed from slavery to sin and death.

The basic facts of the Gospel are a part of the plan which is accomplished "in Christ." Paul has been made an apostle as a part of it. Everything has been put under Christ's feet, making him head over the church which is his body. Ephesian Christians had been raised with Christ and made to sit with him in heavenly places (Eph. 2:5-6).

Solomon had built a material temple as the dwelling place for the Lord whom earth could not contain, and it had been accepted by the Lord (1 Kings 9:3). Herod's reconstruction of the temple in Jerusalem was in operation as Paul wrote. Ephesus knew of the temple of Artemis. In Paul's metaphor, the Lord's temple is not of brick and stone. It is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus as the chief cornerstone. It was not on a localized site. It, a spiritual temple (1 Pet. 2:5), is the dwelling place of God in the Spirit (Eph. 2:22) and was in the process of growing. Other metaphors for this new society are "kingdom" and "family." God's people are his household (Eph. 2:19); as citizens (Eph. 2:19) they are in the kingdom (cf. Eph. 5:5).

Paul saw himself and his work as a part of this eternal purpose. He had been given the ministry of preaching to the Gentiles. The power that had raised Jesus was working in him (Eph. 3:7).

The church had not developed from human choice and from ordinary historical processes. Through the church the manifold wisdom of God is made known. It is the outworking of God's purpose with the ongoing work that glory be given to God in the church and in Christ to all generations (Eph. 3:21).

The plan gave boldness and confidence of access to God (Eph. 2:18; 3:12). The new society is a people formed to be God's glorious heritage (Eph. 1:18), his treasured possession. This being true, one cannot say "Yes" to Christ and "No" to the church. Christ had been God's agent in the creation of the world and now was his agent in the recreation of a new humanity.

The whole plan and its accomplishment is to the praise of God's glory (Eph. 1:6, 12, 14). We glorify him by being the people holy and without blemish he planned to serve him. We praise him by walking in the good works he planned. Paul ends the first half of the letter with a doxology: "To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever, Amen" (Eph. 3:21).

SOME THINGS PAUL WANTS CHRISTIANS TO KNOW ABOUT GOD

From Paul's enumeration, the spiritual blessings given in Christ include election, adoption, redemption, forgiveness, revelation of the mystery, an inheritance, and the Holy Spirit as a seal. Concerned that the Ephesians have a proper appreciation, Paul prays that they have knowledge of God (Eph 1:17). *Epignosis* describes true acquaintance, not mere book learning.

They need the eyes of their heart enlightened that they may know the hope to which they have been called (Eph. 1:18). Paul is explicit that there is one hope of their calling (Eph. 4:4).

Paul wants the Ephesians to know what are the riches of the glory of God's inheritance in the saints (Eph. 1:18). God's people compose his inheritance (cf. Deut. 32:9), but they also share an inheritance of the saints in light (Col. 1:12).

Paul wants the Ephesians to know the exceeding greatness of God's power in us who believe. He stacks up synonyms: power, working, strength, and might. God raised Jesus as his greatest demonstration of redemptive power. He also made him sit at his right hand, and he made him to be head over all things to the church.

This same power that raised Jesus is the power at work in us who believe (Eph. 1:19, 20), able to do more than we think or ask. Paul expounds a parallel between what God did with Jesus and what he does with the believer.

Using a different figure, the manner of life is presented in the Semitism of a walk. In the past there had been a slavery to sin (cf. Jn. 8:34). The Ephesians had been slaves to their culture, to the prince of the power of the air, and to the passions of their own flesh (Eph. 2:3). "Flesh" in Paul is ordinarily all that is in man that is in rebellion against God. Such behavior had made them suitable for God's wrath (Eph. 2:3).

God had acted drastically out of the great love with which he loved us. He made us alive together with Christ (Eph. 2:5), raising the believer with Christ and seating him with Christ in heavenly places. Though once dead, he has been made alive; though once enslaved, he has been enthroned. Paul multiplies words to describe God's motives: "rich in mercy," "great love with which he loved," "grace," and "kindness" (Eph. 2:4, 5, 7, 8).

God had in mind creating a people holy and without blame (Eph. 1:4), a people who would devote themselves to good works (Eph. 2:10). The whole divine plan and its outworking is above human imagination or dream. It all merits the doxology, "To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever, Amen" (Eph. 3:21).

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NOTES

1. G. Schrenk, "pater," *TDNT*, 5:951-56; H. Ringgren, "'abh," *TDOT*, 1:16-19.
2. The wording of the Model Prayer (Mt. 6:9) is for the disciples' use jointly.
3. Huiothesia ("placing as a son"); Rom. 8:15, 23; 9:4; Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:5.
4. E. Schweizer, "huios," *TDNT*, 8:389-92.
5. R. A. Wild, "'Be Imitators of God': Discipleship in the Letter to the Ephesians," in *Discipleship in the New Testament*, ed. F. F. Segovia. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985, 127-43.
6. W. Foerster, "kyrios," *TDNT*, 3:1039-098; H. Bietenhard, "Lord," *DNTT*, 2:508-20.

7. H. Kleinknecht, O. Grether, J. Fichtner, E. Sjöberg, O. Procksch, and G. Stählin, "orge," *TDNT*, 5:382-447; H.C. Hahn, "Anger," *DNTT*, 1:107-13.
8. M. Barth, *Ephesians 1-3*, The Anchor Bible. New York: Doubleday, 1974, 65.
9. G. Schrenk, "thelema," *TDNT*, 3:55-59; D. Müller, "Will," *DNTT*, 3:1019-023.
10. W. H. Mare, "Paul's Mystery in Ephesians 3," *Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 8 (Spring 1965): 77-84.

JESUS CHRIST IN EPHESIANS

Jim Howard

In his epistle to the Ephesians the apostle Paul rises to a level of rapturous language and ethereal vision unequalled not only in his other writings but in all of Scripture. In the majestic portrayal of God's universal, cosmic drama for the reclaiming of his lost creation, the apostle soars far above and beyond the mundane to share a vision of and dream for God's glorious ideal, the church. Perhaps it is this grandiose, panoramic concept of the church that makes this writing so difficult for most of us. We are too earth-bound, too time-bound in our understanding of the church because our vantage point is from the church in its most local expression full of warts and blemishes and characterized by human nature sometimes at its worst. But Paul dreams of the church as it could and should be.

And as the apostle thus visualizes the church as nothing less than God's cosmic, eternal design for the ultimate salvation of the whole world, the glue that holds the superstructure together is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. The Father's glorious ideal finds its glory in the Son--Jesus Christ as sovereign, Jesus Christ as mystery, and Jesus Christ as fullness.

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF CHRIST

The sovereignty of Jesus Christ in God's plan is necessitated by the "riftedness" of the world. John Mackay rightly observed that our world is out of synch.¹ The disarray of the world is transcendental and it is historical. Man is alienated from his Maker. The apostle Paul recognized that malevolent "principalities and powers"

as instruments of what Mackay calls "a master strategist of evil" have left man and his world in shambles. As fallen man has succumbed to the powers of evil, personal and cosmic chaos has resulted.

Man's only hope for deliverance is a new sovereignty, a new Lord. And this is precisely the task to which God the Father has called God the Son. God proposed "to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ" (1:10 NIV). The Revised Standard renders the phrase "to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth." The key word in this phrase is one of the longest terms in the Greek New Testament -- *anakephalaaiosasthai*. Right in the middle of this word is the Greek term for "head." No wonder Paul asserts, "And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way" (1:22)!

Christ's sovereignty means, however, a great deal more than the narrow role we assign him when we limit his sphere of influence to the institutional church. Another key phrase in Ephesians 1:10 is "all things in heaven and on earth...." Paul does not limit "all things" to sacred things. The sovereignty of Jesus Christ demolishes the artificial boundary between the sacred and the secular. If the world's rift is to be bridged, if man's chaotic disintegration is to be healed, Christ must be sovereign over the arts, the sciences, history, philosophy, man's educational pursuits, the world of business, entertainment, sports, and on and on the list goes. Nothing that is honorable, nothing that is part of the Father's ongoing creative design, is excluded from submission to Christ's Lordship. God intends for Jesus Christ to be the glue that holds the entire universe together. No wonder that the apostle chooses the term "fullness" to describe the practical application of this sovereignty! And of course the ultimate goal of the healing of the rift, the reconciliation of man from his alienation, is "... that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory" (1:12).

Christ's sovereignty is not, however, limited to the world-encompassing sphere. Paul makes it clear that Christ desires to rule over classes, races, and over the individual life. In Ephesians chapter two this principle is illustrated in the breaking down of the barrier between Jew and Gentile (a principle fully applicable in destroying all racial boundaries in our late twentieth-century world). Christ has "destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility ..." in order "to create in himself one new man out of the two... and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross ..." (2:14-16). The language is that of redemption. When the apostle asserts that "you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ" (2:13), he seems to be employing the corporate personality concept to speak of reconciling races and classes as well as individuals. The salvation here described is cosmic as well as individual in scope. As the rift is broken down and as the world is redeemed and reconciled to the Father, Christ's sovereignty is once again affirmed in his position as chief cornerstone (not only supporting the superstructure but serving as the point of reference for the building's being straight), the one in whom "the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord" (2:20-21).

THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST

If Jesus Christ is sovereign in Ephesians he is also mystery. In writing the epistle, Paul's goal was that the Ephesians (and perhaps others since this epistle seems to have been a circular letter) might "be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets" (3:4-5). Whenever Paul uses the term "mystery," he refers to what was formerly mysterious but has now been revealed ("... the mystery made known to me by revelation ..." 3:3). Markus Barth clearly demonstrates that the Greek *mysterios* used by the apostle

in Ephesians refers to God's "secret."² Paul explicitly defines this "secret" or "mystery." "This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus" (3:6).

The mystery as God's plan for the salvation of humanity was conceived in his mind before the creation of the world (1:4). It was "the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ ..." (1:9). God's mystery revealed and implemented in Christ partakes of God's holiness. Defined by God's very essence as love, this eternal plan for man's salvation could only be put into effect and revealed when the time was right. Paul sees it to be his mission "to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God ..." (3:9). God's intent was that "now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord" (3:10-11). The mystery is nothing more or less than God's eternal plan to reclaim his lost creation through his son Jesus Christ. This plan is holy because its revelation brings us to the holiest of all places, the heart and mind of God. God's nature is thus disclosed to us in Jesus Christ (cf. John 14:9). Barth sums it up beautifully:

When a lover confesses to his beloved his secret love, he does not reveal a method or technique. Rather he reveals himself, he opens his heart, and in so doing he delivers and gives himself to the beloved. The secret revealed is his innermost heart. He is essentially and totally for the other and makes known that he never wants to be without or against the beloved. Even so and much more God reveals himself when he reveals his secret. It is God himself by whom Jews and Gentiles were brought together, by whom even hostile powers are brought under control. Above all, everything that they are in, with, and through Christ, is not

just a passing whim of God. It is his revealed secret. They have no reason to suspect, or to ask for, a true deity behind or above the revelation who might be different from the revealed God. Or else God would have kept something hidden from them. But through the salvation now experienced they have access to God himself (2:18; 3:12). God has not just revealed this or that of his identity, or -- as Greek oracles did -- one or another thing that was to happen or to be done. He has revealed *Himself*. This is the meaning of the references to The Secret that is disclosed.³

THE FULLNESS OF CHRIST

Closely related to both Christ's sovereignty and his mystery is his fullness. The apostle Paul declares that "God has placed all things under his [Christ's] feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way" (1:22-23). The gifts given by Christ to his church are intended "to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of Christ" (4:12-13). Research into the meaning of "fullness" ("fullness of time" in 1:10 RSV; "fullness of him" in 1:23 RSV and NIV; and "fullness of Christ" in 4:13 RSV and NIV) has accelerated considerably since the rise of scholarly interest in Gnosticism for which the Greek term *pleroma* (translated "fullness") referred to the sum total of all the divine emanations between the sovereign deity and sinful mankind.

But there has been no unanimity of scholarly opinion as to how the terms "fullness" and "fills" should be understood in Ephesians.⁴ The most meaningful interpretation, however, seems to be that it is Jesus Christ who fills the church and the universe with his powerful and loving presence. This view seems not only the best

fit of the immediate contexts of the verses involved but also seems most compatible with the corporate personality view that Christ is incarnate in his body, the church, which entity fully embodies his essence and his personality. The notion that Christ fills his church likewise seems compatible with the many New Testament pictures of the close, intimate relationship which Christ sustains with his church (e.g. vine and branches, building and stones, etc.).

It is the idea of the fullness of Christ or his ability and intention to fill his body, the church, that provides the rationale for the Christian lifestyle set forth in Ephesians chapters 4-6. Husbands love their wives because Christ loved the church (5:25-33). Wives are submissive to their husbands because the church is submissive to Christ (5:22-24). Slaves are told to obey their masters just as they would obey Christ, and masters are told to treat their slaves "in the same way" (6:5-9; a modern-day application would involve employer employee relations). All Christians are instructed to live a life of love "just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (5:2).

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NOTES

1. John McKay, *God's Order*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1956, 25-50.
2. Markus Barth, *Ephesians*, Vol. I. Garden City, N.J.: Doubleday, 1974, 123-127.
3. Barth, *Ephesians*, I: 127.
4. John R.W. Stott, *God's New Society*. Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1979, 61-66.

THE HOLY SPIRIT IN EPHESIANS

Jimmy Jividen

PAGAN BACKGROUND

Ephesians reflects an understanding of the Holy Spirit held by Christians who lived in culturally diverse Ephesus in the first century.

Paul lived there for more than two years. He had preached in the synagogue, taught in the school of Tyrannus, and worked miracles. He was the object of a riot stirred up by the silversmith, Demetrius (Acts 19:1-20:1). Still later, he wrote to Timothy in Ephesus and instructed him on "how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God" (Eph. 3:15).

Ephesus was a city with many and varied religions. Artemis, the Greek fertility goddess, was dominant. Her temple at Ephesus was considered one of the wonders of the world. Silver shrines used in her worship must have made up a significant part of the city's gross national product. There was also a Jewish influence in the city. Luke records that Paul preached in the synagogue for three months, and twelve disciples of John the Baptist were converted there.

Many at Ephesus followed the magic arts. Those who became Christians turned away from the practice of magic, but their repentance was expensive. The text says:

Many also of those who had believed kept coming, confessing and disclosing their practices. And many of those who practiced magic brought their books together and began burning them in the sight of all. (Acts 19:18-19)

The price of the books burned in this bonfire came to 50,000 pieces of silver or \$1,160,000 in 1994 dollars. At that time a man would have to work at day wages two hundred years to earn 50,000 pieces of silver.

There is even a case of pseudo exorcism recorded at Ephesus. The seven sons of Sceva were wandering Jewish exorcists. They must have witnessed Paul casting out demons, for the text says, "[They] attempted to name over those who had the evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, 'I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches'" (Acts 19:13).

You know the story. The demon said, "I recognize Jesus and I know about Paul, but who are you?" The man who had the demon attacked the exorcists and drove them out of the house naked and wounded.

This pagan religious background gives one a greater understanding of Paul's statement about the Christian warfare:

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world-forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. (Eph. 6:12)

The Ephesians did not need someone to tell them about the spiritual world, for they were religious people who believed in spiritual beings. Paul referred to their former pagan experience in the epistle: "You formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience" (Eph. 2:2).

HOLY SPIRIT BACKGROUND

The church at Ephesus had formerly received instructions about the Holy Spirit. When Paul first came to Ephesus, he found twelve men who were disciples of John the Baptist. The text does not say who taught them or how they got there, but it does indicate they were ignorant of the Holy Spirit. Paul asked them a question about

the Holy Spirit: "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said to him, "No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit" (Acts 19:2).

The consequences of this ignorance are evident. If they had not heard about the Holy Spirit, then they had not been baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They had not received the gift of the Holy Spirit at baptism. They were not Christians, children of God. After Paul taught them about Jesus and the Holy Spirit, they were baptized. According to the promise of Acts 2:38, they then received the gift of the Holy Spirit.

After their baptism Paul, an apostle, laid his hands on them, and the Holy Spirit came upon them in another way. They spoke in tongues and prophesied. They received not only the "gift of the Holy Spirit" at baptism, but also the miraculous powers that came from the Holy Spirit through the laying on of the hands of the apostles.

REFERENCES TO THE HOLY SPIRIT IN EPHESIANS

There are nine references to the Holy Spirit in the epistle. This, of course, does not include the personification of wisdom (1:17), the spirit of man (4:23), or evil spirits (2:2; 6:12).

Sealed with the Holy Spirit	1:13-14
Access to God in one Spirit	2:18
The church as the temple of the Holy Spirit	2:22
Mystery revealed by the Spirit	3:5
Strengthen through the Spirit	3:16-20
There is one Spirit	4:3-4
Grieve not the Holy Spirit	4:30
Be filled with the Spirit	5:18
Sword of the Spirit	6:17-18

It should be noted that there are no promises of the Holy Spirit, as in the gospel of John, or examples of reception of the Holy Spirit, as in the book of Acts. Paul was not concerned with

developing a theology of the Holy Spirit. The Ephesian Christians already knew about the Holy Spirit and personally possessed the Holy Spirit. Paul's references to the Holy Spirit begins with these assumptions. Acts gives the historical data of the coming and operation of the Holy Spirit and explains his nature. The gospel of John gives the theological purposes of his coming. Ephesians begins with this background and tells of the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church.

REALM OF THE SPIRIT

Ephesians, perhaps more than any of the other New Testament books, speaks of a spiritual realm. The very nature of spirits is that they do not take up space nor are they bound in time. Their nature is spiritual -- not physical; eternal -- not temporal. They are not flesh and blood. They exist in a different realm.

There is a technical word which is only used in Ephesians for the spiritual realm of existence. It is *epoura'nios*, translated "heavenly places." It is used five times:

Saints are blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places (1:3).

Christ is seated at the right hand of God in heavenly places (1:20).

Saints are seated with Christ in heavenly places (2:6).

The wisdom of God has been made known to rulers and authorities through the church in heavenly places (3:10).

Saints war against rulers, powers, world-forces of darkness, and spiritual forces of wickedness in heavenly places (6:12).

Heavenly places are "other-worldly." They are the realm where saints abide with Jesus on the right hand of God. They are the realm in which we receive all spiritual blessings. They are the arena in which we war with evil spirits. God and his angels abide there. They are the abode of Beelzebub and all his evil spirits. They are non-physical. Those who dwell there are not flesh and

blood (6:12). This realm extends beyond this present age into the age to come (1:21).

THE SEAL OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Luke's narrative in Acts reveals three ways the Holy Spirit was received by those in the early church. First, there was the baptism of the Holy Spirit which came upon the apostles and the household of Cornelius. They spoke as the Spirit gave them utterance (Acts 1:8; 2:1-4; 10:44-46; 11:15-17). Second, there was the reception of the Holy Spirit which involved spiritual gifts. It came by the laying on of the apostle's hands (Acts 8:18; 19:6; 2 Tim. 1:6). Third, there was the gift of the Holy Spirit which was received by those who repented of their sins and were baptized (Acts 2:38; 5:32; 1 Cor. 12:12; Gal. 3:26-4:6).

All three ways are reflected in Ephesians. First, the *muste'riou* --the mystery--which for ages had been hidden in God and had not been made known in other generations was revealed to Paul along with the apostles and prophets. He said that the hidden mystery "... has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit" (Eph. 3:5).

Second, Paul was speaking of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection when he quoted from Psalm 68:18. He used this text to show how Jesus sent the Holy Spirit when he ascended back to heaven: "When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives and He gave gifts to men" (Eph. 4:8). The context shows these gifts refer to different leaders in the church, including the offices of apostles and prophets.

Third, some of the passages in the book reflect the gift of the Holy Spirit possessed by all saints. Two passages speak of being sealed with the Holy Spirit:

In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation, having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is

given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory. (Eph. 1:13-14)

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. (Eph. 4:30)

The idea of being sealed with the Holy Spirit involves ownership. Hot wax would be placed on ancient letters, and then an identifying impression would be made in it to identify the authority by which it was sent. Such an identifying seal is often found on pottery discovered by the archaeologists. A seal indicated ownership, much like the brand ranchers put on their cattle.

The seal of the Holy Spirit which saints receive identifies them as children of God. Paul develops this concept further in Galatians. "And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, Abba! Father!" (Gal. 4:6). The Holy Spirit identifies saints as children of God.

The Holy Spirit is called a pledge. The word is *arrabo'n*. It is a pledge or guarantee. Not only does the seal of the Holy Spirit identify us as belonging to God now, but it also is a pledge or down payment of what he will give us when our bodies are redeemed at the resurrection (See also 2 Cor. 1:2; Rom. 8:23; 2 Cor. 5:5).

REVEALER OF GOD'S MYSTERY

The Holy Spirit was the revealer of God's mystery to Paul (Eph. 3:3). This mystery in other generations was not made known to the sons of men but has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets (Eph. 3:5). It "for ages has been hidden in God" (Eph. 3:9). Paul said that it has been revealed "in [by] the Spirit" (Eph. 3:5). The content of this mystery was "...that the Gentiles are fellow-heirs and fellow-members of the body, and fellow-partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel" (Eph.

3:6). This mystery was in the eternal purpose of God but had been hidden through the ages until it was revealed *to* the apostles and prophets *through* the church and *by* the Spirit.

Peter also wrote of the Holy Spirit's being the revealer of God's eternal purpose:

As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful search and inquiry, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the suffering of Christ and the glories to follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, -- things into which angels long to look. (1 Pet. 1:10-12)

God's will was revealed through the Holy Spirit. Peter said, "men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (2 Pet. 1:21). Peter experienced this on the day of Pentecost. He, along with the other apostles, spoke "as the Spirit was giving them utterance" (Acts 2:4).

It was because of the revealing work of the Holy Spirit that he is so closely related to the word of God. Paul identifies the word of God as being a weapon of the Holy Spirit: "And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Eph. 6:17).

It should be noted that the Holy Spirit and the word of God are not the same. The Holy Spirit is a personality of the God-head. The word of God is his instrument. They are related to one another as a soldier is related to his sword. The Holy Spirit is the person; the word of God is the instrument he uses.

Often the Scriptures speak of the Holy Spirit and the word of God functioning in the same way. This is true because both the Holy Spirit (the person) and the word of God (the instrument) are involved in the action. This is shown by comparing companion

passages in Ephesians and Colossians: "And do not be filled with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18); "Let the word of Christ richly dwell with you" (Col. 3:16). Notice how different passages say that what the Holy Spirit does is also done by the word of God:

Creation	Genesis 1:2	Hebrews 1:3
Truth	John 16:13	John 17:17
Bear Witness	John 15:26	John 20:30-31
Dwells in	Romans 8:11	Colossians 3:16
Comforts	Acts 9:31	Romans 15:4
Sanctifies	2 Thessalonians 2:13	John 17:17

The work of the Holy Spirit in revealing the mystery hidden throughout the ages is contained in the word of God. To discuss the metaphysics of how this was accomplished, or to say more than the Scriptures say, is unprofitable.

HELPER OF THE SAINTS

One of the words Jesus used to refer to the Holy Spirit is *parakletos*. It is generally translated "Helper" or "Comforter." The word is a combination of the preposition *para*, which means "along side of," and the verb *kaleo*, which means "to call." The Holy Spirit was sent by Jesus to dwell in Christians and the church as their helper in this world. This fact is reflected throughout the book of Ephesians.

The Holy Spirit is shown to be a unifier of the saints. The Ephesian Christians are exhorted to be "... diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit" (Eph. 4:3-4). The same Holy Spirit dwells in every saint. He is the tie that binds them together as God's family.

The breadth and depth of this union was shown between the Jewish and Gentile Christians at Ephesus in the first century. How could two radically different ethnic groups be bound together in one body? The answer is given in Ephesians chapter two:

For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one, and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall ... that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross. (Eph. 2:14-16)

The cross of Christ made unity between Jew and Gentile possible. Peace was not only established between man and God, but also between man and man. Through the same Spirit Jew and Gentile have access to the Father. Both Christian Jew and Christian Gentile are a part of the holy temple of God where the Holy Spirit dwells. Paul said: "... through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father" (Eph. 2:18); "...the whole building, being fitted together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit" (Eph. 2:18, 21-22).

The Holy Spirit is shown to be our intercessor in worship. We have access to the Father in one Spirit. We are to be "filled with the Spirit" as we speak to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (Eph. 5:18-19).

We cannot understand completely how the Holy Spirit helps in worship. The text just says that we have access to God through Him. The text exhorts us to be "filled with the Spirit" rather than be filled with wine. Worship is not getting high by drinking wine to feel good. It is letting the Spirit fill our hearts to sing praises with thanksgivings. Worship is not receiving an impression from drugs and drama. It is giving an expression of praise and thanksgiving from the inner man.

A complementary passage on the Holy Spirit's help in worship is given in Romans:

And in the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness, for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the

mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. (Rom. 8:26-27)

When our minds are confused by conflicting desires so much that we do not know how to seek the help of the Lord, the Spirit intercedes. When our feelings are too deep for words and our limited vocabulary cannot adequately express our exuberant praise to God or the deep anguish of our soul, the Spirit intercedes.

The Holy Spirit gives us strength for the journey. He is our enabler. The first petition that Paul made in his prayer for the Ephesians was for the help of the Holy Spirit: "...that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory; to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man" (Eph. 2:16).

He knew the Holy Spirit could give them power in the inner man. His prayer asked for strength through the Holy Spirit. We do not know all that is involved in this help. Certainly the Holy Spirit does not work contrary to God's will in revelation and creation, but He does work in the world.

Power is also mentioned in verse 20. It is to be identified with the power of verse 16 that comes through the Holy Spirit. Notice how great that power is: "Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us" (Eph. 3:20).

The Holy Spirit dwells in the Christian and is his enabler. His power is beyond what we can ask or think. He also helps us to live an ethical and moral life. It is in the context of the practical section of Ephesians that another function of the Holy Spirit is found: "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption" (Eph. 4:30).

A young man may rise above his natural inclination because he does not want to make his mother cry. In a similar way a Christian may rise above temptation because he does not wish to grieve the Holy Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit again becomes his enabler -- his *parakletos*.

SUMMARY

Ephesians does not give Jesus' promise of the Holy Spirit or how He worked in the early church. The Gospel of John and Acts do that. This book does not develop the theology of the Holy Spirit, but his work is noted in every chapter. The reality, the indwelling, the present work of the Holy Spirit is assumed.

He is the Revealer of God's will, the Intercessor of the saints, and the Helper that Jesus promised would be with his disciples forever.

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SPIRITUALITY IN EPHESIANS

Billy Joe Thrasher

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with *every spiritual blessing....*" Ephesians 1:3 ASV

INTRODUCTION

In order to develop our study of "Spirituality in Ephesians," we need to define spirituality and in order to do this we need to understand the meaning of "*Spirit*," "*Soul*," and "*Body*."

The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia defines spirit as "the seat of emotion in desire or trouble, and thus gradually of mental and moral qualities in general." The soul is defined as "the individual, personal life, the person." The body of course would be the material or physical structure of a person.

We usually think that human beings are made up of soul and body. The soul is looked upon as the spiritual part and the body as the outer corporal part. The soul is invisible and the body visible. However, 1 Thessalonians 5:23 reminds us of a trinity concept of man: "Now may the God of Peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your *spirit* and *soul* and *body* be preserved complete...." (Emphasis mine.)

It is important to know the difference between the spirit and the soul of man. Lack of understanding will hinder us in our spiritual development and growth. It is important to have spiritual knowledge in order to have spiritual growth.

The creature referred to as man is more complex than many might realize. As Clark states, we consist of

A *body*, an organized system, formed by the creative energy of God out of the dust of the earth; composed of bones, muscles, and nerves; of arteries, veins, and a variety of other vessels, in which the blood and other fluids circulate. Of a *soul* which is the seat of the different affections and passions, such as love, hatred, anger, etc., with sensations, appetites, and propensities of different kinds. Of *spirit*, the immortal principle, the source of life to the body and soul, without which the animal functions cannot be performed, how perfect the bodily organs may be; and which alone possesses the faculty of intelligence, understanding, thinking, and reasoning, and produces the faculty of speech wherever it resides, if accidents have not impaired the organs of speech.¹

Genesis 2:7 affirms "the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being (soul)." When God breathed into man "the breath of life," which became man's spirit, the soul of man was formed. The spirit became the source of life (John 6:63). Do not confuse this spirit with the Holy Spirit, for they are different (Romans 8:16).

"...Formed man of dust from the ground," refers to man's body. "...Breathed into his nostrils the breath of life," refers to man's spirit as it came from God." "...And man became a living being (soul)," refers to man's soul when the body was given the spirit and brought into a living being. Body, spirit and soul--a perfect blending of three parts to make one whole, each dependent on the other for life.

A more practical example would be a *light bulb*. The wire and bulb itself would represent the body. The electricity would represent the spirit and the light itself the soul. The electricity is the cause of the light, and the light is the effect of the electricity. The wire and the bulb are the materials used for carrying the electricity and manifesting the light.

Thus the spirit is the very life-line of the spiritual man. It communicates that which is spiritual to the soul of man. The soul is the site of personality where the will, intellect and emotions of man are found. Thus the soul is the central point of every human. In order to grow spiritually the soul of man must submit to the spirit of God.

Christians believe that the Spirit of God is revealed in his inspired word, the Bible. Thus by meditation, understanding, and application of this word, one can grow spiritually.

Ephesians is a great source for our consideration of growing spiritually through study of His word. Let us look at "spirituality in Ephesians."

THE TEXT

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ," (Eph. 1:3). We have received all we need in the way of doctrine and ability to receive the spiritual blessings from the Lord. We can be confident and happy in this.

"...WHO HATH BLESSED US WITH EVERY SPIRITUAL BLESSING" 1:3. As stated in our opening remarks regarding the blessings from the Lord, we have indeed been blessed with *every* spiritual blessing. In this study we want to show how the Ephesian letter points this out and how we may tap into these blessings.

"...HAVING THE EYES OF YOUR HEART ENLIGHTENED, SO THAT YOU MAY KNOW..." 1:18. One's mind must be open to the knowledge revealed in this verse. Three areas are identified:

1. The hope of his calling.
2. The riches of the glory of his inheritance.
3. The exceeding greatness of his power.

"...FOR WITH HIS GREAT LOVE WHEREWITH HE LOVED US" 2:4. How did Christ express his great love to us? Verse 5 reveals three ways:

1. He made us alive together with him.
2. He made us to sit with him in Heavenly places.
3. He showed us the exceeding riches of his grace.

"ONCE THE GENTILES WERE" 2:11-12. Before establishing the strong foundation of spiritual blessings enjoyed now by Jew and Gentile alike, Paul reminds them from where they had come. They were at one time:

1. Separate from Christ.
2. Alienated from the commonwealth of Israel.
3. Strangers from the covenants of the promise.
4. Having no hope and without God.

"...HOW THAT BY REVELATION WAS MAKE KNOWN UNTO ME THE MYSTERY" 3:3-6. To the Gentiles, the mystery was to be revealed before the blessings could be fully realized. The mystery was:

1. That the Gentiles were fellow-heirs.
2. That the Gentiles were fellow members of the body.
3. That the Gentiles were fellow-partakers of the promise.

"...UNTO ME IS THIS GRACE GIVEN" 3:8-11. The beautiful thing to Paul concerning the mystery was that he would be the revealer of it. He was chosen to:

1. Preach unto the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.
2. Make all men see what is the mystery.

"...THAT YE MAY BE STRENGTHENED WITH POWER" 3:16-19. This is a strong passage and begins our journey to the

development of spiritual growth. The strength comes through several means:

1. "through His spirit in the inward man"
2. "that Christ may dwell in your hearts, through faith"
3. "that you may be rooted and grounded in love"
4. "may be strong to apprehend....what is the breadth and length and height and depth"
5. "and to know the love of Christ"
6. "that ye may be filled unto all the fullness of God."

"I THEREFORE...BESEECH YOU TO WALK WORTHILY OF THE CALLING...." 4:1-7. We may talk the talk, but walking the walk is an entirely different matter. In order to grow spiritually, one must realize the importance of the call and the need for the walk. One must walk:

1. With all lowliness and meekness.
2. With longsuffering.
3. Forbearing one another in love.
4. Giving diligence to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace, remembering that there is:
 - a) one body
 - b) one spirit
 - c) one hope of your calling
 - d) one Lord
 - e) one faith
 - f) one baptism
 - g) one God

"...MAY GROW UP IN ALL THINGS INTO HIM..." 4:11-16. It is important that we grow spiritually. Our spirituality will be seen as we accept God's plan of development and understand the purpose for which it was intended.

1. "and he gave some to be..."
 - a) apostles

- b) prophets
- c) evangelists
- d) pastors
- e) teachers
- 2. For the purpose of...
 - a) perfecting of the saints
 - b) work of ministering
 - c) building up of the body of Christ
- 3. For how long...
 - a) till all attain unto the unity of faith
 - b) till all attain the knowledge of the Son of God.

"PUT AWAY...THE OLD MAN...AND PUT ON THE NEW MAN" 4:22-32; 5:3-14. The development of our spirituality means a change of life and life-style. The old image is completely reshaped into an entirely new one. Our generation has not realized the tremendous change that must take place. The list of things to put away numbers thirteen. They are:

- falsehood
- anger
- stealing
- corrupt speech
- bitterness
- wrath
- foolish talking
- clamor
- railing
- fornication
- uncleanness
- covetousness
- filthiness

Before one can put the following on, the above things must be removed. Once removed, the following can be added to our lives and help us grow tremendously in our spirituality:

- kindness
- tender heartedness
- forgiveness
- thankfulness

"BE YE THEREFORE IMITATORS OF GOD" 5:1. The real meaning of spiritual growth is in our imitation of God. We walk in his steps, as shown us by the Son. We walk:

1. "as beloved children..."
2. "in love, even as Christ also loved you."

"LOOK THEREFORE CAREFULLY HOW YE WALK..." 5:15-21. We follow someone. Our path is influenced by those who give us good directions or who point us in the wrong direction. As Bob Dylan stated in his song, "We're gonna serve somebody. It may be the devil or it may be the Lord, but we're gonna serve somebody." So be careful how you walk:

1. not as unwise, but as wise.
2. be not drunken with wine.
3. be filled with the spirit.
4. speak to yourselves in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.
5. give thanks always for all things.
6. subject yourselves one to another.

WIVES, BE CAREFUL HOW YOU WALK 5:22-24. The wives are cautioned to walk in two ways towards their husband: *submission* and *respect*.

HUSBANDS, BE CAREFUL HOW YOU WALK 5:25-33. The husband likewise is cautioned in his spiritual growth towards the wife: *love your wives as yourself; nourish and cherish the wife*. In regard to the children, the husband is reminded of his responsibility to bring them up in the *discipline* and *education* of the Lord and not to provoke them to rebel (6:4).

CHILDREN, BE CAREFUL HOW YOU WALK 6:1-3. Children are to grow spiritually as well as the parents. The relationship of children to parents is one of the most powerful spiritual indicators. Children are to *obey* and *honor* their parents.

SERVANTS AND MASTERS, BE CAREFUL HOW YOU WALK 6:5-9. We are all God's servants. The principles of the

servants towards masters and masters towards servants of Paul's day can certainly be spiritual growth patterns for us today: servants (employees) *be obedient* to those over you and *serve* in the true sense of the word. Masters (employers) do not threaten, do not lead by *fear*; instead, treat them as servants of Christ.

CONCLUSION

"FINALLY, BE STRONG IN THE LORD, AND IN THE STRENGTH OF HIS MIGHT..." 6:10-19. This presentation has carried us through each chapter and has pinpointed the key verses that point us towards growing spiritually. There is no finer charge or conclusion than the one Paul himself closes with: "...be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might," and in order to do this, Paul says:

FIRST--PUT ON THE WHOLE ARMOR OF GOD

1. loins girded with truth.
2. breastplate of righteousness.
3. feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.
4. take up the shield of faith.
5. put on the helmet of salvation.
6. take up the sword of the spirit.

SECOND--SURROUND YOURSELF WITH PRAYER AND SUPPLICATION

THIRD--ALWAYS KEEPING WATCH

LAST--LOVE THE LORD WITH A LOVE INCORRUPTIBLE

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NOTES

1. The author did not supply bibliographic material (Editor).

UNITY AND DIVERSITY IN THE CHURCH

Jimmy Adcox

Almost every Christian is aware of the continuing tension that exists among many Christians and churches. A church that has built its security on uniformity is likely to struggle with diversity. When biblical patterns are understood to encompass almost every aspect of church life, practice, and understanding, there is little room for difference of opinion and preference. When tradition is set in concrete and made equivalent to Scripture, there is little room for openness. Structure and style may become more important than meaning. When church agendas are promoted only out of selfish opinions and demands for change, there is little room for negotiation and compromise. Diversities that should be tolerated, and even celebrated, frequently lead instead to polarization, exclusion, and division.

The book of Ephesians deals with issues of diversity and unity, but perhaps in a different way that we might expect. The problems addressed by this book are much different than the issues of diversity and unity that most of us are facing. We must be careful not to read our issues and problems into the book as the context for Paul's discussion. Rather we must understand Ephesians in light of its own context, discern the theological principles that remain constant and instructive for us, and carefully apply them to our own unique settings. The two sections of the book of Ephesians that most directly relate to unity and diversity are Ephesians 2:11-18 and 4:1-16.

EPHESIANS 2:11-18: THE PROBLEM THEN AND NOW

It has often been assumed that Ephesians 2:11-18 primarily addressed the problem of Jewish acceptance of Gentile Christians. Although this was a prominent challenge facing the first century church, it is not the issue addressed in Ephesians. The recipients of this letter were predominantly Gentile Christians (2:11, 19; 3:1) who were still struggling with their pagan backgrounds (4:17). Consequently, they were not completely aware of their new found status (2:19-22) and available strength in Christ (1:15-23). Past hostilities and alienation from God and his people had left them feeling like uninformed outsiders on the fringes of the kingdom of God. As a result they were weak and vulnerable to non-Christian attitudes and lifestyles. Far from experiencing the fullness of God's rule in their lives, they remained like spiritual infants and were easily swayed by non-Christian influences (4:14).

The message was not to encourage Jews to receive Gentiles, but to help Gentiles become aware of who they were in Christ. They felt like outsiders because that is what they had been. They were labeled the "uncircumcised" by those who were circumcised. Before they became Christians, they were "separated from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of promise, without hope and without God in the world" (2:12). Apparently, even after they became Christians, they were alienated and distant. They felt like step-children. It was not easy to overcome. They had settled for less than God had in store for them, and their spiritual lives suffered because of it.

This alienation and division between Jews and Gentiles was symbolized as a barrier, a dividing wall of hostility (2:14). This image was a play on a notable feature of the temple built by Herod the Great. The temple itself was constructed on an elevated platform. Around it was the Court of the Priests. East of this was the Court of Israel and further east the Court of the Women. All three courts were on the same level as the temple itself. From this

level there was a descent of five steps to a walled platform and then a descent of fourteen more steps to another wall, beyond which was the outer court of the Gentiles. From any part of it the Gentiles could look up and view the temple, but could not approach it. They were separated from it by a stone barricade posted with warning notices which read in effect, "Trespassers will be executed."¹

This wall typified the separation and rejection the Gentiles felt. In Jesus, those who were far off were being invited to come near. But how? What could possibly remove the deep-seated pain, rejection, and resentment that had existed between these groups for centuries? How could people from such diverse backgrounds and hostilities possibly know any depth of true unity? What could possibly make Gentile Christians feel like full and equal recipients of all the blessing God had promised his people?

Paul says Jesus removed the dividing wall "by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations" (2:15). "The law" was a barrier and a contributor to division in two ways. First, Paul is referring primarily to the ceremonial aspects of the law of Moses. The parallel passage in Colossians 2:11, 16-17 lists circumcision (the physical distinction between Jews and Gentile), dietary laws, festivals, new moons, and Sabbaths as examples. Such ordinances reinforced the Jewish identity and were distinctions that perpetuated division. Divisions based on "commandments and regulations" that were not the substance of God's plan, but which were only shadows of it, were unnecessary. What had been necessary to prepare the Jews for Jesus had become an obstacle to the inclusion of the Gentiles. Jesus abolished the necessity of such regulations through his death on the cross and peacefully united opposing factions by making each a new, spiritual creation in Christ.

But there is a second principle at work here. The reference may also include the law in general as well as the ceremonial law in particular, not in the sense that law was abolished as a standard

of behavior, but that it was abolished as a means of justification. Although it was never God's intent that men be justified on the basis of law keeping, that perspective in much of Jewish thought was a perpetuating factor of division with the Gentiles. It was also a major factor of self-deception among the Jews. Wherever law is viewed as the ground of salvation and the basis of acceptance with God and others, division will occur. None of us can keep God's law perfectly, no matter how hard we try. As a result we find ourselves separated from God and from each other. Any effort to be justified by law-keeping is an effort to be justified by human works. The result is either a false sense of self-righteousness for one's achievements and a corresponding contempt for those who have not achieved the same or despair and disillusionment at one's unworthiness and inability to achieve such righteousness at all.

Unity out of diversity cannot be achieved on the basis of law. No external code has the power to change the human heart with its prejudice, selfishness, and hostility. Unity can only come when hearts are transformed and a new outlook is created. This was Jesus' purpose through the cross,

to create in himself one new man out of two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. (2:15b-16)

Law as a basis of salvation and unity will always fail. Acceptance before God is now through faith in Christ crucified. God has not replaced one legal, law-keeping system with another. Rather, through Jesus, he has saved us by grace through faith (2:8-10). Law is a barrier between us, but faith unites us, since all of us have to come to God through Christ in the same way. We all stand on the same level at the foot of the cross. With all ground of boasting removed, we each stand only on God's grace. Just as God accepts us because of the sufficiency of Christ, so we are able to accept our brother upon the same basis. Both of us are saved, not due to the merit of what we have done, but because of what

Christ has done for us. When each person becomes a new creation in Christ, all barriers are removed.

Seeing clearly the work of Christ and his purpose for unity, how dare we erect new barriers in place of the old? Barriers of race, pride, selfishness, prejudice, jealousy, culture, tradition, taste, preference, power, control, and opinion still divide God's people. When that happens in such matters that are not central to the gospel of Christ, we have set ourselves against the very purpose of God. We are undoing the work of the cross. We are once again building on the foundation of "commandments and regulations" rather than yielding ourselves as God's new creation drawn together by the power of the cross.

EPHESIANS 4:1-16: THE CHALLENGE THEN AND NOW

This passage of Scripture begins a section of exhortation and application based on the foundation laid in the first three chapters. Having seen the work of Christ and what he had done for them, they were encouraged to live out the reality of that new life. Not surprisingly, Paul begins with exhortations toward unity. The following points of emphasis are important to observe.

First, unity in diversity requires love and forbearance (4:2). Andrew Lincoln has written of the Ephesian Christians:

If they are to maintain and demonstrate this unity and be bound together as agents of peace and reconciliation, the qualities the readers will need to display are the humility which springs from a realization of their own dependence on God's grace and the worth of their fellow believers, the gentleness which issues in consideration of the needs of others, and the patience which is tolerant of the shortcomings of others. What will be necessary, in short, is a mutual forbearance that is only possible through the power of love.²

Unity is a given. Jesus died to accomplish it. It is a unity initiated by and centered in God's Spirit. It is our responsibility to maintain that unity in the bond of peace. We must be eager to manifest the Spirit of Christ in order to insure that such unity is protected. But are we as eager to maintain that unity as God was to establish it? Are we eager enough to swallow our pride? To respect those who differ with us? To talk, discuss, and encourage each other? Are we eager to bear with the weak, even to sacrifice our liberty to keep them from stumbling? Are we eager enough to grant freedom to the strong without extending judgment or condemnation, even when our own conscience will not allow us to participate? Are we eager enough for unity to respect the rights of our brothers and sisters to study God's Word for themselves and to grow at their own pace? To sacrifice our own preferences and styles for the welfare of others in the body? Jesus laid down his life for the unity of his people. Are we willing to do the same? If so, we must learn to be completely humble and gentle, to be patient, bearing with one another in love. (4:2)

Second, Christian unity is based upon the oneness of God (4:3-6). The more we experience oneness with God, the more we will be united with one another.

This section reveals seven "ones," three of which refer to the three members of the Godhead, while the other four refer to our Christian experience in relation to the three persons of the Godhead. These truths can be expressed with three affirmations. First, there is one body because there is only one Spirit who indwells and animates it. Our common indwelling of the Holy Spirit unites us in one body. Second, there is only one Lord. It is Jesus in whom we believe, Jesus into whom we were baptized, and Jesus who is our only hope. And third, there is one Christian family encompassing us all, because there is one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.³

Paul is not so much affirming the creedal grounds for unity but rather is maintaining that the essential nature of the gospel itself is

unity. Because of this truth, a divided church is a basic denial of the gospel. God's nature, and the nature of the gospel itself, demands that we do everything in our power "to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (4:2).

Third, progress toward this unity is made possible by the diversity of gifts God has graciously given to each one of us in his church (4:7-13). With this emphasis Paul has turned from "all of us" to "each of us," from unity to diversity. Far from being a threat to the church, diversity in this sense is a blessing. Every member is gifted to contribute to the work of ministry. Ministry is carried out in the body so the body may be built up, reach unity in faith and knowledge, and become mature in Christ. Without such gifts, the church is ill-equipped to carry out its ministry and perform its work. Rather than bland sameness in the body of Christ, God's diversity of gifts means every faithful member is to be accepted, valued, and encouraged to use his gifts for the benefit of the body as a whole. Rather than being an obstacle to unity, diversity is intended by God to be a means to it.

Fourth, unity leads to maturity and maturity to unity. What is to happen to people whose diverse views demonstrate immaturity in knowledge and faith? Interestingly, Paul does not encourage us to isolate such people for their immaturity, but to hold them in the body so that they may be matured. Staying together, blessing each other with the faithful exercise of ministry gifts, and holding each other accountable in love to the truth of the gospel sets the environment where growth toward maturity occurs. Of necessity then, even diversity of views will exist in the body, if for no other reasons than some will still be immature enough to be "blown here and there by every wind of teaching." While this is not ideal, and hopefully only temporary, it is a reality that will exist while the church is united in the process of growing up into Christ.

But maturity also leads to unity. It is through growing together in maturity that we "attain to the whole measure of the fullness of

Christ" (4:13). The closer we grow to Jesus, the closer we grow to one another.

CONCLUSION

A group of young people planned a mountain climbing project together. Early one morning they met at the foot of the mountain and began their climb. It was not long until differences in the group began to emerge. Some were competitive and needed to be first. They rushed ahead, determined to be the first to the top. Some were more concerned about the joy of the journey than the destination. They took their time, gradually making unhurried progress. Some were physically disadvantaged. They huffed and puffed about halfway up the mountain but finally gave up. Many who needed help were too independent to accept it. The group was spread and scattered all over the mountain, but only a few ever made it to the top.

After returning home, they analyzed their day. They concluded that since everyone had not made it to the top, the group project was a failure. They each had been more concerned with themselves than with the group as a whole. They decided to start over. This time they would climb the mountain together. The strong would wait on the weak. The competitive would curb their instincts for the welfare of the group. The stubbornly independent would be willing to depend on others when necessary. It might take them longer. They might have to stop and rest, but together, they would reach the top. And they did.

God's plan for unity and growth also leads to the top. We are different, but we need each other. By his marvelous grace and the working of his power in our lives, God can bring unity and maturity out of diversity.

Now unto him who is able to do immeasurable 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.
(Eph. 3:20-21)

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NOTES

1. John R.W. Stott, *The Message of Ephesians: God's New Society*. The Bible Speaks Today. Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1979, 91-92.
2. Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary. Dallas: Word Publishers, 1990, 264.
3. Stott, *Message*, 15-151.

SALVATION BY GRACE

John Mark Hicks

In recent years there has been a renewed interest in the biblical doctrine of grace. But this interest has largely had a polemical tone. On the one side are those who stress salvation as a divine work on our behalf which appears to some to minimize the role of human responsibility. They cry that they can not effect their own justification, do anything to save themselves, or contribute to their salvation. God's grace is the sole salvational power in conversion. God saves us despite ourselves rather than because of ourselves. On the other side are those who stress human responsibility which appears to some to minimize the divine work of salvation. They insist that there is something humans must do to effect their justification or contribute to their salvation. We are saved, they claim, when we act in response to the gospel, when we do something. We are saved because we do something.

This polarization has become acute in the past few years. It has become part of the fabric of the discussion of the "new hermeneutic." Those who advocate or practice a "new hermeneutic" tend to stress grace and claim a new perspective which had not been previously known or was at least relatively rare among churches of Christ. Those who oppose the "new hermeneutic" tend to stress human responsibility and claim that churches of Christ have always understood and preached grace.¹ As a result, the discussion of grace has become intertwined, to some degree, with the discussion of the "new hermeneutic."

This trend is unfortunate because the problem is not a hermeneutical one but rather is a matter of theological precision and understanding. The polarization of positions on grace (particularly

as focused in the question "Who is a Christian?") is more a matter of semantical confusion than it is a real theological difference. In the context of Ephesians 2:8-10, I hope to mediate this growing polarization. Yet, before mediation, we must understand something of the polarization as it now exists.

THE POLARIZATION

In 1990, Rubel Shelly penned a bulletin article entitled "*Arbeit Macht Frei*"² where he addressed a kind of "spiritual neuroticism" which affirms that only through "doing enough" can one feel secure in his salvation.³ His article contained these two sentences which have inflamed much of the contemporary controversy over grace: "It is a scandalous and outrageous lie to teach that salvation arises from human activity. We do not contribute one whit to our salvation." Thomas Warren responded that "our brother eliminates all human activity from salvation. If he were right, then every human being will be saved, because God's grace is offered to all men."⁴ Garland Elkins, under the sponsorship of the Knight Arnold Church of Christ in Memphis, Tennessee, challenged Shelly to a debate on the relationship of divine grace to human obedience.⁵ Shelly declined, but he did participate in the 1992 Annual Preacher's Forum at Harding University Graduate School of Religion which attempted to mediate between Shelly and his critics. But the polarization had already set in: it was a difference between those who said that we do not contribute to our salvation and those who say we do.

Wineskins produced a special issue on grace in June, 1993. One article in particular has drawn fire for its statements. Roy Osborne, in an article entitled, "Dead Men Don't Climb Ladders!" wrote:

We seem unable to give up the idea that we must DO SOMETHING to effect our justification. Some of the most prominent preachers, in and out of the Church of Christ, teach justification as a cooperative effort on the part of God

and man.... Those who are dead cannot contribute **anything** to the process.⁶

Wayne Jackson has written a response to this article in which he characterizes Osborne's teaching as "a shocking example of the type of neo-denominational thinking that has contaminated our brotherhood in recent years."⁷ In response to Osborne's fundamental thesis, Jackson asks, "But is there not a sense in which man is seriously involved in his own salvation?"⁸ The polarization appears once again: it is a difference between those who say we do nothing to effect our justification and those who say we must do something to effect our justification.

This polarization is not new. It has generated conflicts about the doctrine of grace for generations within churches of Christ. While there are several historical examples of this conflict, one of the best is the publication of K. C. Moser's *The Way of Salvation* in 1932.⁹ The significance of the book may be judged by the difference it highlighted between two influential contemporaries, G. C. Brewer and Foy E. Wallace, Jr. When the book appeared, Wallace, the editor of the *Gospel Advocate*, noticed it in an editorial. His tone is noticeably negative though tempered by his brother Cled's preface to the book. "We do not think," he wrote, "that [Moser's] 'approach' to these subjects is more effective than the plain preaching of faith, repentance, confession, and baptism as 'conditions' of salvation, like all faithful gospel preachers have always preached.... Such preaching is not to be criticized."¹⁰ Towards the end of his life Wallace regretted "having contributed to its circulation" and noted that his brother Cled regretted having written the preface. Wallace blamed Moser for "indoctrinating young preachers with denominational error on the plan of salvation." Moser's "'salvation by faith' hobby" is contrary to the "gospel plan of salvation" and is "no more nor less than denominational doctrine."¹¹

G. C. Brewer, on the other hand, had almost nothing but praise for the book. One year after it was published, Brewer specifically

commended it and suggested that it be read "two or three times."¹² It is "one of the best little books that came from any press in 1932," according to Brewer. Further, he commended Moser for going to Scripture first instead of first searching for what is taught among churches of Christ and then going about to establish it by Scripture. Brewer wrote:

The author's independence of all denominational views or brotherhood ideas, or of what the 'fathers' taught, or of what has been 'our doctrine' is the most encouraging thing I have seen in print among the disciples of Christ in this decade.

It is clear that Wallace and Brewer had two entirely different views of this book. Wallace believed that it was too critical of brotherhood preaching and offered denominational doctrine in the place of biblical preaching on the plan of salvation. Indeed, he noted that the renowned Baptist debater Ben Bogard used to flaunt Moser's book in his debates with gospel preachers.¹³ Brewer, on the other hand, welcomed the critique of legalism among the churches of Christ. In his review, Brewer noted that "*some of us have run to the extreme of making salvation depend on works.*"¹⁴ It is apparent that either Brewer or Wallace was misreading Moser, or that neither was understanding the other, or that there was a clear theological difference concerning the biblical doctrine of grace between these two pillars of the churches of Christ in the 1930's.¹⁵ Polarization among churches of Christ on the doctrine of grace occurred in the 1930's and is occurring in the 1990's as well.

EPHESIANS 2:8-10

The Text. One of the clearest, yet most disputed, texts on the doctrine of grace in the New Testament is Ephesians 2:1-10. It is clear because it is a declarative statement from which we gain the phrase "grace through faith." It is disputed because it demands interpretation. It is rarely sufficient to quote the text of Ephesians

2:8-9. Everyone wants to know what you mean when you quote it.¹⁶ I propose to provide a meaning which unites the polarized groups among us.

Ephesians 2:1-7 is a single sentence in the Greek text. It describes our sinful condition before God, God's act in Christ to save us according to his mercy and grace, and his goal of glorifying us along with his Son. We were dead in sin, so God raised us up with Christ so that he might pour out his riches upon us. This is a statement of grace--God acts on our behalf. It is God's act in Christ where he made us alive with him, raised us up with him and sat us in heavenly places with him. This single sentence sets the motive and nature of God's actions in the context of God's mercy, kindness and grace. Our actions did not move God to grace, but God's grace moved him to act on our behalf. His work is a gracious work for sinners who did not deserve it.

Ephesians 2:1-7 is grounded in the principle of Ephesians 2:8: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith." The term "for" has explanatory force. The principle of verse 8 explains in summary fashion what he has just described in verses 1-7. In fact, the whole of verses 8-10 have a summary character to them. Paul is summarizing the nature of salvation in Christ. I think his summary can be unpacked in three points.

First, grace is the ground of our salvation. Salvation is God's work, not ours. This is the plain meaning of the word "grace"--it is unmerited favor; it is God's disposition of saving love toward undeserving sinners. Wrath is what is owed, but grace is bestowed. The central assertion of the doctrine of grace is that salvation is God's work. It is God who saves.

God is the subject of the verbs relating to salvation in verses 1-7. He is the active worker here. Further, Paul explicitly clarifies this point by excluding works from the ground of salvation. Salvation is "not from yourselves, it is the gift of God." Salvation does not arise out of our own goodness, our own worthiness. Salvation arises out of God's gracious heart who gives us salvation.

We are not saved from within, but from without. We do not save ourselves, but God saves us.

Paul underlines this point by offering a further contrast. Not only is salvation "not from yourselves," but it is also "not by [literally, out of] works." Salvation does not arise from the works that we do. Our works do not contribute to our salvation--they are not the source of our salvation. Salvation does not arise out of the quality and character of our works. Salvation is fundamentally a gift of God, and anything that undermines that principle is legalism and denies the gospel. In this sense, there is nothing we can do to effect our justification, and there is nothing we can do to contribute to our salvation.

It is important to note that Paul does not qualify the kind of works he is talking about here. He does not say "works of merit" or "works of the law of Moses." Rather, he simply says "works." He does, however, provide a motive for why works are excluded as the source of salvation: "so that no one can boast." Paul excludes all boasting from salvation except the boasting that is in Christ. No one can boast about his works in relation to salvation. If we boast in any work, human effort, or obedience to law, then we exclude Christ. God's grace means that we do not boast in our works but rather in His work in Christ. It is God who saves. We do not save ourselves. Salvation does not arise out of our works.

Second, salvation is by faith. We are saved through the instrumentality of faith. Faith is the means by which we receive God's grace. Through faith we have access to God's grace, and by faith we continue to stand in his grace (Rom. 5:1-2). Faith is the human response to God's gracious offer of salvation. Faith receives what God is willing to give. God saves by grace but through faith.

Human response is required for salvation. No one is saved without faith. Faith is the condition of salvation, and faith is a human response to God's gracious offer. God's grace is offered to everyone, but it is applied only to those who receive it through faith. Consequently, there is a sense in which we must do some-

thing to receive salvation--we must "do faith" or we must believe in Jesus Christ and trust him as our Savior.

What about baptism? If all works are excluded, does this mean that it is faith alone which saves without baptism? We must remember that in verse 8 Paul is summarizing verses 1-7. We are saved by God's act, not ours. But what was God's act which saved us? When we were dead, God made us alive with Christ, raised us up with Christ, and sat us in the heavenly places with him. God raised us from the spiritual grave and made us alive through his work in Christ. We who were dead in sin are now alive in Christ through our death and resurrection with him. If Colossians is any indication (as well as Rom. 6), Paul is alluding to baptism in these phrases. God circumcised our hearts, made us alive with Christ, and forgave us our sins when we were "buried with him in baptism and raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead" (Col. 2:12). When Paul says that God "raised us up with Christ" (Eph. 2:6), the total context of his thought and the parallel with Colossians implies a baptismal context.

Baptism saves, not as a work, but as an expression of faith in the work of God. Baptism is fundamentally God's work--he forgives, he raises up, he makes alive. We simply entrust ourselves through faith in his power. In baptism, we do not do anything but receive everything. Salvation does not arise out of baptism; it arises out of God's grace. But we receive salvation through faith as we submit to God's requirement to express our faith in the context of immersion. Baptism does not belong in the category of "work" but in the category of "faith." It is a human response which arises out of faith, expresses faith, and receives God's gracious salvation as a gift.

Third, good works are the result of salvation; they are not the basis or ground of salvation. We are not saved because we work, but we work because we are already saved. Ephesians 2:10 is a comment on the relationship between works and salvation, as if Paul wishes to clarify or head off misunderstandings of his point

in verses 8-9. We are saved by grace through faith--not of ourselves or our works but as a divine gift so that no one can boast. This is true because, as verse 10 says, we are created for good works and not because we do good works. Rather, we are God's work--we are God's doing, his creation. We work the works of God because we are God's work of salvation--new creatures in Christ.

As one looks at the structure of the text, "works" follow salvation. God saves us by grace, not works. But he saves us so that we can do good works. Works are the result of salvation. We are his creation for good works. Paul's order is clear: grace, faith, salvation, works. It is not: grace, faith, works and then salvation. Works are not a means to salvation; they are the evidence of salvation already received. Works are evidence of God's work of creating us. They testify that we are God's new creation; they testify to our salvation--they do not create the salvation.

Salvation, then, is by grace through faith unto good works. Salvation arises out of God's grace, and we do not save ourselves. Rather, God creates us through faith--we are his work; his doing. He raises us up with Christ and makes us alive through faith in his power which occurs when we are buried with Christ and rise with him in baptism. God saves us through faith at baptism--we do not contribute to the act of God's saving. Rather, through a human response we receive God's gift. As a result, we are God's workmanship who are dedicated to good works, holiness, and discipleship. It is because we are saved that we seek to please God in every respect. Salvation, in summary, is by grace through faith at baptism unto good works.¹⁷

The Point. I believe the semantical confusion which lies behind the current polarization among churches of Christ on the doctrine of grace is the failure to distinguish between the ground of salvation and the means of salvation. This distinction is

recognized by both groups, but they do not recognize it in each other.

There is a distinction between the ground of our salvation and the means by which we appropriate it. The ground of our salvation is the merit by which we stand before God. It is that which earns our righteous standing (salvation) before God. The means by which we are saved is the method of appropriation. It is the way in which we receive our righteous standing (salvation) before God.

The ground of our salvation is wholly outside of ourselves. It is external to us; it comes from outside of us. Titus 3:5 explicitly denies that we are saved by "works of righteousness," that is, works which earn righteousness. We are not saved on the basis of the merit of our obedience or works. We are not saved on the ground that we are good enough. Rather, we are saved by the merits of Christ's work and not our own. It is the righteousness of God which is imputed to us as a gift which saves us (Rom. 1:16-17; 4:1-8). The righteousness by which we are saved is not earned or churned up by our own moral and positive obedience. Our obedience, no matter how blameless it may be, will never be sufficient to earn us a righteous, perfect standing before God.

It is in this sense that we can say salvation is wholly of God; that is, the merit or righteousness by which we are justified in the sight of God is not our own; it is the gift of God. The ground of our salvation, then, is the grace of God alone as it is offered to us in Christ Jesus. We are justified on the merits of what Christ has done, not on the merits which we have earned. He imputes to us a righteousness which is not our own.

Salvation, however, does not come to everyone. This gift of righteousness is not universally distributed. Rather, it is given to believers. Without faith no one can please God or enter into his presence since it is through faith that God gives his gift of righteousness. Faith is the means by which we receive the righteousness that comes from God. As a means, it does not contribute to the merit of our righteous standing, but it is the instrument by

which the righteousness from God is received. The gift is the righteousness; faith is the open hand that receives the gift. Faith is a human act which responds to God's gracious offer of the gift of righteousness by accepting it. Faith, then, as a human act, is the means or instrument by which we appropriate salvation.

THE COMMON GROUND

When people speak two different languages, they cannot understand each other. When they use the same words for two different things, they cannot connect. Theology is, at one level, a language problem--semantics. Theologies speak different languages, and part of the goal of theological reflection is to try to understand them so that differences and similarities might be clarified.

While there are some real differences between Wallace and Brewer, between Elkins and Shelly, and between Jackson and Osborne, there is some substantial common ground which is not undermined by their differences. It is this common ground which I wish to pursue here. While I do not intend to minimize the differences, I do hope to mediate the polarization which is semantical in character.¹⁸

Whereas Brewer, Shelly, and Osborne speak specifically about the ground or source of salvation, Wallace, Elkins, and Jackson speak about the means of salvation. Thus, when Brewer, Shelly, and Osborne say that we can not contribute to our salvation or do anything to effect our justification, they are talking about the source of our merit before God. Grace alone provides the ground of our salvation. However, when Wallace, Elkins, and Jackson stress human responsibility and argue that we must do something to receive salvation, they are talking about the means of salvation. Obedient faith, as a submissive human act, is a necessary response to God's grace. If each other would understand the context of each other's statements, then the semantical problem could disappear. For example, Rick Atchley strikes this balance on the word "do":

"We must do something to receive God's gracious offer of salvation, but whatever we do must in no way be seen as earning [or "doing"] our salvation."¹⁹

Despite the fact that these two groups are caught in a polemical exchange, they do appear to have some real formal similarities. These similarities are admitted on both sides though the similarity may be purely formal rather than material. Nevertheless, four formal similarities emerge within the polemical context. These may be seen by a careful reading of the 1992 Annual Preacher's Forum at Harding University Graduate School of Religion.

First, both agree that the sole ground of salvation is the atonement of Christ. The only saving power is the blood of Jesus. "What can wash away my sins? Nothing but the blood of Jesus!" Grace, then, is the only ground of salvation. Grace alone provides the ground of our salvation. God alone is the source of salvation. This is God's part in the scheme of redemption.

Second, both agree that this grace is appropriated through faith. The salvation that God offers through his grace is conditioned on faith. The human response of faith is the means by which we accept the grace that God offers in his Son. All works must flow from faith, or they are without value. All works must be works of faith. Faith, then, as a principle, is the only means of salvation since even works must be expressions of the principle of faith itself. Faith is both foundational and instrumental in all other responses to God's grace. It is the principle of faith which excludes all works of merit.

Third, both agree that gospel obedience includes submission to Christ through baptism as an expression of faith. Baptism without faith is ineffectual, and faith without baptism does not comply with what God requires. Baptism, then, is the particular embodiment of faith which God requires for the remission of sins. Through baptism, we express our trust in the saving work of Jesus Christ. Baptism is an act of faith. It is not a work of human merit.

Fourth, both agree that Christians are called to holiness and that those who rebel and reject that call are unbelievers. God has created his people for holiness and good works. Genuine believers pursue that holiness under the Lordship of Christ and seek to conform to the will of God in every aspect of their lives. When believers rebel or reject God's commands and insist upon their own selfish ways, then their hearts have turned to unbelief. Consequently, they have fallen from grace. Neither group believes that once one is saved, one is always saved. Rather, we fall from grace when we cease to pursue holiness in Christ by faith. Grace continues to save us--we need God's constant forgiveness and patience--but only as we continue to trust in him and are committed to his cause.

This is the common ground. It is the essence of our theological heritage on the doctrine of grace as we answer the question, "Who is a Christian?" There is no need for a perfect understanding of the theology of grace nor of the doctrine of the atonement. Neither is it necessary to have an impeccable and indubitable faith, but simply a faith that trusts in Jesus for salvation and acts on God's promises. Further, it is not necessary to have a perfect conception of baptismal theology. In addition, while no one's sanctification is perfect, the heart that seeks God and obeys him "as best he can" within the covenant of grace will find mercy.²⁰ However these four points might be applied, their substance is universally present. They evidence a theological unity which binds us together as a church. This has always been our historic position, and, I think, it ought to remain so. It is my hope that both groups will recognize this common ground with each other and that the polarization can be overcome. I think both groups can recognize the substantial truth that is embodied in this statement by David Lipscomb:

Even when a man's heart is purified by faith, and his affections all reach out towards God and seek conformity to the life of God, it is imperfect. His practice of the righteousness of God falls far short of the divine standard. The

flesh is weak, and the law of sin reigns in our members; so that we fall short of the perfect standard of righteousness; but if we trust God implicitly and faithfully endeavor to do his will, he knows our frame, knows our weaknesses, and as a father pities his children, so the Lord pities our infirmities and weaknesses, and imputes to us the righteousness of Christ. So Jesus stands as our justification and our righteousness, and our life is hid with Christ in God.²¹

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NOTES

1. This tension is reflected in many publications. A good example is the contrast between James S. Woodroof, *The Church in Transition*. Searcy, Ark: The Bible House, Inc., 1990, 19, and James D. Bales, "The Church in Transition" to What? Searcy, Ark: James D. Bales, Publisher, 1992, 37-57.
2. Rubel Shelly, "Arbeit Macht Frei," in *The Love Lines, Bulletin of the Woodmont Hills Church of Christ*, 16.45 (October 31, 1990), 3. The title, which was posted over the entrance of the Nazi death camp at Auschwitz, means "work will set you free." It was a false hope for those who entered the camp, and, according to Shelly, it presents a false hope for Christians today.

3. Rubel Shelly, "Question-Answer Session," in *Grace, Faith, Works: How Do They Relate?*, ed. by C. Philip Slate. Huntsville, AL: Publishing Designs, Inc., 1992, 123.
4. Thomas B. Warren, "Salvation is by Grace but not by Grace Only," 106.5 (May 1991), 129.
5. *Yokefellow* 18.4 (April 15, 1991). The proposed propositions were: "The Bible teaches that salvation from sin results from the grace of God alone, totally and completely apart from any human activity." (Shelly affirms, Elkins denies); and "The Bible teaches that salvation depends upon both (1) the grace of God and (2) the faithful, loving obedience of the individual human being." (Elkins affirms, Shelly denies). Shelly refused to debate. See also Goebel Music, *Behold the Pattern!* Colleyville, TX: Goebel Music Publications, 1991, 325-26, 335-8.
6. Roy Osborne, "Dead Men Don't Climb Ladders!" *Wineskins* 2.2 (June 1993): 17. He also quotes K. C. Moser ("a giant in biblical understanding"): "One of the most difficult truths for man to accept is that he has a real Savior. He desires that Jesus **tell him what to do to save himself!**" (p. 17).
7. Wayne Jackson, "Concerning Dead Men and Ladders," *Spiritual Sword* 25.3 (April 1994): 12.
8. *Ibid.*, 14, citing Acts 2:40 and Phil. 2:13.
9. K. C. Moser, *The Way of Salvation*. Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1932.
10. Foy E. Wallace, Jr., "The Way of Salvation," *Gospel Advocate* 74 (21 April 1932): 494.
11. Foy E. Wallace, Jr., *The Present Truth*. Fort Worth: Foy E. Wallace, Jr., Publications, 1977, 1036.
12. G. C. Brewer, "Read this Book," *Gospel Advocate* 75 (11 May 1933): 434.
13. Wallace, *The Present Truth*, 1036. G. H. P. Showalter records an incident where Ben Bogard asked him: "What are you folks going to do with Moser?" Cf. "The 'Faith Alone' Idea," *Firm Foundation* 51 (3 April 1934): 4.
14. Brewer, "Read," 434.
15. On the importance of Brewer and Wallace among churches of Christ in the 1930's, see Robert E. Hooper, *A Distinct People: A History of the Churches of Christ in the 20th Century*. West Monroe, LA: Howard Publishing Co., 1993, 131-64.
16. The Woodland Hills elders quoted this text in response to the challenge for debate by the Knight Arnold Church of Christ. Clearly, this quotation was not sufficient to settle the question. It is a statement that must be interpreted.
17. This same structure can be seen in 2 Timothy 1:8b-11a and Titus 3:3-8. The language of this sentence is dependent upon Jack Cottrell who has used this summary in many different places in his writings. See his *Being Good Isn't*

- Good Enough*. Cincinnati: Standard Publishing Co., 1973 and his recent *Baptism: A Biblical Study*. Joplin, MO: College Press, 1989.
18. There are real differences of a paradigmatic nature which influence the interpretation of words and create some of the semantical problems. However, I do not wish to pursue these differences here. My interpretation of these differences can be found in my "The Man or the Plan? K. C. Moser and the Theology of Grace Among Mid-Twentieth Century Churches of Christ" for the 18th Annual W. B. West, Jr. Lectures for the Advancement of Christian Scholarship delivered at Harding University Graduate School of Religion. A copy of the lecture is in the library at HUGSR.
 19. Rick Atchley, "Baptism: A Grave Response to Grace," *Wineskins* 2.2 (June 1993): 15.
 20. The phrase "as best he can" is a recurring phrase in the discussion of grace for the Christian life. Representatives of both traditions use it. G. C. Brewer, "Grace and Law (No. 8)," 633: "Being thus committed to Christ, he continues to obey him as best he can . . . Failure to reach perfection will not mean a failure to reach heaven." Also Jerry Moffitt, "Grace and Law," *The Firm Foundation of God Standeth*, edited by William S. Cline and John G. Priola (Pensacola, FL: Firm Foundation Publishing House, 1984): 262, ". . . so we must walk in the light, following the law of Christ as best we can that we remain in that saving grace which we entered by obedience." Also Roy H. Lanier, "Walking by Faith," *Gospel Advocate* 96 (23 December 1954): 1009, "Faith working through love is nothing more than faith obeying the commandments of God as best we can because we love God . . . But faith obeying the commandments of God does not demand even perfect obedience to every commandment and permits, necessitates, the mercy and grace of God in our salvation." But Harding, "Three Lessons From the Book of Romans," in *Biographies and Sermons*, ed. by F. D. Srygley. Nashville: F. D. Srygley, 1898, 247, questioned whether anyone ever really does the "best he can." Only Jesus did the best he could. As a result, "it is foolish for a man to talk about being saved by doing the best he knows how, when he has already failed thousands--perhaps millions--of times to do it."
 21. David Lipscomb, *Ephesians, Philipians and Colossians*, Vol 4 **A Commentary on the New Testament Epistles**, ed. with additional notes by J. W. Shepherd. Nashville: Gospel Advocate, reprint 1957, 205-206.

THE IMPORTANCE OF EPHEBUS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT WORLD

Don Shackelford

INTRODUCTION

The apostle Paul first visited Ephesus as he was concluding his second missionary journey. After eighteen months at Corinth, he sailed from Cenchrea to Ephesus. Priscilla and Aquila were with him, and they remained there as Paul continued his journey to Palestine. He reasoned with the Jews briefly in the synagogue. They desired that he remain for a longer time, but he did not consent. He did promise to return "if God wills" (Acts 18:18-21).

Before Paul returned to Ephesus for an extended stay on his third missionary journey, Apollos arrived at Ephesus. Priscilla and Aquila were still there. Since he knew only the baptism of John, they "explained to him the way of God more accurately" (Acts 18:26). Apollos desired to go to Achaia, the region where the city of Corinth was located. The brethren wrote a letter of introduction for him (Acts 18:27). One wonders if Priscilla and Aquila accompanied him to Corinth as they are not mentioned as being in Ephesus when Paul returned there shortly after Apollos' departure.

Later that same year, as he had promised, Paul returned to Ephesus on his third missionary journey. Richard Oster notes:

The text of Acts indicates that Paul's efforts played an important role in the early spread of the Gospel in Ephesus (Acts 18--20). This city was not only the site of his longest missionary tenure as presented in the scheme of Acts, but also was the base of operation for Paul and his associates as they spread the Christian Gospel into the adjacent cities

and regions of Asia Minor (e.g., the Lycus valley). The Pauline Corinthian correspondence was written at a time contemporary with the Apostle's Ephesian ministry and Romans was written shortly thereafter.¹

GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION

A glance at a map of the Mediterranean world shows the strategic location of Ephesus on the west coast of Asia at the mouth of the Cayster River where it flows into the Aegean Sea. The valley of the Cayster provided a natural pass into the heartland of Asia Minor. Paul Trebilco summarizes its importance:

Ephesus was located on a number of very important land and sea routes, with the result that it was a major centre of international trade. Sea traffic from the Aegean to the west, the Bosphorus and Dardanelles to the north, from Palestine to the east, and from Egypt to the south all called at Ephesus. Ephesus was also a key centre for land transportation. As well as having good land routes to the north and the south, two great highways led from Ephesus to the east.²

This may explain one reason for Paul's choosing to work there for two and a half years--longer than he had previously stayed at any place in his missionary work.

HISTORY OF EPHEBUS

Earliest Settlements. The founding of the city of Ephesus is shrouded in legend. The ancient writers Strabo and Pausanias pass on the tradition that Ephesus "was founded by the Amazons, and the majority of the population of Ephesus consisted of Carians and Lelegians."³ In 1954 a Mycenaean tomb containing artifacts dating to the fourteenth century B.C. was accidentally discovered during work to build a park. It seems probable that they had a settlement

there.⁴ Also, a Hittite rock-relief near the city and bronze artifacts dated to the 13th century B.C. found in the city could mean that the Hittites once lived in the region.⁵ Oster indicates that the best explanation for the beginnings of Ephesian settlement in the Late Bronze Age is Greek migrations.⁶

Greek Colonization. Dorian invasions from the north prompted migrations of the Greeks to islands and peninsulas of the Aegean Sea. Strabo and Pausanias attributed the development of Ephesus to Androclus, son of a king of Athens, who selected a site on the northern slope of Mount Pion [i.e., Panayir Dag] overlooking the harbor.⁷ A frieze of the Temple of Hadrian in Ephesus (2nd century A.D.) shows a mythological interpretation as to how the actual site was selected. Greeks ruled for several centuries. The Temple of Artemis was begun by them in the seventh century B.C. only to be destroyed by the Cimmerians.⁸

The Lydian Period. In 560 B.C. King Croesus of Lydia captured Ephesus. He treated the Ephesians as friends and presented column capitals with reliefs to the temple. One of these capitals has been found with his name inscribed on it.⁹ He invited Aristarchus, a nobleman from Athens, to rule over the city and collect taxes.

The Persian Period. A short time later the Lydian kingdom fell on hard times as the army of King Cyrus of Persia conquered the whole of western Anatolia. Many cities revolted against Persian rule but Ephesus adopted a policy of "wait and see" who would be victorious and then move to that side. This policy was rewarded by the Persians as the city and temple were not harmed. As was the custom of the Persians, the local population was allowed freedom to rule themselves and practice their religion. During the sixth century B.C. the city prospered greatly. The fifth and early fourth centuries B.C. were very unsettled times for the

Aegean world as the Greeks fought Persia and one another for control of the area. During this time Ephesus was controlled by Persians, Athenians and Spartans but was not destroyed as were many other cities.

The Hellenistic Period. In 334 B.C. Alexander the Great of Macedonia crossed the Hellespont to engage the Persians in battle. The invincible Persian calvary was defeated at Granicus. This signaled the "beginning of the end" of the Persian Empire. That same year Alexander entered Ephesus and instituted a democratic government and ordered that taxes formerly paid to the Persians should be paid to the Temple of Artemis.

After the death of Alexander in Babylon in 323 B.C. Ephesus was in turn ruled by the Seleucids of Syria and the Ptolemies of Egypt. In 303 B.C. Lysimachus of Thrace moved against the Seleucid ruler of Anatolia. In 299 B.C. he captured western Anatolia completely. He relocated the city of Ephesus between two hills, Pion and Coressus, which is the site of the present ruins of Ephesus, and renamed it for his Egyptian wife Arsinoe.¹⁰ He enclosed the area with a massive city wall. This period saw much new construction: a modern port, massive city walls, public buildings, and the "slope" houses. After his death (c. 280 B.C.), both the Seleucids and Ptolemies "forcefully exerted their control over Ephesus and W. Anatolia."¹¹

In 188 B.C. as a result of the Apameia Peace Treaty, Ephesus passed under the rule of Eumenes II of Pergamum. It continued to flourish during this period. In 133 B.C. Attalos III of Pergamum bequeathed his kingdom to the Romans.¹²

The Roman Period. Due to heavy taxation enforced on the Roman Asian province, Ephesus joined other cities in revolting against their overlords in 88 B.C. The Roman consul and general Sulla came to Asia to quell the revolts. Ephesus was fined 20,000 talents for their participation. From that time the city chose to be

submissive to Roman rule and was rewarded with peace and increasing prosperity.

Many famous Romans resided in or visited Ephesus during the first century B.C. Cicero came to Ephesus as Proconsul of Rome in 51 B.C. Julius Caesar gathered the Asian governors for a meeting there. Brutus and Cassius took refuge in Ephesus after murdering Julius Caesar in 44 B.C. Mark Antony and Cleopatra resided there. She introduced the cult of Serapis. He prepared for his ill-fated battle with Octavius while residing there in 33 B.C.

In 27 B.C. Octavius was given the title of Augustus by the Roman Senate. A period of peace and prosperity settled upon the city which was to last more than a hundred years. Oster writes:

Beginning immediately with Augustus' ascendancy, Ephesus entered into an era of prominence and prosperity. It served as the capital of the Roman province of Asia and received the coveted title "First and Greatest Metropolis of Asia." The elevation of Ephesus in the dramatic urbanization policies of Augustus is revealed in its architecture. This revitalization included construction of aqueducts, repavement of streets, including at times enlargement of agoras... triumphal monuments.¹³

It was this Ephesus that the apostle Paul saw when he landed in the harbor of Ephesus in the mid-first century A.D. and to which he returned by land a short time later to take up residence for two and one-half years.

THE EPHEBUS OF PAUL

In March of this year, I had the privilege of revisiting the ruins of ancient Ephesus. The archaeologists have done a marvelous job of revealing some of the splendor of the city. Much of the archaeological work carried on at Ephesus has been under the direction of the Austrian Archaeological Institute of Vienna which commenced their activity in 1895. In the remaining section of this

study, I want to describe some of the sights the apostle Paul would have seen and to comment on their significance for his ministry there.

The Harbor. Sometime about A.D. 53, the apostle Paul sailed from the Aegean port of Cenchrea near Corinth to the city of Ephesus. No doubt his ship docked at the harbor of Ephesus where the Cayster river emptied into the sea. As his ship drew near to land, he would have seen a bustling city of perhaps 200,000 to 250,000 inhabitants--third largest in the empire after Rome and Alexandria. No doubt many ships were docked at the piers because Ephesus served the empire from Rome in the west to Egypt in the east. It was also connected to the rest of Asia by four prominent land routes to the north, east, and south.

The Arcadiana (Harbor Street). As Paul disembarked, he would have walked west on the Harbor Street, later called the Arcadiana. It was about 36 feet wide and almost 2000 feet long. To his right was the state agora or marketplace which received, sold, and shipped goods arriving by land and sea. Directly in front of him rose the majestic theater which is mentioned in Luke's account (Acts 19:29).

The Mercantile Agora. To his right (south), Paul would have passed the gate of Mazeus-Mithradates which led into the marketplace or agora. It was first built in the third century B.C. and later renovated by both Augustus and Nero. It was 360 feet square and surrounded by shops, some of which remain intact.¹⁴ It was Paul's custom to proclaim the good news in the market place in Greek cities although specific mention is not made of his doing so at Ephesus (Acts 17:17).

The Theater. If he continued east on Harbor Street, he would have come to the imposing theater built into the western slope of

Mount Pion during the reign of Lysimachus in the third century B.C. It seated about 25,000 on three levels of twenty-two rows each and reached a height of about 100 feet. It was enlarged and beautified by the Roman emperors of the first century. Oster describes its function:

As in all cities, the theater at Ephesus served as the site for theatrical performances, for the regular meeting of the City's ecclesia..., and for city meetings in times of urban crisis (Acts 19:23-41).¹⁵

It was in this theater that the riotous assembly of Ephesians led by the instigation of Demetrius, railed against Paul and the Christians because so many were turning from idolatry to God (Acts 19:21-41). Paul was restrained from entering the theater at that time by the urging of Asiarchs who were his friends. McRay notes that the Asiarchs were "political figures of wealth and power."¹⁶ One measure of Paul's success in ministry at Ephesus is seen in these friends.

The Streets. If Paul turned right (south) as he reached the theater, he would have walked down the Marble Street which was part of the sacred way and skirted the full length of the eastern side of the agora. It was probably not paved with marble in Paul's day but was nonetheless impressive. After perhaps two hundred yards, it intersects with Curetes Street.

The Curetes Street was paved with marble blocks. Many of the elite of Ephesus lived and worked along this street which winds east-southeast in a valley between Mt. Pion and Mt. Coressus (also called Mt. Bulbula) to the Magnesian Gate. I will not attempt to describe every building along this important street, but several which Paul would have seen are worthy of consideration.

The Slope Houses. Fronting Curetes Street on the right as one begins the ascent toward the Magnesian Gate are the Slope Houses, so called because they were built on the slopes of Mt. Coressus.

Each house served as the terrace of the next house on the slope. Most of the houses were three stories high with a courtyard. They were obviously homes of the wealthy. The houses had running water and were heated. Oster comments:

The most significant dwellings so far excavated are the slope houses situated adjacent to the temple of Hadrian and the Scholastica Baths but on the S side of the Embolos (Curetes Street). This area contained two insulae occupied from the late Roman Republic until the late 6th-early 7th centuries.¹⁷

The Memmius Monument. As one continued up Curetes Street past the Slope Houses, he would encounter the Memmius Monument erected in the 1st century B.C. to commemorate the heroics of Caius Memmius, grandson of Cornelius Sulla.

The Pollio Fountain. Next to the monument is a lovely fountain built by Caius Sextilius Pollio at the beginning of the first century A.D. A two-tiered aqueduct brought water from the Marnas River for the fountains and homes on Curetes Street. It is one of three such aqueducts which brought water to the city.

The Prytaneum. On the same side of the street one next encounters the Prytaneum [also spelled: Prytaneion] which was constructed in the third century B. C. where, Ozeren explains, "the executive council (Prytanes) ruling Ephesus had their meetings, ate their meals, received official guests and honoured them."¹⁸ John McRay adds:

The prytaneion was the center for religious and political life. Three statues of Ephesian Artemis found in the prytaneion now reside in the museums of Selyuk and Izmir in Turkey.... Various banquets, ceremonies, and receptions also were held in the complex. It also housed the city's state clerk, the *grammateus*.... The state clerk of Ephesus

came from his headquarters in the prytaneion to the theater on its north side to placate the mob that was protesting the work of Paul (Acts 19:35--41).¹⁹

The Odeum. Adjacent to the Prytaneum stood the Odeum, a small theater seating about 1500 which served as a meeting place for the advisory council (*boule*). The assembly of citizens had its meetings in the larger theater described above.

The Basilica. Across Curetes Street from the Odeum was the Basilica with the side facing it completely open. Statutes of Augustus Caesar and his wife Livia were found during excavations of the site.

The State Agora. Just south of the Basilica was another agora which Selahattin Erdemgil describes as "a semi-sacred area where political and religious meetings were held under the supervision of the state."²⁰

Various other private and public buildings lined the entire length of Curetes Street with many modifications made over the centuries. The above are only a few of the more important ones. The city was certainly a thriving metropolis when Paul walked her streets.

THE TEMPLE OF ARTEMIS

The Temple of Artemis (Roman: Diana) was outside the city wall and about 1.2 miles from the center of Roman Ephesus. The Temple that Paul viewed was the last of seven temples built on the site. It was the largest temple of Greek antiquity (measuring 377 feet by 235 feet), about four times the size of the Parthenon. McRay says that "it was the first monumental structure ever constructed of marble and the largest building in the Greek world."²¹ It was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

R. E. Oster writes of the bond between Ephesus and Artemis in this way:

The quintessence of Artemis was forever related to the well being of Ephesus. Notwithstanding the individualistic and personal significance of the goddess, the principal force of her cult was upon the interrelated components of the city's urban life, e.g., the civic, economic, educational, patriotic, administrative, and commercial facets....There was no other Graeco-Roman metropolis in the Empire whose 'body, soul, and spirit' could so belong to a particular deity as did Ephesus' to her patron goddess Artemis.²²

Although there were many temples in Ephesus, none rivaled the splendor or importance of the Temple of Artemis. Festivals and processions reminded the Ephesians and visitors of the sacred bond between themselves and the deity. The Temple served important economic functions as Treblico explains:

Artemis also had her own financial estate, which was one of the largest in Asia. The assets which belonging [sic] to the Temple came from gifts and bequests, and from revenue from property and livestock, such as the sacred herds, which were owned by the goddess. Thus the Temple could, for example, lend money at interest and loan money on mortgages. Hence Broughton describes the temple of Artemis as 'the biggest bank in Asia.'²³

It is little wonder that Demetrius, the silversmith who made silver shrines of Artemis, stirred up the tradesmen by saying:

Men, you know that our prosperity depends upon this business. And you see and hear that not only in Ephesus, but in almost all of Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away a considerable number of people, saying that gods made with hands are no gods at all. And not only is there danger that this trade of ours fall into disrepute, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis be regarded as worthless and that she whom all Asia and the

world worship should even be dethroned from her magnificence. (Acts 19:25b-27)

One can not fault the wisdom of Demetrius! This is exactly what the preaching of the great apostle was calculated to do!

CONCLUSION

We stand amazed at the effectiveness of Paul's two-year-plus ministry at Ephesus. He went to the very center of entrenched paganism to proclaim the One True God. He taught in the synagogue and in the school of Tyrannus (Acts 19:8-9). He "did not shrink from declaring anything that was profitable, and teaching publicly and from house to house, solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:20-21). Luke tells us "that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks" (Acts 19:10).

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WHAT WE CAN LEARN ABOUT THE CHURCH
FROM EPHESIANS

Gary Ealy

THE CITY OF EPHESUS

Considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, the temple to the goddess Artemis stood outside the city walls of Ephesus facing the east. Built of shining marble, the temple rested on a large platform (about 425' x 240') and was reached by a flight of fourteen steps. The temple measured 343' x 164' and had more than a hundred columns about 60 feet high. In the inner shrine was the image of the goddess, claimed to have fallen from heaven (Acts 19:35). It was a figure with many breasts, the symbol of fertility. She was considered the "Queen of the Universe." Ephesus was the "warden of Artemis." The duty of the Ephesians was to worship and protect the rights and privileges of the goddess. In return she would protect the Ephesians from the "powers of this dark world and the spiritual forces of evil" (cf. Eph. 6:12; 1:21-22; 2:2). She would guard the Ephesians from invasion, pestilence, disease, etc. Although many other pagan temples existed, Artemis ruled supreme. She was "Artemis of the Ephesians" (Acts 19:28).

The practice of sorcery was intimately connected with pagan religion in the ancient world (cf. Acts 8:9-25; 19:11-22). On the statue of the goddess Artemis was inscribed a certain mystic formula to which magic powers were ascribed. The "Ephesian Letters" refer to this cluster of six Greek words thought to contain the magical powers in order to get the gods to hop! By the time the religion of Christ confronted the Ephesians, the "Ephesian Letters" apparently had expanded into a generic religious language spoken

in the performance of magic. These would include inarticulate sounds, foreign terms, polysyllabic phrases, holy names of deity, palindromes, etc. These terms were used, according to Plutarch and Xerophen, in practicing exorcisms and keeping at a distance the evil powers who would do harm. As a result of the immense amount of activities involving sorcery, Ephesus was considered the center of the occult.

The implications of worshipping the fertility goddess and the practice of the occult in this metropolitan city upon its moral and ethical demeanor seem quite obvious. A cursory reading of Ephesians 4:17--6:9 is a divine commentary on the lifestyle of these pagans.

On Paul's third missionary journey, he returned to Ephesus where he previously had visited for a short time (Acts 18:18-21). This time Paul would stay an extended period resulting in the gospel being spread all over the area (Acts 19:8-10). Luke tells us of many who "openly confessed their evil deeds" and of a "number who had practiced sorcery" who brought their books of sorcery and burned them in repentance (Acts 19:18-20).

A GENTILE CHURCH

Although a Jewish element was a part of the Ephesian church, the letter is clearly addressed to those from a Gentile background. The religion of the pagans primarily constituted the performance of the rituals of sacrifice and the recitations of magic formulas to ward off the spirits. When accomplished, the adherents went about life without regard to living a higher ethical standard. From the book of Ephesians, it is clear that many who had become Christians did not understand their calling. They had not fully grasped why God had chosen them (Eph. 1:4) and the practical way that is to be reflected in every day life (Eph. 4--6). These Ephesians were involved in a life and death struggle with the demonic powers of

the devil and would be able to overcome him *not* by rituals of magical sayings, but by the power of the Lord (Eph. 6:10) who has put all enemies under his feet (1:20-23). They must put on the full armor of God in order to successfully overcome the devil's schemes (Eph. 6:11ff).

HINGE OF THE BOOK

The hinge of the book is Ephesians 4:1. The first three chapters could be characterized as "motivational" in nature as Paul lays theological groundwork for the challenge he is to place before them. The last three chapters could be characterized as the "practical" section as Paul declares what particularly he had in mind as he reminds them of their holy calling. Thus chapter 4:1 sums up Paul's message to the church when he says, "... I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received." As the "body of Christ" they should be the embodiment of the Christ who is their head (Eph. 1:20-23). As the adopted children of the Father the church is to imitate their Father as dearly beloved children (Eph. 5:2), thus bringing him praise and honor (Eph. 1:3-14).

The indication that the Ephesians were not living "worthy" of their calling is an indication that (as mentioned earlier) these Christians from a pagan background had missed the sense of their calling. They were not living "suitably" in respect to their calling. Their lives were not reflective of what their calling "deserved." They were not demonstrating the "value" of their calling. They were Christians by calling but still pagan in their thinking and practice.

The text of Ephesians implicitly sheds some insight as to "why" this is the case. Besides the difficulty all of us seem to have in changing long time behavior when society encourages no change, the Ephesians seemed to have felt somewhat "inferior" as God's children when compared with the Jews. Whether they were influ-

enced to feel this way by the Jewish Christians, either purposefully or accidentally as the Jews reflected upon their rich background and heritage as God's chosen people, is unclear. It is clear, however, that Paul spends much time in seeking to communicate just how precious the Gentile Christians are to God. They are "chosen" (Eph. 1:4) and showered with God's grace as a result of His great love (Eph. 2:4). Paul's prayer for the Ephesians includes his desire that they "may have power ... to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know that love that surpasses knowledge" (Eph. 3:18). Paul's ministry itself was evidence of God's love for the Gentiles as he was privileged to make known "the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Eph. 3:8) to them and to reveal to the Ephesians that God had always planned to unite them together on equal footing with the Jews in the one body of Christ (Eph. 2:11-3:13). God broke down the animosity between Jew and Gentile by placing them all in need of grace (Eph. 2:1-3), and making the two peoples one body at the foot of the cross--all in equal need of his blood (Eph. 2:11-22). Their past heritage may not have been as rich as the Jewish nation enjoyed, but now in Christ they had all things common. They had unity created by the Spirit of God that must be maintained (Eph. 4:1-3). The Jews and Gentiles both were part of the one body and were indwelt by the one Spirit. They shared a common hope, Lord, faith, and baptism. And when they addressed the one God, they each called him Father (Eph. 4:4-6).

This wonderful love was not without purpose. As stated earlier, they were "chosen to be holy and blameless before him" (Eph. 1:4). His love was sacrificial with the intent of having a bride (church) that was made holy and which maintained that holiness so that the bride could be presented to himself "as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless" (Eph. 5:25-27). Living holy and blameless is the "worthy" life that

is the result of such great love. As children who imitate their Father, he is honored and praised through them.

Paul's opening words sums up what he understands is their spiritual need. He does this by revealing to the Ephesians the content of his prayers in their behalf (Eph. 1:15-23). They desperately need "to know him better." In particular they need to know "the hope to which he has called you," (i.e. what God hoped for when he called you, his dream for your life), "the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints and his incomparably great power for us who believe" (Eph. 1:18-19). The resurrection and ascension power which placed all evil spirits under the feet of Jesus is at their (our) disposal. They (we) do not have to fear or be overcome by the demonic powers since we sit with Jesus in the heavenly realms. Thus they are to "walk worthy of their calling" and "stand fast" in the Lord (Eph. 4:1; 6:10-18).

Does pagan thinking still exist within the church today? Webster defines a pagan as someone who is neither Christian, Moslem, or Jew. From a Biblical influence one might define a pagan as someone who makes his moral and lifestyle decisions on something other than the will of God. Allowing this definition, I believe we have and always will have some who are "Christians" who conduct their lives as pagans. For example, a very popular and growing theology among us is what I would call the "happiness theology." The basic doctrinal position of this thinking is that God wants me to be happy, and therefore I know he approves of what I am about to do. This is very prevalent when a couple is considering divorce. Ephesians teaches that there is resurrection power available to us that can raise marriages from the dead if two people desire to follow God's will in marriage. All too often biblical teaching is ignored on the basis of what I believe will make me "happy."

CONCLUSION

What can we learn about the church from Ephesians?

1. The church is composed of the chosen people of God.
2. The church is the object of and recipient of the riches of his glory and the outpouring of his love.
3. The church was chosen for a purpose--to fulfill God's hope for us by living holy lives that imitate our Father.
4. The head of the church (Jesus) has conquered and placed under his feet all demonic powers.
5. The church has resurrection power available to it so that we can make the moral and ethical choices our Father desires.
6. All racial, financial and social barriers that divide churches have been destroyed and that "the race is one at the cross."
7. The unity of the church is based upon our common experience and relationship with the Godhead and that this unity must be maintained.
8. The church is to so live before the world that our Father receives praise, honor, and glory because of our lives.

So, "I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received" (Eph. 4:1).

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THE PRIVILEGE AND RESPONSIBILITY
OF ELECTION

John O. York

THE RIGHT OF CHOICE

"Life, what a beautiful choice," says the voice-over in the commercial. Few values are prized more highly in American culture than the individual's right of choice. "Choice" has become a buzz-word of our time, as individualism and human rights have become the central agendas for understanding what it means to be an American, even what it means to be human. We are a people consumed by the need to make our own decisions, not let others violate *my rights, my space, my self-worth, my choice to be all that I can be, go where I want to go, do what I want to do*. We can choose the job, the church, the city, the time, the person to share it all with. Freedom in our country means, more than anything else, freedom to make one's own choices, choose one's own destiny. We prize the individualism that comes through that right, although our individualism is most often an odd type of conformity to others around us. "I want to be me" and "I want to be just like Mike" get blended into a strange set of choices that are partially our own and partially a result of peer and group pressures around us.

Choosing one's own destiny has some interesting corollaries. One is the need to be in control of all our surroundings. In our technologically advanced society, we control climates in our homes, our offices and our vehicles; we control distance through our varied modes of transportation; in many areas of medical health, we feel a greater degree of control over longevity of life.

We can choose and control our communication and entertainment options of video, television, telephone, compact discs, computers/modems, fax machines. We have laws to control behavior and hired guns to enforce the law. We choose by election political officials whose job it is to keep both international and national affairs of state under control. Underpinning our notions of election and choice and individual rights has been, we thought at least, a shared value system that made behavior predictable, that made our life together predictable. That which is predictable is secure and comfortable and reassuring and safe.

What we fear most in life are those things we cannot control, those things that are either the choice of others "above" us or outside our control. There is a growing fear that even that which we once controlled is now getting out of control. There is a growing fear that the laws of the land no longer are being enforced and that we cannot build enough jails or hire enough policemen to control lawless behavior. We have difficulty trusting our elected government officials because they tend to live outside the rules themselves. Even though we have the right to vote, few people seem interested in exercising that right. But beyond politics, it is the felt loss of a shared value system and the loss of predictability to our lives that is confusing the choices supposedly we are so free to make. We realize that we are no longer free to walk about wherever we choose at night; our streets and highways are not free from the dangers of drive-by shootings; having a good education does not guarantee our choice of a good job. Life is not always climate-controlled, and our ability to make the right choices in life for ourselves and/or others is terribly deficient.

All too often control and choice are reduced to power decisions. Law and lawlessness sometimes seem to be little more than power decisions rather than decisions of truth or even justice. Contracts are made to be broken, if one has enough power--contracts no longer are issues of commitment or conscience. A pregnant woman can choose to abort her pregnancy because she has the

power of choice that the fetus does not have. We fear Dr. Kevorkian because he threatens our sense of control over life and death just like a man with an A-K 47 does. Even if someone wills to die, such wishes seem inappropriate to our belief in the value of life. But more than that threat is the threat of death itself. No matter how good our medical technology, there is still the HIV virus or the new strain of streptococcus that eats human flesh or Legionnaires disease or the E-boli virus that destroyed an entire African village. There are still inoperable, untreatable forms of cancer. Death is still the great inevitable conclusion of life, and no amount of preventative strategies to combat aging can stop the inevitable.

Then there are the "natural disasters" that obliterate the human perspectives of power and control and free will. Even though scientists could predict some sort of eruption at Mt. St. Helens in 1980, they had no expectation that the top third of the mountain would be blown off. Although we can send weather airplanes into the eye of a hurricane and measure wind velocities and label storms according to their intensity, we cannot predict where exactly they will hit, nor can we prevent the devastation that results. We can build levies and dams, but nothing could stop the flooding of the Mississippi River last year. We can build "earthquake-safe" buildings, but the codes always have to be changed when the earthquake actually hits. The L.A. Earthquake, hurricanes and tornadoes, floods in the midwest, the drought and famines in other parts of our world all remind us that there are still things outside of human power and control games.

NOT CHOOSE, BUT CHOSEN!

Life may be a beautiful choice, but whose choice is it, really? The great human deception throughout history has been that life and death are somehow human choices. Even when we assume a Christian perspective that admits God is the creator and sustainer

of human life, and when we also add to that the assumption that God has offered eternal life to us through faith in his son Jesus, we then talk about the human decision to choose God. We center our evangelistic efforts on the human choices of submission to God's will, of choosing the right church, of choosing the right set of scriptures and doctrines, of choosing to live right. When Paul speaks to the Ephesians, he certainly is concerned about human choices, but from his perspective all human choices are secondary and even superficial when compared with the Creator God's choices. It is not that we benevolently choose God but that God benevolently has chosen us. So the opening thanksgiving of Ephesians chapter one praises God and recognizes the choices he has made:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as *he chose us* (or he elected us) in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. *He destined us* in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace which *he freely bestowed on us* in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace which *he lavished upon us*. For *he has made known to us* in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. *In him, according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to the counsel of his will*, we who first hoped in Christ have been destined and appointed to live for the praise of his glory. *In him you also*, who have heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and have believed in him *were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit*, which is the guarantee of our

inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory. (Ephesians 1:3-14, emphasis mine)

For Paul it is God who has chosen to act decisively in his creation through Jesus Christ. From the foundations of the world he has sought a holy and blameless creation. The choosing and the destining and accomplishing of that purpose is not deterministic in the sense that it denies human decision. Rather Paul seeks to recognize the fact that any and all human decisions or human hope are made possible only by the gracious activity initiated by God. The good news is not that we choose God, but that God first chose us! The hope that we have in Christ is not of our choosing but of God's calling (1:18). It is God who has chosen to reveal the mystery of his will through Jesus Christ. It is God who has chosen to guarantee his promises of life with the seal of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life.

Humans do not elect or choose God. God chose to give life to his creation when his creation chose death by separation and denial of God through sin. The issue for Paul, as it was for Jesus and as it was for the prophets, is not the non-election of some by God, but the lack of "ears to hear" by those who are not chosen. Thus, in Ephesians chapter two, Paul explains in detail the gracious activity of God in Christ. The end result of human choices through the centuries of existence on earth was death and sin and division. Paul beautifully weaves together the consequences of sin in humanity: you were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world...we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of body and mind (2:1-3). Humans made their own choices, sought their own solutions and meanings to life, pursued their own right of choice--and ended up mired in the search for death rather than the search for life. But by the mercies of a God whose steadfast love endures forever, we have been saved by grace, not by works nor our own choices. *It is the gift of God*, Paul reminds his audience, *not because of works, lest any man should boast* (2:9). God has

graciously called and chosen and saved *us*--the people who have responded in faith to the gracious gift of life offered in Christ Jesus for good deeds. These are activities prepared for humanity from the beginning just as we were chosen from the beginning (2:10).

The election by God of those called in Christ has done more than redeem individuals, it has broken down the barriers that separate humans from one another. In one of the most beautiful passages in Scripture, Paul reminds his audience of the means by which God's activity in Christ has healed the division of Jew and Gentile (2:11-22). All have now been brought near to God at the foot of the cross. This reconciliation is, again, not the product of human will or human secretaries of state with their peace initiatives, but it is all in God's initiative in Christ. The two have been made one (2:15), given the same access to God in the Spirit (v. 18), built together into the dwelling place of God in the Spirit (v. 22). The choice of salvation and the choice of community and fellowship are God's choices in and through Jesus Christ and the ongoing operation of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believers.

For Paul the concern for human choices begins with his own reception of that grace and the recognition that he is a steward, a caretaker, of the grace he has received (3:1-2). He is compelled to share the "secret"--the mystery of God's activity in Christ (3:3-13), through which Gentiles have been chosen by God to be full participants in God's promises that produces his own ministry. Being chosen as a recipient of God's grace thus comes with compelling responsibilities and choices, but even the human activity is guided and motivated and performed by the presence of the Holy Spirit--that "power that is at work within us" (3:20).

THE CHOICE OF RIGHT

Recognition of God's choosing and God's calling is the basis not only for Paul's stewardship of grace but also for every believer's responsibility to lead a life worthy of the calling to

which he has also been called (4:1). Individual rights of choice give way to attitudes of humility and patience. The pursuit of power is clothed with meekness and loving decision to forbear (put up with) one another. Diversity and the drive to be different give way to the unity created by the shared presence of the Holy Spirit. Because the gifts of grace in Christ are different for each person, there is a diversity which exists in the community of believers, but that diversity does not serve individualism, it serves community through the individuals who share their differing gifts with each other. The goal of equipping the saints for ministry (4:12) is the building and maturing of the community, the body of Christ, as it seeks to be the fullness of Christ (4:13). Being chosen by God creates and sustains community, but each member in the community is mutually responsible for the health and vitality of the community.

Being chosen has the further responsibility of choosing right living in the culture and world that surrounds one. For Paul, that responsibility is best described as no longer living like the Gentiles. The life of the Gentile is the life of being in charge of one's own choices, alienated from God by making themselves gods. That old nature must give way to the new nature (4:18-32). One who has been chosen has been sealed with the Holy Spirit. To live according to the old nature is to grieve the Holy Spirit, to deny the presence and power at work within us. So the old choices give way to new choices--the thief no longer steals, but does honest work with his hands and helps those in need; evil talk gives way to edifying speech that builds people up instead of tearing them down; attitude problems of bitterness, malice, and slander give way to kindness toward others and compassion and forgiveness. In summary, the new calling leads one to imitate God and walk in love; that is, to be like Christ who *loved us and gave himself up for a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God* (5:2).

The rest of Paul's letter fleshes out what that life of imitation looks like and what choices the believer is freed to make as a child

of light. All family relationships are shaped by the call to submission, putting other's rights ahead of one's own (5:21-6:9). Husband and wife, parent and child, master and slave all have relationships based on the imitation and model of Christ in their lives. But they should never think that the power to live the life or the power to choose is self-generated or human powered. It is the armor of God (6:10-20) that enables and empowers for right living, for successfully choosing what is right, for living a life worthy of the calling we have received.

CONCLUSION

That life is very different from the American culture's love affair with choice and individualism and human rights. It is not my right of choice that gives meaning to human existence; it is God's loving choice of humanity that gives not just life's meaning but life itself! Our choices result from being chosen; even those choices are not our own but the Christ's who lives in us. Evangelism is born of the recognition that God has chosen us and we have received a stewardship of grace that calls us to ministry. The good news, the Gospel, is the proclamation that God has chosen us; he has acted in Christ Jesus to bring about our salvation. Thus we share the good news, that others may have "ears to hear" and understand that God has chosen them as well.

Empowered by the Spirit that guarantees our inheritance, let us grow up into him who is our head, recognizing that God has chosen to make his dwelling in us through the Holy Spirit. In him, we find the capacity to forgive as we have been forgiven, to act as we have been acted upon, to choose what is right because we have been chosen!

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JEW AND GENTILE IN EPHESIANS 2:11-14

Paul Pollard

INTRODUCTION

Paul in Ephesians 2:1-10 describes in passionate terms the former lives of his Gentile Christian readers in Ephesus. (Also see 4:17-23 for a similar description.) This existence was characterized by being dead in their trespasses and sins, living according to the style of this world, giving in to the lusts of the flesh, and in general serving as models of degenerate living. But into this devastated scenario God entered and made those captured by their immoral lifestyles his children by making them alive in Christ Jesus by grace and faith.

Ephesians 2:11-13 parallels the structure of 2:1-10 in that verses 11 and 12 describe the pre-Christian existence of the Gentile believers characterized by their being: (1) Gentiles in the flesh, (2) without Christ, (3) estranged from the commonwealth of Israel, (4) strangers of the covenants of promise, (5) without hope, and (6) without God. (See 2:1-3 for the counterpart of 2:11-12.) Just as 2:4-10 shows the reversal of the Gentile's situation by what God did for them through Jesus Christ, so 2:13 describes the situation of those "in Christ Jesus." The structural continuity of 2:11-13 with 2:1-10 is further emphasized by the semantic markers then (*pote*) and now (*nun*) found in 2:2 and in 2:11, 13.

Verse 14 belongs to the next section, Ephesians 2:14-22, and is part of what is generally thought to be an ancient hymn (verses 14-18) that Paul took over and reworked for his own purposes. The extent and details of his redaction are not relevant to this study, and the hymn is taken as it stands. Ephesians 2:14-22 is intimately

connected with the preceding verses. (See the connective preposition for (*gar*) in verse 14 tying the verse back to verse 13.)

Both the vertical and horizontal dimensions of God's salvation efforts in Jesus Christ clearly appear in 2:14-22. First, on the horizontal level Jesus, by tearing down the dividing wall between Jews and Gentiles, brought them together into one new man destroying the mutual hatred. On the vertical level he reconciled both to God in one body, the church. Both now are part of the fabric of God's building, tightly bound together by being anchored to their common foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ as the chief cornerstone. This building described as a holy temple is, furthermore, held together by the cement of the Holy Spirit.

ONE IN CHRIST

It is safe to say that the overall theme of Ephesians is the unity of both Jews and Gentiles in the church. That these two groups who in general detested each other, could ever be united in one body must have stunned and dumbfounded many first century people. In Eph. 2:14 the phrase "the enmity" well describes this common dislike between the Jews and Gentiles. Although some Jews, no doubt, liked Gentiles and visa versa, a few general observations are necessary.

Much recent scholarly work on ancient Jew and Gentile relations tends to downplay the antagonism between the groups and argues that what animosity there was came from groups not representing mainstream thought. Thus, John Gager concludes:

Once again it has become apparent that the diversity of attitudes toward Judaism in Gentile society reflects a deep division within that society. Wherever the reality or the dream of a closed community survived, antagonism toward Judaism might be sparked by Jewish proselytism or militant nationalism. But in the Hellenistic and Roman worlds, such

a reality was a rare commodity and even the dream belonged to only a few.¹

Gentile Perspectives on Jews. The traditional view, notwithstanding some recent scholarship to the contrary, is that there was much hostility between the groups.² Both Juvenal and Seneca picture the Jews as arrogant and foolish. They were lazy (not working on the Sabbath) and practiced the disgusting habit of circumcision. They had rigid food laws and kept strictly to themselves. By rejecting the Roman gods, they were viewed as atheists, and the Jewish God, unlike their own, was seen as having no form or image. It was also argued by some Gentiles that the Jews worshipped a man with an ass's head. Tacitus hints at the origin of this idea saying that at one point when the Jews wandered in the wilderness that at one point they were exhausted and near death from lack of water. Moses, fortunately, followed a herd of wild asses to a grove of trees where abundant water was discovered just in time to save the people. They in turn built a shrine and dedicated a statue of the ass to honor the animal for saving them.³

In Book 5 of his *Histories* Tacitus gives his famous excursus on Jewish history and customs before offering a description of the Jewish revolt against Rome. He, apparently, is very well informed about the Jews (especially when compared with many other ancient writers) and says of them that they, "regard as profane all that we hold sacred; on the other hand, they permit all that we abhor."⁴ He scornfully describes many of their practices, mentioning their abstinence from pork (due to a plague once suffered due to eating it) and their resting on the seventh day due to laziness.

Tacitus describes other customs of the Jews as base and abominable. Among these is the sending of money to the Jerusalem temple. He says, "the worst rascals among the other peoples, renouncing their ancestral religions, always help sending tribute and contributions to Jerusalem, thereby increasing the wealth of the Jews."⁵ Among other customs, he mentions their separation from

Gentiles, circumcision, and a belief in immortality and in one God. Of this one God Tacitus says:

The Jews conceive of one god only, and that with the mind alone: they regard as impious those who make from perishable materials representations of gods in man's image; that supreme and eternal being is to them incapable of representation and without end. Therefore they set up no statues in their cities, still less in their temples.⁶

The *Satires* of Juvenal, published between 100 and 127 A.D., also parallel the basic ideas found in Tacitus that Judaism was antithetical to everything Roman; Jewish customs were very peculiar such as observance of the Sabbath, worship of an invisible God, eating habits, and circumcision. He says they, "give up every seventh day to idleness, keeping it apart from all the concerns of life."⁷

Jewish Perspectives on Gentiles. From the Jewish perspective, shaped mainly by the Torah purity laws, Gentiles were viewed as ritually unclean. This, however, did not stop interaction between Jews and Gentiles, and all Pharisees outside Israel had to live with the fact of their permanent uncleanness by virtue of living on Gentile soil. It should be noted that while certain groups may have practiced rigid separation from Gentiles, the Rabbinic literature speaks of Jews and Gentiles trading and eating together. The Torah and other Jewish literature distinguished "good" from "bad" Gentiles. The Old Testament speaks of the "resident alien" being given special treatment (Lev. 17-26), and rabbinic traditions teach that Gentiles who accept the "Noachide commandments" (those commands dealing with prohibitions against idols, murder, theft, incest, blasphemy, etc.) might have a place in the age to come. Such "righteous Gentiles," however, had no real place in the covenant people as such. Gentiles who wanted a closer tie to Judaism (the God-fearers) kept the food laws, Sabbath regulations,

and Jewish festivals. Full proselytism, probably more rare, involved circumcision and possibly a ritual washing.

I Maccabees 5 gives a good example of Gentile atrocities against the Jews and Jewish revenge carried out by Judas and his army in several areas. In Bozrah, a Gentile town, he killed every male inhabitant and left on a night march from there, coming to Dathema where he found at dawn a large Gentile force with ladders and engines of war ready to attack the Jewish stronghold. Coming in behind the Gentiles with three companies and with trumpets blaring, he decimated the enemy forces, leaving eight thousand dead (I Macc. 5 : 28-34).

Josephus' *The Wars of the Jews* also gives examples from the first century of Gentile attacks on Jews and the savage response. Cestius led his army to attack Jews who were observing the feast of tabernacles in Jerusalem. Although it was the Sabbath, the rage of the Jews made them forget the day and attack the Romans furiously. They broke through the Roman ranks killing five hundred and fifteen, putting the army to flight.⁸ He also tells about a Gentile attack on Gischala and the enraged response of the Jews for it.⁹

Much of the Gentile irritation with the Jews had to do with Jewish arrogance and general stubbornness over religious points. For Jews, however, doing the requirements of the Law was how they showed their covenant loyalty as the chosen people of God. The *Letter of Aristeas*, written about 250 B. C. (date debated), describes how the Jewish Law was translated from Hebrew into Greek by seventy-two Jews sent to Alexandria. Furthermore, Eleazar the High Priest gives the Jewish perspective concerning their separation and distinctive religion in a discussion of clean and unclean things:

In his wisdom the legislator [Moses] ... surrounded us with unbroken palisades and iron walls to prevent our mixing with any of the other peoples in any matter, being thus kept pure in body and soul, preserved from false beliefs, and

worshipping the only God omnipotent over all creation....

So, to prevent our being perverted by contact with others or mixing with bad influences, he hedged us in on all sides with strict observances connected with meat and drink and hearing and sight, after the manner of the Law.¹⁰

Obviously, the Law was a fence to keep the Jews from the sins and perversions of the Gentiles. With the addition of the oral laws of the Pharisees and the later Rabbinic laws, the hedge was made even higher with the intention of keeping the Jews from breaking any of God's commands.¹¹ All the time, however, the result was that the Jews looked exceedingly peculiar to the Gentiles and became the object of extreme hatred.

Into the Greco-Roman world with its racial hostilities, divisions, and alienation came Jesus bringing peace to Jews and Gentiles with his message of love and atoning death on the cross. No wonder Paul says of Jesus, "He is our Peace" (2:14). In one body, his own, he makes the two groups one new man, reconciling both to God.

THE TEXT OF EPHESIANS 2:11-14

The preposition "therefore" (*dio*) in verse 11 makes it clear that the whole of 2:11-22 is predicated on what Paul had said in 2:1-10 and intimately tied to it. Because of their past life outside of Christ, they are to remember what it was like *then* compared to their *present* life as Christians. Specifically, the discussion is not about present relations between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians in the church or in the synagogue. He clearly is not arguing that Gentiles are now in and Jews are now out. Rather, he intends that Gentile Christians look at their past in terms of categories which before were valued among the Jews when God focused mainly on Israel.¹²

Paul certainly does not command the Ephesians to "remember" their past lives with any kind of evil pride or desire to return to the old days. When they remember their past sordid lives, they are to

thank God for the greatness of his present forgiveness. Those who objectively look back at their old lives without Christ truly can marvel at the power of God. They see clearly the hideous nature of life apart from God and the true horror of being controlled by evil, malignant forces that degrade every aspect of life.¹³

By emphasizing in verse 11 that they were once Gentiles "in the flesh" (the first occurrence of the word "Gentile" (*ta ethne*) in Ephesians) and called uncircumcision by those circumcised "in the flesh," Paul shows that these distinctions were based on ethnic and physical differences and that from the Christian perspective these no longer count as religiously significant.¹⁴ From that time onward, no brother or sister is to be judged on the basis of their race or other outward features. What really matters is that we are one people united in Christ, in his body the church.

In rapid succession Paul clicks off in verse 12 the horrible reality of the pre-Christian life of his Gentile readers. First and foremost, they were "without Christ." Next, in reference to Jewish privileges, they were totally outside the pale--estranged from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers of the covenants of promise. But why compare what the Gentiles outside of Christ did not have with the blessings of Jews who were also outside of Christ? Paul's point seems to be that at one time Israel did have, as God's chosen, special advantages (even though they forfeited them). The pre-Christian Gentile situation is made even more stark when compared to the real Jewish advantages. Paul certainly does not think that the Jews are acceptable as they are without Christ, despite the arguments of modern scholars such as E. P. Sanders and others.¹⁵ They must become God's people just like the Gentiles despite their past standing.

In addition, the Gentiles were without hope, another example of the "estrangement" language Paul uses to express the totally dismal picture of those without Christ. This condition very aptly characterizes many in today's world. Recently a man became lost in a snowstorm and died in his own backyard. He simply gave up

hope, not realizing where he was and how close to safety he had come. Without hope we are like people with their faces pressed against a window looking in at others sitting down to a huge feast. When we hope in God we fully place our reliance on him, knowing that our expectations will not be in vain.¹⁶ From Paul's perspective the only true source of hope is God and the Gentiles had at one time no relationship with him.

Paul concludes his descriptive list by saying that the pre-Christian Gentiles were "atheists," using the word *atheos* found only here in the New Testament.¹⁷ They were "atheists" not because they failed to believe in gods; that they surely did, worshipping as the Gentiles customarily did a pantheon of gods and goddesses. They were "atheists" because they failed to worship and serve the true God of heaven. They lived without hope and without the true God in their lives and by virtue of this lived in what Paul describes in other places as "this world" or in "this world-age."¹⁸ As William Hendriksen summarized in his commentary, they were "Christless, stateless, friendless, hopeless, and Godless."¹⁹

The pre-Christian Gentiles desperately needed to be rescued from their perilous situation. When we think of rescues we may recall a paramedic squad responding to a 911 call or a SWAT team rescuing individuals. Many of the rescues seen on TV have to do with individuals or small groups. By contrast, Ephesians 2:11-22 speaks eloquently and powerfully about the rescue of the whole of humanity by Christ's atoning death on the cross, rescuing humanity from pervasive alienation and hostility.²⁰ Verse 13 shows that what could not be achieved by any other means was brought about by the blood of Christ. The "now" (*nun*) resounds like thunder across the barren terrain, especially in contrast to the "then" (*pote*) of verse 11. The key phrase in verse 13 appears to be "in Christ Jesus," a favorite designation for Paul of mankind's new relationship to Christ.

The point is that those who once were "far away," namely the Gentiles, have been brought "near" at the cost of Jesus' blood. This "far" and "near" terminology is common in later Jewish discussions of proselytism. Proselytes were those who "came near" the community and blessings of Israel. This traditional proselyte terminology expresses the change that took place for the Gentiles. The reference to the blood of Christ shows that they came "near" to God and gained membership, not in Israel but in the new community Christ created.²¹ Whether Paul had in mind at this point Isaiah 57:19 (which he reworks in verse 17 to better fit his argument) is not clear. Nor is it certain that the entire structure of Ephesians 2:11-22 should be taken as a midrash on Isaiah 57:19 as Wayne Meeks argues.²² What we can be sure of is that this "far" and "near" language indicates that a remarkable change came over those formerly disenfranchised.

Not only does the blood of Jesus cause those who were "far away" to be "near," but he also becomes "our peace" (verse 14). The Jews had a rich understanding of "shalom" which meant for them not so much "peace" but "well-being" or "salvation." In letters and greetings "well-being" which comes only from Yahweh is wished to others. The idea of peace in the New Testament mainly has to do with: (1) salvation, (2) with the "healthy" or normal state of things, (3) with peace of men with one another, and at times (4) with the peace of soul which comes from believing in God. Only rarely is it used in the New Testament for the relationship of believers having peace with God as it does in verse 14 (cf., Rom. 5:1).²³ Paul emphatically stresses (*autos* in the emphatic position) that Jesus is "our peace" and at the same time personifies the concept.

Jesus accomplished peace between Jews and Gentiles by destroying the middle wall and making them into one people of God. This dividing fence is tersely described as "the enmity." Several options exist for what Paul had in mind when he referred to this "dividing wall:" (1) the curtain of the temple that divided

the Holy of Holies from the Holy place; (2) the section of town where Jews lived walled off from others; (3) the wall around Jerusalem.²⁴ More than likely, the status of Gentiles as outsiders is graphically illustrated by the architecture of the temple itself. A wall about three or four feet high was designed to keep Gentiles from the inner court reserved only for Jews. An inscription on one of the posts was discovered by M. Clermont Ganneau in May 1871 and is now in Constantinople.²⁵ The inscription warns:

No man of another race is to proceed within the partition and enclosing wall about the sanctuary. Anyone arrested there will have himself to blame for the penalty of death which will be imposed as a consequence.²⁶

But specifically what does Paul mean by reference to the wall? Regardless of what image came to his reader's minds, whether of the wall in the temple separating Jews and Gentiles or some other barricade, what does Paul intend to illustrate by such language? Some help is found in verse 15 where the convoluted phrase, "having destroyed the law of commandments in (or "according to") regulations (rules)" is found. Is this a reference to the Law of Moses or something else? Does Paul mean that Jesus abolished the Law? If so, how is this verse reconciled with the statement of Jesus in Matthew 5:17-18 that he came not to *abolish* the Law or the prophets but to fulfill them? Also, if Ephesians 2:14-15 is interpreted to mean that the Law was destroyed, how does this fit with Paul's statements about the Law in other places?

One clue to the meaning of the "dividing wall" in verse 14 is the word *dogma* translated as "rules" or "regulations" in verse 15. The word "rule" or "regulation" (*dogma*) is found in the New Testament only five times (Lk. 2:1; Acts 16:4, 17:7; Eph. 2:15; Col. 2:14). The verb form (*dogmitzo*) is found once (Col. 2:20). Since the decrees of Caesar are meant in Lk. 2:1 and Acts 17:7, they are no help here. However, Ephesians 2:14-15 is clarified by the use of *dogma* meaning "decree," "decision," or "rule" in Acts 16:4 with reference to the decisions of the Apostles at Jerusalem

regarding food and social relationships between Jews and Gentiles. In Colossians 2:14 Paul says that by the cross God cancels the written obligation that stood against us with its *decrees*. In verse 20 Paul clarifies what these decrees or rules are when he asks the Colossians why, if they have died with Christ, they still submit to rules or decrees (*dogmatizo*) and then in verse 21 describes the decrees as regulations about touch and taste. These, like the regulations of Acts 16:4, have to do with social contact between Jew and Gentile. Paul, in Colossians 2:23, castigates these man-made rules as pretensive displays in the flesh designed merely to impress others.

In my opinion, what is destroyed in both Ephesians 2:14-15 and in Colossians 2:14 is not the Law. Jesus never came to destroy the Law (Mt. 5:17-18), and Paul never argues elsewhere that the Law was destroyed. If it were destroyed, why did he and others use the Old Testament extensively to prove their arguments? Why utilize something that was *passe*? Evidently, what was destroyed was not the Law but the alienating, man-made rules and regulations that built a hedge around the Law, thwarted its intentions, and shut the Gentiles out.

The problem with the Law as Paul argues in Romans 7 is not the Law, but sin. Sin in the form of stupefying rules and hardened attitudes that closed the door on the Gentiles--the misuse of the Law--is Paul's bone of contention. In Romans 3:31 Paul asks if the Law is overthrown by faith, and he says in the strongest terms that it was not. Rather, faith establishes the Law. He says, furthermore, in Romans 7:12 that the Law is holy and the command is holy and righteous and good! This does not sound like the Law is evil and must be destroyed. In Romans 10:4 Paul states that Christ is the end of the Law, providing us with another clue concerning the role of the Law from his perspective. Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness for all who believe and is the end either in point of time or in terms of purpose. Everything in the Law pointed to Jesus as the Messiah, and to say that it was destroyed by him was to cut

the limb out from under Christian argumentation and to nullify all the supporting evidence about him. The heart of the matter is that the Law was *fulfilled* by Christ; and since it was, we are not living under it but the new covenant spoken of so frequently in Hebrews (especially chapters 8-9). Fulfilling something and destroying something are two different things. What is destroyed in Ephesians 2:14-15 and in Colossians 2:14 is not the Law but the man-made ordinances and rules which caused enmity, hatred, and barriers between Jews and Gentiles. By dying on the cross, Jesus removed all obstacles to unity between all peoples.

Another approach that is possible, if what was taken away in Ephesians 2:14-15 and Colossians 2:14 was the Jewish Torah as a cause of hostility and alienation between Jews and Gentiles and not just man-made regulations, is to argue that Paul was thinking especially of the ceremonial aspects of the Law. The "law of commandments with its requirements" would then refer to the many rules and regulations of the Mosaic Code, dealing with such matters as fasts, feasts, foods, offerings, circumcision, Sabbath, etc. The problem of the Jews, then, is that they had shifted the emphasis from the moral law (laws dealing with love, justice, ethics, etc.) to the ceremonial law, those items contained in the Jewish law that formed a dividing wall between Jews and Gentiles.²⁷

CONCLUSION

Apparently, Paul in Ephesians 2:14-15 either reacts against Jews who have alienated Gentiles by their emphasis on man-made rules and regulations, or, if he is saying the Law was destroyed, against those who emphasized the ceremonial features of that Law. Either way, Paul rejects all efforts to regulate social contact between Jews and Gentiles. Like other Jews in the ancient world, such as Philo, Paul's brand of liberal Judaism did not insist on the minute keeping of the Law, but emphasized instead the ethical,

moral side. As time went on, this more liberal Judaism failed to become the standard Judaism, perhaps due to nationalistic pressures, and the more strict interpretation of the Law (with emphasis on those features which built barriers) prevailed. Since Paul's brand of Christianity was, in the eyes of the Jews, tied to this liberal Judaism, the rejection of this more liberal Judaism was in effect a rejection of Christianity. While Paul's theology won out within Christianity, that of the stricter school within Judaism prevailed with the result that as time passed Jews and Gentiles moved further and further apart.²⁸

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NOTES

1. John G. Gager, "Judaism as Seen by Outsiders," in *Early Judaism and Its Modern Interpreters*, eds. Robert A. Kraft and George W. E. Nickelsburg. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986, 113.
2. In the following see D. R. de Lacey, "Gentiles," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, eds. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, Daniel G. Reid. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993, 335-39.
3. Tacitus, *Histories*, 4. 3. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1951.
4. Ibid., 5. 4.
5. Ibid., 5. 5.
6. Ibid.
7. Juvenal, *Satires*, 14. 96-106. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1950.
8. Josephus, "The Wars of the Jews" in *The Works of Josephus*, trans. William Whiston. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1987, 630: 1-2.

9. Josephus, "The Life of Flavius Josephus" in *The Works of Josephus*, trans. William Whiston. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1987, 4: 10.
10. "Letter of Aristeeas" in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2, ed. James H. Charlesworth. Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1985, 22:139, 142.
11. Neil J. Mceleney, "Conversion, Circumcision and the Law," *New Testament Studies* 20 (April 1974): 338.
12. Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 42. Dallas: Word Books, 1990, 131.
13. Bob Hendren, *Chosen for Riches*. Austin, Tx.: SPC Publications, 1978, 43.
14. Andrew T. Lincoln, "The Church and Israel in Ephesians 2," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 49 (October 1987): 609.
15. E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989. Lloyd Gaston, "Israel's Misstep in the Eyes of Paul," in *The Romans Debate*, ed. Karl P. Donfried. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 309-26.
16. Hendren, *Chosen*, 46-47.
17. The literal translation is "without God" or "Godless."
18. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 138.
19. William Hendriksen, *Galatians and Ephesians*, *New Testament Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Baker House, 1979, 129.
20. William R. Long, "Ephesians 2:11-22," *Interpretation* 45 (July 1991): 281.
21. Lincoln, "The Church and Israel," 610.
22. Wayne A. Meeks, "In One Body: The Unity of Humankind in Colossians and Ephesians," in *God's Christ and His People*, eds. Jacob Jervell and Wayne A. Meeks. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1977, 215.
23. Werner Foerster, "eirene," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964, 2: 406-17.
24. James E. Howard, "The Wall Broken: An Interpretation of Ephesians 2:11-22," in *Biblical Interpretation*, eds. F. Furman Kearley, Edward P. Myers, Timothy D. Hadley. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986, 303.
25. J. Armitage Robinson, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians*, 2nd ed. London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1928, 160. The full discussion of the finding is found in *Revue Archeologique* 23 (1872), pp. 214ff., 290ff.
26. Long, "Ephesians," 282.
27. Hendriksen, *Galatians and Ephesians*, p. 135 is a good representative of this view.
28. Mceleney, "Conversion," 340-41.

Kenneth V. Neller

The church today is beset by what some are calling a "leadership crisis," a "crisis" which has had profound influence on every member of the body. This "crisis," however, has been described from two entirely different viewpoints. On the one hand, there are those who observe that elders and preachers are too powerful and influential, too self-important, too dictatorial. This has the effect, at best, of stifling creativity and activity in the congregation; at worst, of fomenting discontent and dissension. On the other hand, there are those who complain that some churches have a leadership vacuum--no one, because of lack of talent, lack of training, lack of courage, or because of all of these reasons, is willing to step forward with a vision of what the church should be and to inspire their fellow Christians to follow such a vision. No single verse of Scripture, or even a whole series of lectures on an entire book in Scripture, is going to address adequately this apparent "crisis." There is, however, a relatively obscure passage in Ephesians which sheds some light on a solution to any "leadership crisis." In Ephesians 3:7, the apostle Paul, one of the greatest Christian leaders the church has known, says, "I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power" (NIV).

GOD'S ETERNAL PLAN

While Ephesians 3:2-13 may be, in form, a "digression,"¹ it in no way digresses from the theme of the first three chapters of this

letter. On the contrary, what Paul says in 3:2-13 about his ministry of making known the mystery of God is but a further example of God's eternal plan for all creation and Paul's own part--and the Ephesians' part--in bringing the plan to fruition.

In a majestic eulogy in Ephesians 1:3-14, Paul briefly lays out, in theological terms, God's eternal plan, along with the spiritual and ethical implications of it. Before the creation of the world, God lovingly and graciously determined to choose believers in Christ to be his adopted children (Eph. 1:4-5, 11). Through Christ, God's children are to receive redemption, forgiveness of sins, salvation, the Holy Spirit, and every spiritual blessing he has to offer (Eph. 1:3, 7, 13-14). God wants his children to live holy and blameless lives (reflecting their Father's character, Eph. 1:4) so they might be a living example of his intent: to unite all things in heaven and on earth under the "headship" of Christ (Eph. 1:10). All of this--the adopting of children who live holy lives and the uniting of all things in Christ--is God's plan. This plan had been a mystery until it was revealed in Christ, and its primary intent is to bring praise to the gracious glory of God himself (Eph. 1:6, 12, 14).

Paul's concern with the saints in Ephesus is that they are *not* living holy lives and living together in unity and are thus thwarting God's eternal plan and depriving him of his deserved praise. That is why, in the second "practical" half of the letter, he exhorts them to "live a life worthy of your calling (to be holy and blameless)" (4:1), to "keep the unity of the Spirit" (Eph. 4:3; cf. 4:13), and to "put on the new self, created to be like God" (Eph. 4:24). He reminds them that "we are all members of one body" (Eph. 4:25) and that they should be "imitators of God, as dearly loved children" (Eph. 5:1). So he urges them again to "live as children of light" (Eph. 5:8) and "stand against the devil's schemes (to undermine God's plan)" (Eph. 6:11).

In preparation for these practical exhortations, Paul seeks to remind the Ephesians in the first three chapters of his letter of God's eternal plan and his power to carry it out. It was God,

exerting his power, who raised Jesus from the dead (1:19-23), raised the Ephesian saints from the dead and saved them (2:1-10), and united Jews and Gentiles in Christ (2:11-22). Just before closing this section of his letter with a doxology which includes a tribute to God's power (3:14-21), Paul is reminded that he has a *personal* part in God's plan--a part made possible only by the grace and power of God.

PAUL, A SERVANT OF GOD'S PLAN

Once again in this section (Eph. 3:2-13) Paul refers to God's will, or plan, as "the mystery" (Eph. 3:3, 4, 9). Previously (Eph. 1:9-10), he has explained this "mystery" as uniting all things under one head: Christ.² Now he explains that this unification includes making the Gentiles "heirs together with Israel," "members together of one body," and "sharers together" in the promise through Christ Jesus (Eph. 3:6).³ God has given to Paul the "administration" of this mystery (Eph. 3:2).⁴ In other words, it was Paul's job to make God's uniting-everything-in-Christ plan--a plan unknown to previous generations and only recently revealed by the Spirit to apostles and prophets--known to the Gentiles (Eph. 3:5-6, 8-9). It was through the apostle Paul that all the nations of the world besides Israel would learn that God had chosen them, too, to be his children and to be united with the Jews in Christ.

One might think such significant privilege and weighty responsibility might go to Paul's head. It is noteworthy, therefore, that in describing his position within God's plan, Paul refers to himself as a "servant" (Eph. 3:7). This word for "servant" (*diakonos*) is sometimes translated "minister" (e.g., here, in the KJV; in many modern translations: 2 Cor. 3:6; 1 Tim. 4:6) and "deacon" (Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:8). Except in the cases in the New Testament where it is translated as "deacon" (Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:8ff.),⁵ the term does not carry any distinction; it merely means "helper" or "one who serves." It is the word used by John to

describe the servants at the wedding feast in Cana (Jn. 2:5, 9); Jesus equates a "servant" with being the least of all (Mk. 9:35; 10:43). Paul uses *diakonos* to describe other Christians (2 Cor. 3:6; 11:23), servants of Satan (2 Cor. 11:15), civil authorities (Rom. 13:4), and even Christ (Rom. 15:8). So Paul is not claiming for himself (nor was he given) some special position or exclusive rights to a secret of God. He sees himself humbly--as merely a servant or minister with a job to do, spreading the good news of God's grace.⁶

This grace, Paul testifies, is what made his servanthood possible (Eph. 3:7). It is a gift *given* to him by God (Eph. 3:7, 8). The grace which allows Paul to be an administrator of God's newly revealed plan, to be a servant of God's good news, is not something awarded to Paul because of his righteousness, his ability, his education, or his social standing. On the contrary, Paul considers himself to be the least of all of God's people and the most unworthy of a gift (Eph. 3:8; cf. 1 Cor. 15:9; 1 Tim. 1:15). He is keenly aware that he has been the undeserving recipient of God's favor; he has received the gift of God's grace (Rom. 1:5; 12:3; 15:15; 1 Cor. 3:10; 15:10; Gal. 1:15-16; 2:9; Eph. 3:2, 7-8). This grace has not only resulted in his salvation, *but also in his servanthood*. His service for the gospel, his sharing the good news of God's grace, is in itself a gift of which he considers himself an unworthy, though fortunate, recipient.⁷

Nevertheless, though the servant of the gospel may be unworthy and weak, the God who made and implements the plan is powerful. Paul says that he was given the gift of his position as administrator/servant by the power of God (Eph. 3:7). It is likely that in saying "by the power of God" Paul has his conversion in mind, and perhaps also his miraculous gifts, but he is also aware that a powerful God designed the plan to unite all things in Christ and he powerfully implements his plan, working through his servants (cf. Eph. 1:19-23; 3:9, 20; 4:6; 6:10; 2 Cor. 4:7; Col. 1:29). Paul's status as servant is both as a result of, and dependent upon, God's

power. That is why he can have confidence that though he is in chains because of his service for the gospel, God's power is still working out his plan (Eph. 3:13).

A MESSAGE TO MODERN SERVANTS

Paul's position as servant of the gospel and administrator or steward of God's grace is not unique to him. Paul (along with other writers of the New Testament) goes to great lengths to emphasize that *all* Christians are unworthy recipients of God's grace (see, e.g., Eph. 2:8-9). As beneficiaries of God's grace, they have received not only the gift of salvation, but also the gift of servanthood. *Every* Christian has become a servant of the gospel and steward of God's grace and eternal plan (cf. 2 Cor. 5:18-19; Eph. 4:12; 1 Pet. 2:9-10; 4:10). Consequently, each of us in the church has the privilege and responsibility of making God's plan to unite all things in Christ known to the world (Mt. 28:19-20; Eph. 2:6; 3:10). What the apostle Paul has to say in Ephesians 3:7 about his own servanthood/stewardship, therefore, can serve as an example and a reminder of what ours ought to be.

First, we must remember that our role in God's plan is one of *servant*. Modern Christians, especially those in positions of leadership and influence, often forget this. It is as though we feel, by right of education, age, title, or tenure in the church, that we can now be served instead of being a servant or that we have special insight into God's eternal plan which gives us the duty or privilege of dictating policy and programs and protecting "turf." It has been rightly observed that the inn of fame and fortune is usually full, but there is always room at the manger.⁸ The Lord himself said, "Even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve" (Mk. 10:45; cf. Lk. 22:24-27). No Christian has ever had more "authority" in the church than the apostle Paul, yet he considered himself but an unworthy steward, graciously allowed by God to be a servant carrying out his plan. We would do well to

remember that it is *God's* plan; it is *Christ's* church. We are but unworthy servants.

Secondly, we should recognize that we unworthy servants are part of God's plan only by *grace*. God is not fortunate to have any of us in his service; we are blessed to be allowed to serve. No matter how gifted we may be, it is God's *grace* which gives us gifts, not our merit which earns them. And if we possess undeserved gifts, why do we boast (1 Cor. 4:7)? Recognition that we are the recipients of unmerited favor should keep our perspective focused on our humble servant role. Gratitude for the gracious gift of servanthood should compel us, like Paul, to labor all the more diligently in proclaiming God's grace to everyone (1 Cor. 9:16-17; 15:10; 2 Cor. 5:14), for his grace is too big, too magnificent to be enjoyed by any single individual; it must be *shared*.

Third, we must be aware that humble, thankful servants are only effective if *God's power* works through them. And it is God's, not ours. No matter how well prepared the class, how well-organized the program, how "noble" the cause, it will not accomplish God's purposes without his power. And his power is effective; he *will* work his will. So we, like Paul, can have confidence even in the face of apparent weakness and failure. (The cross teaches us that!)

The plan is not our own. Our position in the plan is not our own. The power which accomplishes the plan is not our own. Blessed is the Christian--whether a leader or not--who recognizes this.

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NOTES

1. See, e.g., A. T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, WBC 42. Dallas: Word, 1990, 167ff.
2. In the parallel passage of Colossians 1:26-27, the "mystery" is Christ himself living in the church. For a brief discussion of Paul's use of "mystery," see F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977, 438ff.
3. Each of the phrases in quotation marks represents one word in Greek, each beginning with the preposition sun--"with," or "together."
4. Cf. 1 Cor. 4:1 where Paul refers to himself as one of the "administrators" or "stewards" of the mysteries of God.
5. For the possibility that *diakonos* in Rom. 16:1 refers to Phoebe as a "deaconess," see J. Walters, "'Phoebe' and 'Junia(s)'"--Rom. 16:1-2, 7," in *Essays on Women in Earliest Christianity*, vol. 1, ed. C. Osburn. Joplin, MO: College Press, 1993, 167-190.
6. It is interesting to note that Paul uses several synonyms for "servant" besides *diakonos* to describe his role in God's plan: e.g., *doulos* (Rom. 1:1; Phil. 1:1), *leitourgos* (Rom. 15:16), *huperetes* and *oikonomos* (1 Cor. 4:1).
7. Because of God's grace, Paul feels that sharing the gospel is a debt to repay (Rom. 1:14), a trust to discharge (1 Cor. 4:1-2; 9:17; Gal. 2:7). Cf. M. Barth, *Ephesians*, AB 34. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1974, 358f.
8. See Gayle Erwin, *The Jesus Style*. Dallas: Word, 1988, 100.

THE PLAN AND WISDOM OF GOD

Ephesians 3:8-11

Edward P. Myers

INTRODUCTION

The book of Ephesians is one of the most beautiful books in all the Bible. Written from a prison cell by the hand of the inspired apostle Paul, Ephesians is one of the loveliest pictures given regarding the beauty of the church that you would hope to find anywhere.

Paul tells us the importance of the church when, in speaking about the church, he says Christ died for the church "that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless." Verse 27 in the ASV (1901) reads that the church is presented as a "glorious church." Such is the idea in Paul's mind.

In this small book of only 6 chapters and 155 verses, Paul refers to the church nine times (cf. 1:22; 3:10, 21; 5:23, 24, 25, 27, 29, 32). But to further emphasize the church, Paul uses a synonym for the church, i.e., the word "body." This is also used nine times (1:23; 2:16; 3:6; 4:4, 12, 16 [twice]; 5:23, 30). This means that Paul refers to the church 18 times either directly, by use of the word "church," or indirectly by using the term "body." It is not difficult, therefore, to see that one of Paul's important themes in this book is the church.

Our assignment is to deal with chapter 3:8-11 in discussing "The Plan and Wisdom of God." We begin by asking first, "What

is the plan and wisdom of God?" which is referred to in these verses. The answer is quickly given: (1) the wisdom of God is seen in salvation granted to the Gentiles; (2) the plan of God is his eternal plan for the church.

Ephesians 3:8--"To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ."

Paul felt his calling to apostleship was one of grace and favor from God. He considered himself fortunate to be an apostle. A similar feeling is recorded in 1 Corinthians 15:9, "For I am the least of the apostles, who am not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God." And again in 1 Timothy 1:15, "It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all."

In this passage the apostle does not say why he feels this way but simply states the fact that he feels fortunate to be an apostle of Jesus Christ. The phrase "the very least of all the saints" could be translated "I who am less than the least."¹ Markus Barth says that the Greek adjective used here is a novel form and in English would equal the terms "smallest" or "least."² Such superlatives were often used in Greek to give emphasis.

The grace³ which he was given was to preach the unfathomable riches of Christ. These are riches which cannot be traced or tracked.⁴ The word "riches" of God or his grace have already been mentioned earlier (cf. 1:7; 2:4, 7). It refers to the unlimited supply of the riches we have in Christ Jesus. The term "unfathomable"⁵ is not found in non-biblical Greek but is used in the Septuagint version of the book of Job to denote the mystery of creation. In Romans 11:33 it is used to describe the ways and judgments of God.

We have a treasure house that is inexhaustible; we have a

supply which is unlimited.

Paul's specific ministry is to proclaim to the Gentiles about the Christ. For this beloved apostle, there was no place where the riches of the gospel was more clearly seen than in the provision made for the Gentiles in the grand scheme of redemption (2:11-12; cf. also Romans 11).

Ephesians 3:9--"and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things;"

The gospel Paul preached was one that was hidden in God for all ages (cf. Col. 1:27-28; Rom. 16:25; 1 Cor. 2:7) but is now brought to light. Paul's responsibility is to show the administration of that mystery. In 1:9, "He [God] made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him." In 3:9 Paul says he is "to enlighten all" on what is the administration of the mystery. What had been hidden before all the ages is now revealed and made known.

Ephesians 3:10--"in order that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places."

In the place of "manifold wisdom of God," the NRSV reads, "...the wisdom of God in its rich variety..."; the NEB reads, "wisdom of God in all its varied forms." The reference here is to the "diversity of ways in which God has previously manifested himself."⁶ The word "manifold" could also be translated "richly diversified."⁷ This is the only occurrence we have of this word in the New Testament.

Ephesians 3:11--"This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord."

One of the central themes which flows throughout the entire epistle is that behind all events of history there is a God who is working out his purpose and plan. The gospel which Paul preached, by which both Jew and Gentile would be saved, was one that was "in accordance with the eternal purpose of God." Often, when we stop to contemplate the subject of eternity, we think only in terms of the future; i.e., what will happen when time is no more. But eternity, properly understood, stands outside of time. As one once said, "time is a parenthesis in eternity." Eternity was before time began. Paul's statement here is that the plan of God which he carried out by Christ was not an after-thought in the mind of God; not a secondary measure, implying that perhaps he had something else in mind that did not work and that he is going to "Plan B." But rather, before time ever began, God purposed the plan for saving man in Christ.

CONCLUSION

God's manifold wisdom and marvelous purpose in redemption was carried out in accordance with his eternal purpose found in Christ. Redemption was planned in eternity, promised in the Old Testament Scriptures, and presented in the preaching of the Gospel in sharing the unsearchable riches of Christ found in the church.

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NOTES

1. See Markus Barth, *Ephesians 1-3*, The Anchor Bible. Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1974, 339.
2. Ibid., 339-40.
3. Hendriksen writes, "Anyone who wishes to learn how magnificently Paul fulfilled his God-given task, what excellent use he made of the 'grace' (here 'blessed but undeserved privilege') given to him should read such chapters and passages as the following: Rom. 5:8; 12; 13:11-14; 1 Cor. 13:15; 2 Cor. 4:5; 2 Cor. 6 (see especially 8:9); 11; Gal. 5; 6; Phil. 2; 3; Col. 3:1-17; 1 Thess. 4; 5; etc.; also, of course, the account of Paul's life and preaching in the book of Acts. William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Ephesians*, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1967, 156.
4. cf. Rom. 11:33; Job 5:9; 34:24.
5. This can also be translated "inscrutable, incomprehensible." See Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, trans. by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich. 2nd. Ed. Chicago: University Press, 65.
6. Michael R. Weed, *The Letter of Paul to the Ephesians, the Colossians, and Philemon*. The Living Word Commentary, Everett Ferguson, ed. Austin, TX: R. B. Sweet Co., Inc., 1971, 151.
7. C. Leslie Mitton. *Ephesians* New Century Bible. London: Oliphants, 1976, 128.

LIVING AS CHILDREN OF LIGHT
Ephesians 5:8-14

Charlie Coil, Jr.

INTRODUCTION

In the folklore of the aborigines of Australia there is a story about how light and darkness came to be. At first the world was in a kind of murky state of semi-darkness. Then, someone threw a beautiful blue emu's egg up into the sky which somehow set fire to a woodpile belonging to the god of the sky. With the light of this egg-ignited fire he looked down and saw how beautiful the earth was whereupon the sky-god began making a fire every day in order to look upon the earth. In the early morning when the fire is not fully kindled there is naturally little warmth; of course, it is cool at night when the fire dies out.

This is the kind of story that modern storytellers love to turn into a children's book with beautiful pictures and whimsical text that fuel the imagination. It is harmless enough until it dawns upon the Christian storyteller that to the modern mind this story is just as "true" as to the origin of light as the Genesis version. The first chapter of the first book in our scriptures claims that God created light and darkness, and I believe it happened just that way "in real time and space in history" as the scientist would put it. What is more, the last chapter of the last book in the Christian's Bible triumphantly states that God intends to banish the darkness forever for his children at the end of time. According to John's Apocalypse, those words are trustworthy and true and I believe it just like a child carried away by a story that ends happily ever after.

But somewhere in the meantime is where we find ourselves in the Bible text for this lecture--living, as best we can, as "children of light." The reference is metaphorical I suppose, but talk of light seems to transcend mere metaphor and take on almost metaphysical qualities. After all, science still cannot precisely define light. Is it energy waves or is it particles of matter? The physics debate is ongoing. They can tell us that light is an information conveyor and that it is always moving whatever it is. I am still trying to get my mind around the idea that today an astronomer can observe a supernova (star explosion) that actually happened in real time about 170,000 years ago. The information about that explosion conveyed by light has been traveling at 186,000 miles per second for that many years, at least according to the way we calculate time which is another mystery.

With that thought in mind consider the text again and its original readers who could only reason from appearances. Without a scientific theory of light, theirs was a world filled with mystery and wonder. Perhaps some of that wonder needs to be reintroduced into our understanding. What a wonderful thought that disciples somehow are transformed into light. We are not just in the light but the light is in us. We are light. What a mind-boggling assertion! That is not to say that it is impossible for us to dabble in the unfruitful works of darkness. We have the power to turn off the light. Another mind-boggling assertion! The whole point of this "practical" section of Ephesians is to show exactly how to live as children of light or to be imitators of God (Eph. 5:1).

COMMENT

Our text starts with a warning: once you were darkness. This is not the Jungian dark side of your personality like the dark side of the moon. The darkness of evil is not a necessary counterpart to light in some dualistic, new-age Star-Wars philosophy. Good does not require evil in order to exist. Moreover, Christians anticipate a

day when light ultimately will prevail over darkness. We fully recognize that there can be no coming to terms with the forces of darkness, no reconciling with the dark side. "For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against ... the cosmic powers of this present darkness, [for which we need] ... the whole armor of God" (Eph. 6:12). "Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light" (Rom. 13:12).

V. 8, For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. "For" represents so much that has just been said about putting off an old way of life and putting on a new one (Eph. 4:17--5:7). The description is stark. The Ephesian Christians had not merely been in the dark; darkness was in them. The darkness that was ancient Ephesus has been well-documented. Numerous references in the New Testament describe this condition as being in a state of sin or ignorance (Lk. 1:79; Jn. 8:12; Rom. 2:19; 1 Thess. 5:4; 1 Jn. 1:6, 8; 2:9).

Darkness was also the state of the world before the Incarnation (Jn. 1:5; Is. 9:2). Confessional tone, "once...now" is a centerpiece of the practical sections of both Ephesians and Colossians. In between those words comes a most important phrase. In Christ, in the Lord, in him, in Jesus, or in Christ Jesus is repeated no less than 36 times in Ephesians. "It is he alone who has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light" (1 Tim. 6:16a). Still, the unequivocal "you are light" is an astounding pronouncement!

Live as children of light. "Probably no New Testament writing makes the heavenly status of believers more clear and explicit (cf. Eph. 2:5, 6) yet this status is achieved in experience in very earthly activity." The commentator Robert Wild made this statement by way of introducing the practical section of Ephesians. I think that the phrase "live as children of light" sums up that earthly activity very well and is similar to Ephesians 5:1--"Therefore be imitators of God." N. L. Baker sees this text fitting under the heading of

"imitators of God" laid out in three avenues: in love, Ephesians 5:1, 2; in purity, Ephesians 5:3-7; and in light, Ephesians 5:8-14. There is so much in this letter about the power of God in Jesus Christ at work in the Christian's life. Did the Ephesian disciples maybe have a low sense of their identity in Christ? If so, they would have found a spine-tingling boost in every paragraph of this letter. The imperative here is to live up to the inheritance from the father of lights (cf. Jas. 1:17). Children of light, what a lofty vision to inspire righteous living!

V. 9, For the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. Here is a second way to say that light is a living, fertile thing as opposed to darkness representing death and barrenness. This triad of virtues corresponds to an earlier triad of vices: sexual immorality, vulgar speech, and greed (Eph. 5:3-5). Compare this list to 1 Samuel 15:22 or Micah 6:6-8. The idea, as old as the prophets, was to go beyond knowing correct doctrine or performing correct worship rituals and actually live radically changed lives. "Good" carried the idea of kindness, generosity, benevolence, or mercy. "Right" meant treating people justly and trying to be right before God. "True" should be understood in its broader sense as genuine, sincere, or faithful--not "true" in the narrower sense of honest or factual or according to the facts of Scripture. "Fidelity" might be the best translation for this context.

V. 10, Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. A parallel could be Romans 12:2--"...be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God." The idea is repeated in Ephesians 5:17. The Greek verb translated "try to find out" is the word for testing or examining as in 1 Corinthians 11:28, 31 or Philippians 1:9, 10. The verse does not mean to go ask a preacher what is pleasing to the Lord. In fact, the whole point of the passage is for disciples to get out there and try out this new way of life as light-children; test it; experience it!

When you live life as a child of the light, you are a test case in affirming the will of God. There is clearly a positive flavor to this verse. Are you obsessing on the "don'ts"? Get out there and do something that is more pleasing to God than concentrating on avoiding darkness. After all, you are a child of the light!

The well-known British cleric of Westminster in London, David Martin Lloyd-Jones preached from Ephesians for nine straight years from 1954 to 1962. One volume of these transcribed sermons is entitled *Darkness and Light: An Exposition of Ephesians 4:17-5:17*. He preached five sermons just on Ephesians 5:7-14. Here is his comment on verse 10:

He is the motive The Christian's motive is not to live up to a certain code of morality, it is not to avoid the criticism of others, it is not to be on good terms with himself, it is not to be a paragon of all the virtues, it is not to cut a great figure or have a great name among men. No, no! He says, 'let nothing please or pain me, apart, O Lord, from thee.'

V. 11, Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness. How much plainer can you be? For a catalog of such works see Ephesians 4:17-5:6. Broader than simply immorality, "unfruitful works," carries with it the idea of being without purpose, aimless. Taking part can mean that one becomes darkness personified. Remember the Ephesian Christians in their former condition, v. 8! The Essenes (a Jewish sect known to us through the Qumran community of the Dead Sea Scrolls) were likely familiar to these Christians of the first century. Perhaps this was a deliberate allusion in order to underline the serious nature of this light vs. darkness imagery. As recorded in their *War Scroll*, the Essenes saw the end of the world coming down to an all-out war between the sons of light and the sons of darkness. Perhaps some thought that the end of the world had come when Judas came with the mob and Jesus said to him, "But this is your hour, and the power of darkness," (Lk. 22:53). But, Jesus had already made it clear that as

for the sons of darkness their hour was passing with every step that he took. "Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life,'" (Jn. 8:12). So, why get mixed up in something that can not produce anything good or right or true--an empty cause totally without merit?

...but instead expose them. Here is the convicting presence of a Christian in any circumstance. Jesus said, "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven" (Mt. 5:16). The Greek verb for "expose" is used 17 times in the New Testament, mostly as some kind of reproof of one human being to another within the church. J.I. Packer sees Ephesians demonstrating four propositions about godliness: (1) starting with *acknowledging* God's grace and power in Christ which involves the mental activity of hearing the Word; and which (2) grows by *adoring* God's grace and power in Christ; naturally (3) demanding *alteration* of behavior through God's grace and power in Christ; which necessarily (4) requires *aggression* against evil through God's grace and power in Christ.

My alliterative summary might be that godliness in Ephesians involves Word, worship, will, and witness! Packer considers Ephesians 5:8-14 as a call to witness with this being the explicit verse. As Bob Hendren, master of the pithy saying, put it, "You can't raise sunflowers in the basement."

V. 12, For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly. This is the second (v.3) caution about topics of conversation. Paul said, "I want you to be wise in what is good and guileless in what is evil" (Rom. 16:19). An inscription still visible on a building in ancient Ephesus reads *paidiskeion* meaning "house of girls," apparently a term for a brothel. The structure was just being completed in the last half of the first century A.D. possibly around the time the Ephesian Christians were reading this letter.

Along the Marble Way, a main street in Ephesus, there is chiseled into the pavement a sort of crude street billboard of a woman's head, a heart, and the outline of a foot pointing in the direction of the brothel. It was not like they did not know. The shameful thing was in letting it become a part of everyday conversation--a grocery store tabloid or a degenerate talk show obsessed with darkness.

V. 13, But everything exposed by the light becomes visible. The ethical content of light in this passage cannot be overstressed. "Social purity expresses moral light," said expositor John Mumaw. What about people "who put darkness for light and light for darkness" as Isaiah accused his generation? "You who call evil good and good evil" (Is. 5:20). The assumption is that the masquerade cannot last. The anger of the Lord will be kindled! "Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light ... [but his] end will match [his] deeds" (2 Cor. 11:14-15).

A scathing example of evil made visible is found in Romans 1:18-32. The intent of becoming visible is that evil deeds then lose their dark influence over people. I recall being on a cave tour with a guide who fancied himself a jester. At the lights-out point in the tour he told everyone to hold their hands up to their faces to demonstrate how dark is dark. Then he suddenly flipped the light switch back on. Everyone was standing there foolishly staring at their palms. Sin looks awfully foolish when it "becomes visible."

V. 14, For everything that becomes visible is light. Now comes the great spiritual leap in the midst of all this light metaphor talk. In the physical world all that becomes visible by exposure to light does not actually turn into light. Indeed, like Nicodemus, we too would question the very idea of rebirth if we could not grasp its spiritual dimensions. Transformation in the spiritual sense requires this stretch that perhaps we never fully comprehend though we believe it and have witnessed it in our lives and in the lives of others. But, is not this what propels the missionary enterprise--that

darkness can be turned into light by the power of God? Do not forget, light is fertile; it can have children!

Andrew Lincoln has paraphrased it this way: "The exposure carried out through believers' lives enables others to see the nature of their deeds and respond to the light in such a way that they are themselves light." And J. B. Phillips has this rendering: "It is even possible (after all it happened to you!) for light to turn the thing it shines upon into light also." Perhaps a positive contrast to Romans 1:28 is intended here. "And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God [*allow the light to expose and make them visible so that they could turn into light themselves*] God gave them up to a debased mind" [darkness]. Freewill is not denied in either case. Positively, God can turn darkness into light if we are willing, and negatively, God can give us up when we are determined to turn away from the light and live in darkness. "For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light so that their deeds may not be exposed" (Jn. 3:20). We have come full circle from the "once you were darkness" all the way to "now in the Lord you are light" (Eph. 5:8).

Therefore it says, "Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." Although it is set up like a quotation of Scripture, these exact words cannot be found anywhere in the Bible. For comparison check Deuteronomy 33:3; Proverbs 6:9; Psalms 12:4; 13:2; 27:1; 40:9; 41:8; Isaiah 9:2; 26:19; 51:9; Malachi 3:20; 4:2. Most often Isaiah 60:1 is cited. In recent years, however, scholars have discovered hymn fragments and oft-repeated affirmations of faith that New Testament writers guided by the Holy Spirit, incorporated into the text. Clues from writings that came after the first century make it clear that these words form part of a hymn traditionally sung at a baptism.

Wherever the origin of this quotation, it makes a beautiful summary of darkness-to-light spirituality. It is like awakening from a deathlike sleep only to find the Lord Jesus in all his radiant

splendor smiling back at you. Theologically, it underlines the radical extreme considered in this text. What greater change can be contemplated than darkness to light, barren to fruitful, secret to exposed, sleep to awake, death to new life! And most important is the understanding that Christ is the source of it all. It sounds a lot like this excerpt from 1 Thessalonians 5:4-11: "for you are all children of light ... So then let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake ... For God has destined us ... for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ."

"The poetic form, the central position, and specific content of the words give to Ephesians 5:14 a prominent role in the context of Ephesians 5:1-20. All that is said about the imitation of God, church discipline, wise use of one's time, singing, and thanksgiving can be understood as a ramification of the many statements made about light in verses 8-14, especially verse 14," says commentator Markus Barth.

EXPOSITION

I want to pose this question: "What happens when Christians actually live as children of light?" Or, "What happens when Christ shines on his church?" I think the answer given in our text involves a process of spiritual awakenings. First, an awakened state of *being*. Second, an awakened state of *becoming*. And third, an awakened state of *beckoning*. If the church can be viewed as a shining city of light, then these are three glowing portraits of that city.

The Accountable Church. The church must awaken to a state of *being* always under light-piercing conviction where acknowledgment of sin becomes confession. The "once...but now" (Eph. 5:8) perspective is kept in the forefront. Accountability means that mere acknowledgement after the fact is not good enough. We willingly set up ways and means to hold ourselves accountable to each other

in order to avoid the works of darkness. *This is the forgiven and forgiving church, a confessional but not a concessional church.* We confess our faults, and we make no concession with darkness!

Would not this awakening help curb the debate about the imperfect church? We appear rather pompous and arrogant when we act as if the church of Christ does not take part in the works of darkness while our denominational neighbors do. Why else would there be such a lengthy warning in chapters four and five? But, it is not enough to concede, "Yep, we're a church full of sinners and so was the church of the 1st century." While I am not advocating a narrow-minded, stern, school marm approach, I do know that confessing sins one to another and praying together for one another does heal churches (Jas. 5:16). I do recall that the homes and classrooms where I felt loved and secure and where I knew I was learning and growing also happened to be the least permissive. Forgiving yes, but accountable as well.

And would not this awakening impact the divorce debate? A confessional atmosphere in our churches cuts both ways. It fosters acceptance, and it challenges divorcees to confess their own faults, stop obsessing on past trauma, and get on with their lives. We have trouble, however, accepting human failure as an inevitable part of human freedom and divine grace in the church. Churches are not mini-dictatorships breeding a super-race; they are mighty confession booths full of awakening children of light!

The Becoming Church. The church must awaken to a state of *becoming*; that is, to a light-sensing growth where barren lives are becoming fruitful. Growing disciples are by definition "becomers," bearing fruit in "all that is good and right and true" (Eph. 5:9-11a). *This is the fruit-bearing and fruit-sharing church, a fertile and not a hurdle church.* In our zeal to make ourselves accountable "without spot or wrinkle...holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:27) we can forget the One who actually presents the church to God in this condition. Our purpose is not probation. We are not about

hurdles and hoops. We are about repentance, yes. We are about taking no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, yes. But that is not all we are about. We are even more about bearing fruit!

Would not this awakening help us sort out the grace/works debate among us? As Jewish churches of the first century wanted to set up hurdles for Gentile Christians there are today Gentiles who want to set up hurdles for the church becoming spiritual Israel. With this mindset the old law is destroyed rather than fulfilled, and a new, narrow, New Testament legalism replaces it. But, the "dividing wall" (Eph. 2:14) has been broken down, not replaced with a new one. I have become, by faith, a child of Abraham according to The Promise. What I do by faith in becoming a child of light is not earning my salvation. Whatever I am able to do in living as a child of the light is impossible outside the Lord's grace under my own power. There is a divine power at work within us (Eph. 2:20). The text says "in the LORD you are light" not "first become light and then the Lord lets you in."

Would not this awakening help us make peace over the Bible interpretation debate? Can we not have room to grow and "become" in our approach to interpreting Scripture? I believe that human approaches to interpreting the Bible, no matter how logical they may be, are not divinely-inspired. I believe that there will always be new fruit to be found "in all that is good and right and true." I believe in encouraging our people to try to be more Spirit-led yet free to try and to fail. I believe in urging disciples to be less censorious and more forgiving when any method is not as fruitful as we had hoped.

The Calling Church. The church must awaken again to a state of *beckoning* or calling others to a light-exposing purpose where comatose followers become coherent disciples. This is the called out and calling church. Expose them! (5:11b-14). Chuck Colson has suggested in *The Body: Being Light In Darkness* that the church will begin to make a difference in society only when we decide to

heed this very admonition. Here is the ultimate expression of a militant godliness, the shining city on a hill that cannot be hid. *Here is the death-defying (v. 14) and fire-swallowing church, a shining-city church not a whining-pity church.* One great purpose of Ephesians is to bolster the self-identity of that group of disciples. If it is possible to be God-imitators (Eph. 5:1) and actually become light (Eph. 5:8), then we have swallowed, like Jeremiah, a consuming fire (Heb. 12:29) that cannot be held inside!

Would not this awakening help us get over our current "sky is falling" mentality about the moral decline in America? Has darkness suddenly developed a power to extinguish the light? I always thought it was the other way around. Are we really past help as a nation as some are telling us? And here is a related question. Is the purpose of the church to defend the original intent of the American founding fathers? Even if Mr. Rush Limbaugh (the radio commentator) is right--politically conservative, reactionary, righteous indignation is not what we are about. We are children of light! We shine the light of truth by imitating God, not Rush. The text says, "Christ will shine on you" (v.14), not whine with you. We are not about politicizing the gospel and plagiarizing Pat Robertson. We must move on from picketing clinics and plastering city hall to picking up homeless addicts and praying with unwed mothers!

Would not this awakening have a profound affect upon what we do in our public worship assemblies? As children of light in a dark world we are living examples of Marshal McLuhan's maxim, "The medium is the message." Why does that not include how we package the message we present every Sunday? Have we suddenly lost our evangelistic urgency within the public assembly? Some are saying, "We're not here to entertain outsiders; we're here to worship God." But, I thought we always believed that God himself could be coming to us in the form of those outsiders (Mt. 25:40) and that we could be entertaining angels unaware (Heb. 13:2) at any time.

Should we not stop worrying about whether or not something we did in the assembly was entertaining and start asking, "Was it transforming?" No, we are not in the frivolous diversion business, but neither are we merely in the information dispensing business. In a world where packaging is everything, where glitz and glamour prevail and everything politically-correct is in, we will deliberately choose a shining alternative. We will choose to be there for people with authentic goodness, kindness, and fidelity and that will be communicated in how we worship. Not a "shining performance" but Jesus shining on us.

With this awakening we can affirm our wonderful, frontier revivalism heritage with its familiar trappings: personality-centered, harvest-minded, pressure-driven, public response-oriented, big event-anchored, institution building. At the same time we can also affirm the Biblical roots of being a community-building, learning-oriented, informally-programmed, praise-focused, process-encouraging pilgrim people. Is there not room to adjust our approach while still calling people to the same Light? We used to call our occasional change in method "matters of expediency." Let us bring back the expedient consideration in public worship and get on with calling sleepers to awake!

CONCLUSION

These three light-drenched portraits of the church of Jesus Christ (accountable, becoming, calling) present a lofty image of splendor "so that, with the eyes of your heart *enlightened*, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you" (Eph. 1:18). The text is a call to action and as such could be summarized with verb groups like--exit, experience, expose; leave, live, liberate; renounce, renew, rescue; or my favorite, God's shun, shine, show method for how to live as children of light.

We must not lose or underrate the potent imagery at work in these verses. The millions who flock to New Age philosophies

today certainly do not underestimate its value. Do you not imagine that Aquila and Priscilla used such imagery in working with the mighty orator Apollos in Ephesus? (Acts 18:24-26). After all, his namesake was Apollo, the mythical Greek god of light. Now, the one true God would have an "eloquent man" of "burning enthusiasm" as a new champion and powerful proclaimer of THE Light.

Among the many temples and official buildings in ancient Ephesus there was one built in the first century A.D. called the Prutaneion which was the sanctuary of the goddess Hestia. She is still known and worshipped today in modern Turkey as Boulaia. The beautiful and stately Doric columns of her part temple, part city hall still stand even to this day. Hestia was the matron goddess of the cult of fire, the divine personification of the sacred fire of the city of Ephesus. Priests kept this sacred "eternal flame" continuously burning for the city's lamps and hearths. The flame was looked upon as representing the life of the city itself. What a striking and dangerous contrast to finding one's true source of light "in the Lord" rather than the goddess Hestia or the gods of our own age. This is powerful imagery!

Three hundred years later a major influence upon the church in the region of Ephesus was a man named Gregory of Nazianzus. He wrote one of the earliest theological discourses in defense of the doctrine of the Trinity. Gregory also reported on the traditional way a baptism was carried out in those days. In addition to the ceremonial dress in white garments he wrote that lighted candles would be placed in either hand of the one who had just been baptized. This new child of the light would then be asked to stand before the table of the Lord's Supper while the congregation stood to receive him "with hymns and songs of a better life." Afterward, everyone was to go out with a lamp lit, symbolizing the lighted lamps of virgin souls going forth to meet the bridegroom. I imagine them also singing some form of Ephesians 5:14b--"Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

I shall never forget as long as I live the night-baptisms down on South Fork river in north Arkansas at "the ford." And granddad Coil's huge, long, heavy, shiny silver flashlight that he carried with him to the summer gospel meetin' for just such an occasion as a baptism at night. And the brilliant, round lighthouse beacon-like headlights of those late '40's and '50's model cars throwing eerie shafts of light out across the black water which was crystal green by day. But at night that icy cold, spring-fed river looked to me like hot, shiny tar, and it appeared as scary to my young eyes as an open grave! I would hold my breath when someone was put under the water just to see if I could manage that part of the ritual at least. A moment of hushed silence, then suddenly, we would hear a splash. A ghostly mummy-like form would spring straight up out of the water sputtering and smiling from wet, liquid darkness to light--headlights, flashlights, and moonlight. The older men would thunder a chorus of "Amens" and someone on the bank out of the darkness would start a song, and then everyone would join in.

What empyreal drama! What sublime imagery! This was great stuff for a nine-year-old--very entertaining, but deeply meaningful as well. I wanted to experience what those people on that river bank were experiencing. And I would experience it one day in 1965 and even more since then in other ways as I have tried to live as a child of the light. No physics professor who has ever studied the wonders of light could ever explain what we have experienced in the light. No surgeon who has ever cut open a human body could take a scalpel and ever remove that light that shines within us. No astronomer who has ever viewed the heavens could look through a telescope and ever see the light we have seen.

"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness--on them light has shined!" (Is. 9:2). We must believe in who we are ("in the Lord you are light") in order to "live as children of light." It is a lofty vision.

My friend Joe Cannon (the son) told me this short tale from the desert fathers of the 4th century. A disciple once came to Abba Joseph, saying, "Father, according as I am able, I keep my little rule, my little fast, and my little prayer. And according as I am able, I strive to cleanse my mind of all evil thoughts and my heart of all evil intents. Now, what more should I do?" Abba Joseph rose up and stretched out his hands to heaven, and his fingers became like ten lamps of fire. He answered, "Why not be totally changed into fire?"

Why not live as a child of the light!

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NOTES

1. David Martin Lloyd Jones, *Darkness and Light: An Exposition of Ephesians 4:17-5:17*, 410.

PAUL'S COUNSEL TO WIVES AND HUSBANDS

Ephesians 5:21-33

Allen Black

Bring me my slippers and my housecoat;
Bake me up some bacon and some beans.
Put another log on the fire;
Then come and tell me why you're leaving me.

These lines from an old country song portray a model of husband-wife relationships which has been all too common through the centuries. Millions of husbands have assumed the role of king in their castle and have treated their wives not as the queen, but as one of the servants. It is not surprising that our society has produced a rebellion against this traditional, dictatorial model of the marriage relationship. As a result there have been many productive changes. Fewer husbands now act as dictators; the opinions, needs, and interests of wives are heard and considered more often.

But most of those who have led the attack on the traditional model want to replace it with an egalitarian model in which neither mate has a God-given leadership role in the family. The egalitarian marriage is in many respects an improvement over the traditional marriage, but it has created a new set of heartaches for husbands, wives, and children. In this new social experiment, deadlocks are often broken by breaking relationships.

The most extensive and important biblical text on the roles of husbands and wives is Ephesians 5:21-33. In this section, Paul presents a Christian model for marriage relationships that is neither dictatorial nor egalitarian.

THE CONTEXT OF EPHESIANS

The main purpose of Ephesians is to encourage Christians in ancient Asia Minor "to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called" (4:1).¹ Paul calls on the church to "no longer live as the Gentiles live, in the futility of their thinking" (4:17). The first three chapters describe the blessings of God's calling, and the last three describe the pagan lifestyles Christians must avoid and the Christian lifestyle they must adopt. It is in this setting that Paul gives his advice concerning relationships within the household, including husbands and wives.

HOUSEHOLD CODES

Ephesians 5:21-6:9 takes up the three relationship pairs that constituted the ancient household: wives and husbands, children and parents, slaves and masters. The very same pattern occurs in Colossians 3:18-4:1, and a similar section is found in 1 Peter 2:18-3:7.

These three texts (and to a lesser extent Titus 2:1-10 and 1 Timothy 2:8-15; 6:1-2) are related (although not in a direct literary fashion) to other ancient discussions of the same relationships. The Old Testament, of course, takes up each of these three relationships although it does not bring them together in a single discussion. From at least the time of Aristotle (4th century B.C.) Greek and Latin philosophers and others commonly discussed these three pairs of relationships.² Although there were many gradations of sensitivity to the needs and interests of wives, children, and slaves, the overwhelming opinion of the ancient writers for centuries before and after the New Testament was that these three groups in the household should submit to the man who related to them as husband, father, and master.³ In their letters to various churches in ancient Asia Minor, Paul and Peter do not reject this consensus, but

they do challenge the selfish way in which many men exerted their leadership of the household.

MUTUAL SUBMISSION (Ephesians 5:21)

In the Greek, Ephesians 5:21 is a participial clause that relates both backward and forward. "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ" translates the fifth of a series of participles that describe what Christians do when they are filled with the Spirit: speak, sing, make melody, give thanks, and submit (vv. 19-21). On the other hand, this participle provides the verb (omitted but implied in the Greek text) for v. 22, "Wives, submit to your husbands" Verse 21 ties the two paragraphs together and suggests that being filled with the Spirit involves, among other things, Christian behavior in household relationships.

It has recently become popular to use the mutual submission encouraged in v. 21 to undermine or "deconstruct" the submissive role for wives described in vv. 22-24 and 33.⁴ According to this view, Paul intends the husband to submit to the wife in the same way the wife should submit to the husband. However, it is obvious that this line of thinking cannot be applied to the rest of the household code, which addresses children and slaves. It also does not fit with Paul's concept of the headship of the husband or with his comparison of husbands and wives to Christ and the church.

There are two other views of the relationship between v. 21 and what follows. One of them points out that "one another" does not always mean "everyone to everyone" (see, e.g., Rev. 6:4; Gal. 6:2; 1 Cor. 11:33) and argues that those Paul wants to submit are identified in 5:22-6:9 as wives, children, and slaves.⁵ However, the church-wide references in vv. 18-20 suggest that the best alternative is that which understands Paul's exhortation in v. 21 to suggest mutual submission, but in a qualified sense.⁶ According to this understanding, the subordinate role of wives, children and slaves is maintained; but the husband, father, and master "submits" in the

sense of practicing humility and sacrificial love toward those who submit to him. This qualified form of mutual submission does not necessitate deconstructing the submissive roles described for specific household relationships.

PAUL'S COUNSEL TO WIVES (Ephesians 5: 22-24, 33)

Wives, Paul counsels, should "submit to" their husbands. This verb (supplied from v. 21) has been extensively discussed.⁷ Terms like "obey," "be subject to," or "submit" are offensive to many contemporary readers.

To some extent these English words may have connotations that Paul did not intend. Paul counsels voluntary submission, not forced obedience. He does not exhort husbands to bring their wives into submission; he exhorts wives to submit.

Furthermore, it may be significant that in both Ephesians and Colossians Paul used the verb *hupotasso* for wives "submitting" to husbands and switched to *hupakouo* for children and slaves "obeying" fathers and masters. Aristotle provides an example of an ancient writer who (although he used only one verb [*archo*=rule] for all three relationships) recognized a difference in types of rule in the household. According to Aristotle, "it is a part of the household science to rule over wife and children ... as freemen, yet not with the same mode of government, but over the wife to exercise republican government and over the children monarchical."⁸ Paul may intend a milder connotation for "submit" in 5:22 and 24 than for "obey" in 6:1 and 5.

But Paul's offense to modern ears cannot be completely removed. In vv. 23-24 he compares the wife's submission to her husband with her submission to the Lord (note even the phrase "in everything"); in v. 23 he describes the husband as "the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church"; and in v. 33 he exhorts wives to "respect" their husbands using the same word (usually translated "fear") that he used in v. 21 for "reverence" for Christ.

The extent to which we should distinguish between "submitting" and "obeying" is called into question by (1) Paul's use of "submit" for the obedience of slaves (Tit. 2:9), (2) Peter's use of Sarah's "obedience" to Abraham to exemplify her "submission" (1 Pet. 3:5-6), and (3) the ancient writers Plutarch and Ps.-Callisthenes's use of *hupotasso* to describe basically traditional understandings of wives' submission to husbands.⁹

On balance, it is perhaps preferable to translate this verb "submit to" rather than "be subject to," and to differentiate it from the stronger connotations of "obey," but the offense of Paul's term is not only in the term but in the concept of a family hierarchy which he espoused.

According to Paul, wives are to submit to their husbands because "the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church." This statement is also offensive to many, but the repeated attempt to redefine headship here as indicating source or origin instead of authority is dubious even for 1 Corinthians 11:3, much less for Ephesians 5:23 (cf. Christ's headship in Ephesians 1:22).¹⁰

With v. 23 Paul begins an extensive comparison of husbands and wives to Christ and the church which is the special contribution of Ephesians 5 to our understanding of the marital relationship.

PAUL'S COUNSEL TO HUSBANDS (Ephesians 5:25-33)

It is what Paul does with this Christ/church comparison with respect to husbands that transforms the traditional model into the Christian model for marriage. He reserves his most extensive exhortation for husbands.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the

church ... each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself (vv. 25-33).

Paul obviously is aware that husbands often exert their leadership role with a great deal of selfishness. Through the example and influence of Christ he pleads with husbands to treat their wives in a selfless, self-sacrificial manner.¹¹

These instructions transform the traditional model into something quite different. Wives submit to a self-sacrificing, loving husband; a man who practices the golden rule most especially to his nearest and dearest neighbor.¹²

THE HERMENEUTICAL QUESTION

It is commonplace in contemporary interpretation to argue that Paul simply assumes the household relationships of his day and that the instructions to wives to submit to their husbands are no more applicable to us than the instructions for slaves to obey their masters.¹³

There is not room to address this issue here except to refer to my article on Paul's use of Genesis in establishing his views of the roles of husbands and wives.¹⁴ In spite of recent arguments to the contrary, I remain convinced that Paul believed that there was a "created order" on which the husband's leadership in the home is based. If this is so, then the husbands leadership in the home is not a so-called "cultural" teaching that is irrelevant for our society.

CONCLUSION

Despite the disproportionate space I have given to undermining recent egalitarian explanations of Ephesians 5:21-33, what I would like to see emphasized is not Paul's exhortation to wives to submit to their husbands, but rather what he himself emphasizes: his encouragement to husbands to love their wives with the self-sacrificial love exemplified by Christ. In general, we husbands have

improved in this respect in recent years, but in many ways we still understand so little of the love of Christ and of our wives' perspectives that we do not even recognize many of our failures. Let us pray for husbands who love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. Our wives will find it easier to submit to such men.

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NOTES

1. All quotations will be from the NIV.
2. See especially David Balch, "Household Codes," *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. D. N. Freedman. New York: Doubleday, 1993, 3:318-20.
3. David Balch, "Household Codes," in *Greco-Roman Literature and the New Testament*, ed. David E. Aune, SBL Sources for Biblical Studies 21. Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1988, 129-33.
4. For example, Craig S. Keener, *Paul, Women and Wives: Marriage and Women's Ministry in the Letters of Paul*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1992, 169-70. For other references see Keener, 183 f.n. 119.
5. John Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds., *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991, 493-94 f.n. 6.
6. George W. Knight III, "Husbands and Wives as Analogues of Christ and the Church: Ephesians 5:21-33 and Colossians 3:18-19," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, eds. Grudem and Piper, 167-68.
7. For example, Markus Barth, *Ephesians 4-6*, Anchor Bible Commentary vol. 34A. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974, 708-15; Kenneth V. Neller, "'Submission' in Eph. 5:21-33," in *Essays on Women in Earliest Christianity*, ed. Carroll D. Osburn. Joplin, MO: College Press, 1993, 1:247-49; and Andrew T.

Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary vol. 42. Dallas: Word, 1990, 367-68.

8. Aristotle *Politics* 1259a-b.

9. Plutarch *Advice to Bride and Groom* 33: "And so it is with women; if they subordinate (*hupotattousai*) themselves to their husbands, they are commended, but if they want to have control, they cut a sorrier figure than the subjects of their control." Ps.-Callisthenes *Alexander* I.22.19-20 has Alexander the Great tell his mother, "It is proper for the wife to be submissive (*hupotassesthai*) to her own husband." On both texts see David Balch, *Let Wives Be Submissive: The Domestic Code in 1 Peter*, SBL Monograph Series, 26. Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1981, 98-99.

10. See Wayne Grudem, "Does *Kephale* ('Head') Mean 'Source' or 'Authority Over' in Greek Literature? A Survey of 2,336 Examples," *Trinity Journal* n.s. 6 (1985): 38-59; idem, "The Meaning of *Kephale* ('Head'): A Response to Recent Studies," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 425-68; and Joseph Fitzmyer, "Another Look at *Kephale* in 1 Corinthians 11:3," *New Testament Studies* 3S (1989): 503-11.

11. See the excellent exposition on this subject by John Chrysostom cited by Neller, 258.

12. Lincoln, 373-75.

13. For example, Keener, 184-224.

14. Allen Black, "Paul's Use of Genesis and the Role of Women." *Harding University Lectures* (1992): 299-309.

Duane Warden

INTRODUCTION

The life of a slave in the world where Paul lived depended entirely on the good will of his owner. A slave had no rights. He or she had been captured in battle as a prize of war or had been born of a slave mother. Slaves were chattel; they had no more rights than a donkey or an ox. There were no human rights organizations to demand humane treatment. On the contrary, it was high comedy on the Greek stage for a great man to threaten his cowering slave with the mines, quarries, or grain mills. The unfortunates who were sent to the mines could expect short and miserable lives.

The wealthy gentlemen who produced the literature that has survived from the ancient world chose not to bother with such ugliness; hence, we have little first-hand knowledge of the pitiable life of slaves in the mines or on the treadmills. In the mid-second century Apuleius gives one of the few descriptions of life in the mills. "Merciful gods," he writes, "what wretched mannikins did I see there, their entire skin covered with bluish welts, their backs torn into bloody strips.... Their foreheads were branded with letters, their heads half-shorn, their feet stuck in rings."¹

By comparison, the lot of the household slave (the *oiketai*, e.g., 1 Pet. 2:18) was mild. The work of these might vary from field hands to tutors for the children of their owners. But even from the perspective of the 20th century, it is easy to imagine that nothing compensated for the indignity of being owned. Woe be to the slave

in the ancient world who forgot his position. He behaved, ate, and slept in a way befitting to a slave. An instrument used by the Athenians called a "gulp preventer" (*pausikape*) offers a glimpse into the life of the domestic slave. It was a wooden device that clamped down over the jaws of the food handlers lest they steal a morsel of the meal intended for their owners. Since slaves were less than human, they could be, and regularly were, tortured before giving testimony at legal proceedings. Slavery was a brutal and dehumanizing aspect of life in the world where the tentacles of the Gospel first spread a message of hope and life.

INTERPRETING PAUL'S WORDS

We read Paul's instruction in Ephesians 6:5-9 against the background of the harsh reality of slavery in the world where he lived. The apostle writes neither approving nor condemning the institution. Rather, he writes in order to empower believers to live noble lives regardless of their legal and social status. He offers slaves the spiritual resources to deal with an unenviable position. Further, he reminds masters that they had a Lord over them. Paul's message is this: Circumstances such as where you live and what you own do not give goodness and value to life. The Lord knows the heart. He values you for who you are. Paul tells his readers that even slavery does not cut them off from the blessing of being benevolent and kind and good.

In the immediate context, Paul's words give instructions specifically to slaves and to those who owned slaves. That being the case, do these instructions have any relevance in a social context where slavery is non-existent, where it is even disdained? None of us are slaves, nor do we own slaves. It is unlikely that any of us have ever met a person who was a slave or who owned a slave. We have a problem of interpretation before us. How do we gain meaning in the 20th century from instructions given in a

world whose social institutions, values, and ways of life differ significantly from our own?

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC RESPONSIBILITY

Paul's instructions to slaves and masters are viewed too narrowly when we read them only for rules applicable to literal slaves and masters. His words embody principles that are broad in scope. The apostle's admonitions to slaves and masters is an acknowledgement that every person has a place within a complex social and economic world from which he draws and to which he contributes. We are all alternately exploiters and the exploited; we are both slave and slave owner. In a broader sense, Paul is urging believers to contribute cheerfully and with good grace to the larger social and economic world to which they belong. The world may be no more fair to any one of us than it was to Onesimus (Philem. 10-14) or to any of the other slaves to whom Paul originally addressed his words. All of us sometimes get more than we deserve from life and sometimes less.

It is a hopeless and discouraging exercise to dwell on whether we are, on the balance, more often the victims or the victimizers. Let us grant that some Christians have back-breaking and low paying jobs. Some work under conditions where their good health is ruined. Some sense that they have no possibility for advancement from a menial job from which they are unable to break free. But whatever our circumstance, Paul calls on each of us to contribute as best that we can, "doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with good will as to the Lord and not to men" (Eph. 5:6-7). That does not mean that one passively accepts his lot in life without aiming for self-betterment. To slaves at Corinth Paul wrote, "But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity" (1 Cor. 7:21). But if you cannot obtain your freedom, the apostle said, it does not matter. External circumstances are not the foundation upon which Christian freedom rests.

Accepting one's responsibility in the economic and social structure of the world involves more than a slave/master or an employer/employee relationship. To be a Christian is to contribute positively to the world. It is to carry one's own share of the load in the community, in the state, and in the nation. It is to work so that everyone may enjoy safe streets and have reasonable access to the necessities of life. Or to state it negatively, to live as a Christian is no retreat into some safe-haven, isolated from the world. He who looks to Christ as a model for life has no time to revel in the kind of cynical, hopeless outlook that does nothing and sneers at the good efforts undertaken by others. One of the curses of our time is the tendency of many people to stand aloof and pass judgment on every government official and every attempt of good people to make our communities and our nation better places to live. Those who are involved are in the best position to distinguish between the honest and the dishonest politician.

We have extended the principles embraced in Ephesians 6:5-9 in a natural way when we conclude that the believer accepts his share of responsibility for participation in economic and social demands of a society. He serves knowing that the well-being of each one of us is to some degree dependent on all of us contributing our parts. It has been said that the greatest enemy of the good is the ideal good. None of us can do everything that needs to be done. The ideals may never be realized, but we can all do what we can. It is fitting for each believer to do "honest work with his hands, so that he may be able to give to those in need" (Eph. 4:28). He dare not blame his failure to contribute on his lot in life, on his helpless, exploited state. Even if a slave, Paul writes, be obedient "in singleness of heart, as to Christ" (Eph. 6:5).

SERVING WITH HONESTY AND HUMILITY

When Paul wrote that slaves were to be obedient "with fear and trembling," he conjures up a picture of docile servility that does injustice to his instructions. Paul combines "fear and trembling" in other places in contexts which suggest a mild response that the words belie (e.g., 1 Cor. 2:3; 2 Cor. 7:15). Common phrases are sometimes softened through much use. For example, when an English speaker says, "He undertook that job with a vengeance," the word "vengeance" in the phrase has lost its common severity. When Paul urged obedience in "fear and trembling," he apparently meant that the slave was to serve with humility and deference. He was to acknowledge the social system in which he was accounted as a slave and to take his place in it with due courtesy.

Deference, courtesy! Is it my imagination or have these words all but disappeared from our vocabularies? Is there a valid distinction to be made between courtesy and servility? Why would anyone want to act as if an act of courtesy or deference had somehow demeaned him? For an orderly government to function or for a factory to produce goods or for a retail store to make sales, someone must be in charge. Someone must accept responsibility. The person who holds a position of power may be a good person or he may be detestable. Whatever kind of person he or she may be, it is in the best interests of all of us to show respect for the position. We may say "yes sir" to a policeman or to the man who signs our paycheck without having compromised forever our dignity and worth as a human. Why are deference and courtesy so rare in our world? When Paul urges slaves to be obedient to their owners with fear and trembling there is no implication that the owners lived on some superior moral plain, nor that masters were somehow superior human beings when compared to slaves. He only advises them to follow social conventions or courtesy and respect. In another place he urged slaves to "regard their masters as worthy

of all honor, so that the name of God and the teaching may not be defamed" (1 Tim. 6:1)

Slaves invariably had opportunities to steal. I am quite confident that most any slave could have justified stealing from his master. After all, he worked hard. Either he or his parents had been snatched away as a prize of war. No one seemed concerned with the freedom he had lost. Why should he not steal what he could get away with? Paul advises this: Do not let your servitude make you a thief. Be an honest man. Serve with singleness of heart, not in the way of eye service. To Titus, the apostle said that slaves "were not to be refractory, nor to pilfer, but to show entire and true fidelity, so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior" (Tit. 2:9-10). When the apostle had led Onesimus to Christ, he apparently learned that the slave had stolen some money from his master. Thus, when Paul sent him back to his owner, he included these words about Onesimus: "Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful to you and to me." "If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge that to my account" (Philem. 11, 18). Fundamental honesty was a virtue not to be compromised by circumstance.

I know a man (he wears Christ's name too) whose basement is filled with items that he has lifted out of the shop where he works. He can justify taking what he has. The company has no interest in him. He works hard and deserves better pay. Dishonesty can always be justified. Listen again. If Paul urged a slave to be scrupulously honest with his master, how much more would he urge us to be honest with those who employ us? There are those who allow a fifteen cent item to make them a thief. Circumstances control them. Circumstances define the principles that will guide their conduct. Paul says that honesty is the hallmark of the people of God.

At the beginning of his address to slave owners, Paul urged them to "do the same thing." What "same thing" is he referring to?

"The same thing" appears to be a reference to the beginning of verse 7 where he had said that slaves were to render "service with a good will as to the Lord and not to men." That being the case, Paul is drawing attention to the common standing that slaves and masters have in the eyes of the Lord. Not only the slaves but the masters too were to be servants. It is a common theme that runs like an Aridene thread throughout the New Testament. By giving, by serving, by directing energies and concerns toward others, a person will find the blessings of a happy and full life. In Christ, neither master nor slave will be deprived of the joy of giving.

THE IMPARTIALITY OF GOD

To perform one's duties with a cheerful spirit and with reasonable loyalty and good will is its own reward. Even the burdens of slavery are lightened when the slave finds satisfaction in a job well-done, when he refuses to go the route of eye-service chosen by the man-pleaser. In an important sense, slavery is a state of mind. The slave is "a freedman of the Lord," and the master "a slave of Christ" (1 Cor. 7:22). Emotionally and spiritually, it is in the slave's best interest to serve cheerfully. Still the Christian slave has other resources to help him bear up under his servitude. He serves a God who cares not one whit that he had been purchased on a slave block. Before the Lord he stands equal to his master. Impartiality is the subject when Paul assures the slaves among his readers that whatever good a man does, whether slave or free, God will be judge and reward with equity. Then, addressing the slave owners, the apostle reminds them more explicitly that there is no partiality with God.

The number of times that the New Testament refers to the impartiality of God is worth noticing: "Teacher, we know that you are true,...for you do not regard the position of men" (Mt. 22:16); "Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality" (Acts 10:34); "God shows no partiality" (Gal. 2:6); "For God shows no partiality"

(Rom. 2:11); "For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality" (Col. 3:25). Why should there be such an emphasis on God's impartiality? The answer is simple enough: In all the affairs of life, men are inclined to be partial. Some of our partiality is understandable; some of it is reprehensible. It is expected that a father and mother should be partial to their own children. But partiality is not simply a family matter. It is an institutionalized part of society that feeds injustice. It closes doors to those who have worked hard but who lack the right connections. It is cynically expressed in the proverb, "It isn't what you know; it is who you know."

In the world of the first century, partiality was taken for granted. It was even written into law. For a given crime a Roman of the senatorial order may face exile on an island for a few years. He could, of course, go with a retinue of slaves to care for him. For committing the same crime, a Roman of the plebeian order may face death. Great men expected and received partiality in the lawcourts and everywhere else. At a feast, the choice cuts of meat and the best wines were served to them. The lesser folks took what was left. At the theater, blocks of the best seats were set aside. Common folk could not sit there. In matters great and small, partiality was an accepted part of life.

Partiality hardly died with the world of the ancient Romans. In 20th century America, a child born to a prosperous, well-educated family hardly begins on the same playing field with a child born to a single mother in the slums. While all are supposed to be equal before the law, expensive lawyers can make a difference in the "innocence" of a man. Stock options and insider information allow for some to invest money in ways that others cannot. Able, well-trained people sometimes find it galling when doors are closed to them because they do not know the right people. Partiality is not likely to be erased from the earth soon. In the face of it one feels helpless and sometimes humiliated and victimized.

How does the Christian deal with partiality when he is a victim? He deals with it, at least in part, through his realization that in the great order of things, there is no partiality. God is impartial. It is a comfort to the victim and a warning to the victimizer. And it may be that every person will at times find himself or herself in both categories. All Christians, whether slave or free, young or old, male or female, employee or employer, are to evaluate their behavior in light of one all-embracing fact: The Lord will judge all men impartially. The church forever lives in the end times. The Lord will return; he will return soon.

It is sometimes said that the church is an eschatological community. That means that its values and ideals are formed and executed with the certain knowledge that the end of all things is near. It is not merely that the Lord will return. It is more pressing than that. The Lord will return soon. "Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand" (Jas. 5:8); "The end of all things is at hand; therefore keep sane and sober for your prayers" (1 Pet. 4:7). When believers live expecting the Lord to return soon, the injustices and hardships of life take on a different hue. Paul reminds both the slaves and the slave owners that they have a Master in heaven. Whatever good one does, whether he is slave or free, God will repay him accordingly.

CONCLUSION

The New Testament is no theoretical treatise dealing with the human and the divine. Rather, it is a collection of documents comprised of specific responses to concrete occasions. The letters of the New Testament address a world where slavery was a taken-for-granted institution. When Paul or Peter addressed slaves, they offered them the resources to deal with the injustices and hardships slaves had to endure. They needed more attention than the slave owners because their lot was more difficult to bear. Thus, in Ephesians 6:5-9 the slaves get four verses; the masters get one.

While the situation addressed in Ephesians 6:5-9 is specific to the Roman world, the principles set forth are of universal significance. Every person occupies a place in a larger social order. Some have positions of advantage and others of disadvantage. It has always been that way; it is unlikely to change. Paul advises each of us to live and to serve with good grace in whatever station of life we find ourselves. We are not all senators or chairman of the board of large corporations. For some, financial resources are scarce. For some, repetitious and back-breaking work appears to be the only route to rearing a family and surviving. Others are in positions of power. They make laws, control resources, and give orders. Come to think of it, our world is not vastly different from the one Paul addressed. The words of the apostle meet us where we live. His inspired words remind us to live honestly, to show respect to people, to trust and hope in the Lord of life. Whether the world counts us as one of its great people or one of the small ones, God shows no partiality. To wear the name of the Lord requires that we live like him. We too must aim for impartiality. We too will show kindness and respect for others. Whether we sit in the boss's chair or draw our paychecks on Friday night, in Christ we will not be deprived of a giving, generous spirit. And we will anxiously await the return of the Lord.

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NOTES

1. *Met.* 9, 12.

"SPIRITUAL WARFARE"

Ephesians 6:10-18

Dan Williams

I can vividly recall the impact of the movie "The Exorcist" when it first premiered back in 1973. It is a story about a girl possessed by the devil. I remember the movie not because I watched it—I did not. Rather, I saw its power mirrored in the reactions of my two college roommates. They went to see it, and returned to the dorm visibly shaken. In fact, they spent much of the rest of the night praying and reading scriptures! Although they were Christians, up until then they had never really taken the devil seriously. Even though the movie was fiction, a total fantasy, it was the first time they had come to terms with the reality of Satan.

I still have not seen "The Exorcist," but I would imagine it would be fairly tame compared to what we are familiar with nowadays, and I am not thinking about horror movies! I am referring to the real-life horrors of the evening news: stories about three little children in West Memphis being abducted, mutilated, and murdered; about the Long Island man who went through a commuter train with a gun, randomly slaughtering passengers; about the schoolchildren in Dartmouth, Massachusetts who surrounded a classmate and stabbed him to death, then laughed and traded high fives. It is more difficult today to be naive about the existence of evil in a society which has 13-year-old killers, drive-by shootings, and the highest rate of violent crime in the world.

Someone asked me years ago if I believed the Devil exists. At that time I answered facetiously, "I hope so! I would hate to think people could become so mean on their own." Today, when it seems

as though society is descending into a new Dark Ages morally, I would probably give a more sober answer. Truly, as Paul says in Ephesians 5:16, "the days are evil."

In Ephesians Paul acknowledges the existence of evil in the world. He refers to this in 2:1-2 as he reminds his readers of their former life, when "you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient" (cf. 1 Jn. 5:19; 2 Cor. 4:4). Later, in 6:10-20, he returns to the subject as he gives the Ephesians instructions for "Spiritual Warfare." The best commentary on the message of this passage is found in the verses of two well-known hymns, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" by Martin Luther and "Soldiers of Christ Arise" by Charles Wesley.

NAMING THE DARKNESS

"For still our ancient foe/Doth seek to work us woe./His craft and power are great,/And armed with cruel hate,/On earth is not his equal."

In Ephesians 6:10-12 we find three fundamental principles of spiritual warfare. First, when we speak of "spiritual warfare," we are describing more than the psychological struggles which go on within the human heart. Evil exists as an objective reality. Paul says, "Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (verse 12). There is a malignancy in the universe, a hostile power filled with hatred against the right and the righteous, a darkness that seeks to overcome the light. There is a logic to the lunacy of this world: it is a twisted logic, to be sure, but it is purposeful nonetheless. And the Bible gives this evil power a name: Satan. He is not a personification, but a person! We have an ENEMY: to fail to recognize that is to be a fool. We do not want to be naive about

our opposition, and we do not want to let our adversary catch us napping (1 Pet. 5:8-9; 2 Cor. 2:11)!

And his troops are not confined to those who perform weird and mysterious "satanic rituals" in graveyards at midnight. The Prince of Darkness has many agents in this world. For the spiritually discerning it is not difficult to detect the handiwork of Satan in the activities of those adults who sexually abuse innocent children; those television executives who pander to audiences with sex and violence in order to increase their network's ratings, even though they know it is corrupting the morals of a nation; those crooked politicians who betray the public trust in order to feather their own nests; those tobacco and alcohol corporations who target young people and minority communities to increase their company's profits, knowing full well they are addicting the gullible and impoverishing the poor; those self-willed and mean-spirited church members who destroy the peace of God's people and split churches; and those drug dealers who peddle their poison to children. Satan has a profound investment in human misery, and he has many in this world who further his work.

YOU'RE IN THE ARMY NOW

"Soldiers of Christ arise, and put your armor on;/ Strong in the strength which God supplies,/ Through his beloved Son."

The second fundamental principle found in this passage is that Christians are engaged in a SPIRITUAL CONFLICT! Paul tells the Ephesians to "take your stand against the devil's schemes" (verse 11). New Christians are sometimes surprised and shocked after their conversion to discover that in some ways their life may become harder instead of easier! We must be careful not to preach a message that leaves the impression, "Come to Jesus and all your problems will be over." On the contrary, both Jesus and his

apostles often warned that once we take our stand for the Lord, we are in for the fight of our life! Thus Paul admonishes Timothy to "endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 2:4; cf. 1 Tim. 6:12).

When we cast our lot with Jesus, we enlisted in a cosmic conflict between the forces of good and evil. I often remind new converts that it was immediately after his baptism when Jesus was confronted by Satan (Mark 1:12-13). I warn them once they become serious about God, the Devil will become serious about them! Every time an individual obeys the gospel, Satan loses a subject (Col. 1:13-14), and he often seems to redouble his fury against such former captives.

CHARIOTS OF FIRE

The third fundamental principle found in this passage is that the conflict takes place on a SPIRITUAL BATTLEFIELD. Believers in the inspiration of the Bible hold a supernatural view, as opposed to a materialistic philosophy (Acts 23:8). To modern man "supernatural" often carries the sense of "spooky," but here it refers to the fact that there is a reality beyond the natural world. There is more to this life than "this life"! A Christian's spiritual struggles are part of a larger, universal conflict.

Two examples from the Old Testament demonstrate this spiritual dimension. First, in 2 Kings 6 we read that the servant of Elisha awakens one morning to find the house surrounded by Aramean chariots and soldiers. In a panic he rushes to the prophet. Elisha calmly answers, "Don't be afraid. Those who are with us are more than those who are with them." Then he prayed, "O Lord, open his eyes so that he may see," and when God opened the servant's eyes, he saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire around Elisha. The prophet was able to have confidence in the face of opposition because he was aware of this ordinarily unseen world of spiritual reality and the resources available there.

A second example may be found in the book of Job. There are two levels to the story. On an earthly level Job is baffled by the senselessness and severity of his trials. But on a spiritual, supernatural level, the reader gets a "behind the scenes" glimpse into heaven, and learns Job's sufferings are a test of his faith, provoked by a confrontation between the Accuser and God (Job 1:6-12, 2:1-7). Recognizing this level gives us a completely different understanding of Job's problems. Likewise, our own trials may well be a part of the larger struggle being played out on a spiritual level. When confronted with difficulties, we are often discouraged and tempted to blame God, but the answer may be "an enemy did this" (Mt. 13:28). This spiritual dimension is referred to as "the heavenly realms" in 6:12, a phrase that is repeated throughout the book (1:3; 1:19-21; 3:10).

THE DISCIPLE'S MARCHING ORDERS

**"Stand, then, in his great might,/With all his strength
endued,/But take, to arm you for the fight, the panoply
of God"**

What are we to do in the face of such opposition? Paul's instructions may be summarized by three words: PREPARATION, PERSEVERANCE, and POWER.

PREPARATION

**"Leave no unguarded place,/No weakness of the soul;/
Take every virtue, every grace,/And fortify the whole."**

If we are going to resist the devil's schemes, we must prepare by putting on the panoply (i.e., the "full armor") of God (6:11; cf. 2 Cor. 10:3-5). In detailing the *completeness* of our armor, Paul is warning us against carelessness in our discipleship. Anyone who has been a Christian for any length of time has sadly observed that there are casualties in this conflict. Some will deliberately go

"AWOL," and others will be picked off by the enemy when they thoughtlessly wander away from the ranks.

Paul has already warned us in Ephesians 4:26-27 that unrestrained anger will give the devil a "foothold": that is, it will allow him to get his foot inside the door of our lives! We, like any good soldier, do not have the luxury of living an undisciplined life, for we have an adversary who is always ready to pounce on the unwary. The knowledge of this opposition should motivate us to be self-controlled and on our guard (1 Thess. 5:8; Rom. 13:11-12). There is no sense in cooperating in our own destruction!

On the school yard a boy became involved in a scuffle with another student, and during the ensuing fight he bit his opponent on the ear and kicked him in the shins. When the teacher broke up the fight, she admonished the young man, saying, "I can't believe you could be so rough. I think the devil must be putting these notions in your head." The little fellow replied, "Well, maybe biting his ear came from the devil, but kicking him in the shins was my own idea." In like manner, the devil seeks to destroy us, but we should not help him by our own carelessness and prayerlessness.

PERSEVERANCE

**"That having all things done,/And all your conflicts
past,/You may o'ercome thro' Christ alone,/And stand
entire at last."**

The command to "Stand!" falls like hammer blows four times in this passage: "take your stand" (6:11), "stand your ground" (6:13), "after you have done everything, to stand" (6:13), "Stand firm, then" (6:14). There is simply no substitute for perseverance. Satan is persistent, so we must be resistant! "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (Jas. 4:7).

We must teach prospective followers of Jesus that discipleship is a lifelong commitment (Lk. 9:62; Heb. 12:1-3). When Americans were drafted during World War II, our government was uncertain

how long the conflict would last, so the draft notices read "for the duration." In like manner, when we became Christians we signed up "for the duration."

POWER

**"Strong in the Lord of hosts,/And in His mighty pow'r;/
Who in the strength of Jesus trusts,/Is more than con-
queror."**

We are never told to resist the devil on the basis of our own strength and will-power; we are told to "be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power" (6:10). The best way to defeat the devil is to stay close to the Lord (cf. Jas. 4:7-8)! When we wander from our Lord, we are like a pet rabbit that has crawled under the fence thinking it has escaped to freedom, when actually it has only escaped from safety.

**"Did we in our own strength confide,/Our striving
would be losing,/Were not the right man on our side,/
The man of God's own choosing,/Dost ask who that may
be?/Christ Jesus, it is He!/Lord Sabaoth His name, From
age to age the same, /And He must win the battle."**

GIVING THE DEVIL HIS DUE (BUT NO MORE THAN HE'S DUE)

Last June we observed the 50th anniversary of D-Day, when the Allied forces landed on the beaches of Normandy, and General Dwight D. Eisenhower began his drive to Berlin. That was only the beginning of the counterattack. There were many hard battles still to be fought. But from a military standpoint the final defeat of Hitler was sealed the moment the troops stepped on shore. Once the might of the American army was committed to the conflict, the balance of power was tilted and ultimate victory assured.

In much the same way, we already know the outcome of spiritual warfare. Revelation 20 tells us Satan will eventually be

cast into the lake of fire, there to suffer for all eternity. For this reason we want to give the Devil his due, but we do not want to give him more respect than he is due! It is true Satan is strong and therefore dangerous; but it is also true God is far stronger, and his side will prevail. Satan's power is the power of the spoiler, not the victor. He seeks to destroy individual soldiers whenever he can, but he cannot win the ultimate victory, for his defeat began in earnest with the resurrection of Jesus (Jn. 12:31; 16:11; Heb. 2:14-15; 1 Jn. 3:8; et al).

I am concerned about the effects of the so-called "spiritual warfare" movement in the religious world today. In recent years there has been an explosion of curiosity about both angels and demons, fueled in part by the phenomenal popularity of books such as *Piercing the Darkness* by Frank Peretti, a gripping novel which describes spiritual conflict between angels and demons as they battle over the control of a small town. Another surprise bestseller is *People of the Lie* by M. Scott Peck in which a psychiatrist uncharacteristically takes seriously the existence of evil. This renewed interest in spiritual beings has led some religious teachers to advocate "spiritual boot camps," where believers are instructed in techniques and formulas to be used to "bind the spirits" and initiate "power encounters" with demonic forces, in some cases confronting specific demons by name. (For a critique of this movement, see *How To Meet The Enemy* by John MacArthur, Jr.)

I find such a pugnacious approach incredibly naive. We are never told in the scriptures to be spoiling for a fight. Rather, Jesus taught us to pray, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one" (Matt. 6:13). We do not have to go searching for Satan: he will come looking for us (1 Pet. 5:8)! And nowhere in the Bible are we told to address the demons by name (see Jude 8-9); rather, we are told to address God! But the most dangerous consequence of this movement is the message it conveys regarding the potential power of Satan over believers.

When we over-emphasize the power of Satan, we run two risks. First, we may needlessly frighten sincere believers. Several years ago I called upon a sweet older lady who had visited our congregation. When I spoke with her, I quickly discovered that although she had a deep faith and a good knowledge of the Scriptures, she had become terrified of demonic forces as a result of the teachings of several television preachers. I reassured her that "greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world" (1 Jn. 4:4). A Christian has access to power far greater than that of the Devil! In fact, "power" is one of the themes of the book of Ephesians (see 1:19; 3:7; 3:16; 3:18; 3:20; 6:10).

The second risk of over-stating the strength of Satan is that an unbalanced message can backfire with certain unbalanced people who are perversely attracted to such "power." Like Adam and Eve gazing upon the forbidden fruit, these people are only enticed by lurid descriptions of the devil's might. There is a great deal of debate as to how many individuals are actually engaged in Satanic rituals and cultic devil worship.¹ The level of such activity in the United States is probably less than imagined, but it seems certain at least some individuals have an unhealthy interest in the powers of darkness. These individuals are typically on the fringe of society--the losers and the left out, isolated individuals who feel inadequate by the normal standards of life. They therefore seek to be "somebody" by trying to tap into what they perceive to be a greater power, even if it is an unholy one.

Therefore, when discussing the devil, we need to beware lest we exaggerate his power. In Ephesians Paul does say our struggle is against "the rulers...authorities...the powers of this dark world and...the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (6:12). But he also speaks of God's "incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion" (1:19-21), and by his

grace "God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms with Christ" (2:6). We should be careful to emphasize that "we are more than conquerors through him who loved us" and in Christ our victory is complete, even over "angels, demons, and powers" (Rom. 8:37-39). Many years ago C.S. Lewis wisely observed,

There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors, and hail a materialist or magician with the same delight.²

In summary, we should give the devil his due, but we should not give him more respect than he is due! Paul has given us our marching orders: as soldiers of Christ we should put on the full armor of God and take our stand beside our Commander. We should take seriously the opposition we will face, but remember that if we stay close to God, we are promised our side will be ultimately victorious!

"And tho' this world, with demons filled,/Should threaten to undo us,/We will not fear, for God hath willed,/His truth to triumph through us."

The prince of darkness grim/We tremble not for him;/His rage we can endure,/For lo, his doom is sure:/One little word shall fell him!"

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NOTES

1. See, for example, *Christianity Today*, June 21, 1993, "Memories of Satanic Abuse," Robin Perrin and Les Parrott, 18-23.
2. *The Screwtape Letters*, 3.

1. The first of the three is the "Meditation" section.

2. The second is the "Prayer" section.

3. The third is the "Devotional" section.

4. The fourth is the "Reflection" section.

5. The fifth is the "Conclusion" section.

6. The sixth is the "Bibliography" section.

7. The seventh is the "Index" section.

8. The eighth is the "Appendix" section.

9. The ninth is the "Notes" section.

10. The tenth is the "References" section.

11. The eleventh is the "Footnotes" section.

12. The twelfth is the "Bibliography" section.

13. The thirteenth is the "Index" section.

14. The fourteenth is the "Appendix" section.

15. The fifteenth is the "Notes" section.

16. The sixteenth is the "References" section.

17. The seventeenth is the "Footnotes" section.

18. The eighteenth is the "Bibliography" section.

19. The nineteenth is the "Index" section.

20. The twentieth is the "Appendix" section.

21. The twenty-first is the "Notes" section.

22. The twenty-second is the "References" section.

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27. The twenty-seventh is the "Notes" section.

28. The twenty-eighth is the "References" section.

29. The twenty-ninth is the "Footnotes" section.

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31. The thirty-first is the "Index" section.

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35. The thirty-fifth is the "Footnotes" section.

36. The thirty-sixth is the "Bibliography" section.

37. The thirty-seventh is the "Index" section.

38. The thirty-eighth is the "Appendix" section.

Ralph Gregg

MORNING DEVOTIONALS

GOD'S VISION

God has an eternal, preplanned purpose for the world. He is creating a new community of people, a new body, the church (Eph. 1:3-10, 22-23). This new body is made up of Gentiles, who were once "far off" (Eph. 1:10). Christ has called these Gentiles, who were once "far off," to live holy and to praise God. God did all this for us, his chosen people, which results in praise to him (Eph. 1:11-13, 1:10). The purpose of the Christians is that they might see God's glory and all his goodness (Eph. 1:15-21).

ONE IN HIM
Ephesians 4:4-6

Ralph Griggs

Arrogance. Selfishness. Greed. A win-lose mentality. Manipulation. Hostility. Alienation. Anger. Grudges, leading to revenge. Sexual obsession, drunkenness, and all sorts of addictive behaviors. Stealing, lying, and gossip. Employer/worker distrust and tension. Families hurting each other, falling apart.

Sound familiar, do they not? The apostle Paul would think so too. He knew some Gentiles who practiced such evil behavior in their relationships. But then they came to know Christ, and that meant their lives had to change. Paul writes Ephesians to remind these Christians that their old ways of living and relating to each other were over (Eph. 2:1-5,11; 3:1; 4:17f).

GOD'S VISION

Why? Because God has an eternal, preplanned purpose for them. His purpose is to create of them a new community of people in Jesus Christ--Jesus' body, the church (Eph. 1:3-10, 22-23).

Everyone is included. Even these Gentiles, who were once "far away," are brought under the one head, Christ. These Gentiles, who were mired in a life of sin, God has forgiven and calls to live holy and blameless lives, as fellow-citizens in God's house. God did all this by his grace to demonstrate his wisdom, which results in praise to God (Eph. 1:4, 7, 11-14; 2:1-7, 11-13; 3:10).

Paul's prayer for these Gentile Christians is that they might see what God wants to do with them and all humanity (Eph. 1:18-21; 3:14-19).

God wants to bring an alienated and fractured humanity together in Christ, to be united in him (Eph. 2:14-22) to create a new community, where people do not hurt each other and demand their rights, but as one body to serve one another with the love of Christ.¹

This is God's vision for the world. He calls these Gentiles to that same hope. God wants them to live in a way that will sustain the unity he has created, to live in a way that is consistent with the hope of his vision.

How? By "keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." This unity is an accomplished fact, the result of what God did in Christ. His people are called to embrace this unity and live it out in the way they relate to one another (Eph. 4:1f).²

THE SEVEN ONES

This unity of the Spirit is based in seven interdependent realities or seven "ones": one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father (Eph. 4:3-6).³

One Spirit. The Spirit of God makes all (Jew and Gentile) part of one body (Eph. 2:14-18; 1 Cor. 12:13). One body is Christ's body, the church (Eph. 1:22-23). His people are one body by virtue of sharing in the one Spirit (cf. 1 Cor. 12:13; 2 Cor. 13:14).

Similarly, there is a calling to one hope (cf. Eph. 4:1). This hope relates to God's eternal purpose to bring together an alienated humanity under the one head of Christ (Eph. 1:9-12, 18). The church (the one body) is the arena where the hope of God for a united humanity is realized (Eph. 3:6, 10-11).

This one hope gives the called a shared expectancy and a common vision of what God is trying to do.

One Lord. Jesus Christ is the one Lord who is head of the one body and who is present in his people (Eph. 1:2, 22-23). There is one faith, a faith in Jesus (Eph. 1:15), that gives everyone the freedom to approach God (Eph. 3:12). There is one baptism because all people (Jew and Gentile) become one in Christ through the waters of baptism (Gal. 3:26-28; 1 Cor. 12:13).

One God and Father. He is sovereign over all, works through all, and lives in all. He is one God because he is "the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and earth derives its name" (Eph. 3:14-15; cf. Rom. 3:29-30).

THE FUNCTION OF EPHESIANS 4:4-6

God's aim is to reconcile an alienated humanity into one new community in Christ. Paul details these intentions in the first three chapters of Ephesians and then reminds his readers that they are called to the fulfillment of that purpose. So, Paul exhorts his readers to live together in a way that matches their calling--a way that will maintain the unity of the Spirit (Eph. 4:1-3).

The seven "ones" are a summation of the unity the Spirit gives, dropping back to themes introduced in the first three chapters (i.e., God's vision for a united humanity and what he did in Christ to make it happen).

If those God has called do not practice "oneness" in the way they relate to each other (the content of chapters 4--6), then they contradict and destroy the reality of these seven "ones." Failure to maintain the one body fragments the Spirit and defeats the hope of God. Failure to exhibit the oneness of God in relationships among Christians undermines belief in one God and his vision for humanity.

To live consistent with these seven "ones," then, is to "keep the unity of the spirit."

Even the diverse gifts Christians have bring the body along to the goal of unity and stability in the faith (4:7-16).⁴ Old, selfish ways of relating to people are gone, and as one body, Christians live together in love, submitting to one another in reverence for Christ (4:17-5:21). In Christ, everyone discovers better ways of living together--husbands and wives, children and parents, masters and slaves (5:22-6:9).

In every dimension of life--morality, family, and work--Christians prove that they have the unity of the Spirit: one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father.

BECOMING "ONE IN HIM"

If we today are to be "one in him," God's purposes must be our purposes. Too often peripheral concerns, personal agendas, or petty issues side-track us, and we fail to reach the destination God intends for us. May God give us the wisdom to know his will (cf. Ps. 133:1; Jn. 17:20-23; 1 Cor. 12:4f).

It is essential to have a theological foundation for our oneness.⁵ The seven "ones" suggest that basis. They do not provide the specifics of all that Christians believe and practice. It was not Paul's intention to give such an exhaustive list. (This may explain, along with stylistic reasons, why the Lord's Supper is not mentioned, though Paul sees an important relationship between communion and unity in 1 Corinthians 10:14-17; 11:17-34.) The "ones" do, however, suggest the basic oneness we have in God, with a common faith and hope. This oneness is God's work, and we are not to spoil it through selfish and divisive behavior.

Christians do disagree in matters of opinion. But if we begin by recalling our "ones" (what we have common), we are more likely to discuss differences rather than divide over them; compromise rather than clash; and submit to each other rather than squabble.

The result? The work of the kingdom can continue and prosper for the glory of God.

Siblings have disagreements, but they stick by each other because they are family, sharing the same DNA code. With the same Father, Christians have a common "DNA code." This gives us incentive to accept or resolve our differences.

Since oneness is a work of God and a present reality, Christians are responsible for learning how to live and act in the oneness of God.

Living in an age of "radical individualism" makes this difficult. Today, "freedom" means maximizing one's self-interests. Self-fulfillment in one's private life outweighs concern for the common good.⁶ In the "cocooning effect," people retreat from community altogether to the safety of their own homes (cocoons).⁷ When such societal viruses infect the church, the oneness of Christ's body is weakened.

What Can We Do? What can our congregations do to resist the viruses of individualism and be one healthy body?

An expository study of Ephesians is a good start. Let the church see and understand the big picture--that God's grand vision is to bring all people together into one body, one body of people who love and serve each another.⁸

Then, we can emphasize the importance of oneness (with its implications for Christian relationships) in formulating our identity. Some congregations develop a yearly focus, such as prayer or Bible reading. If your congregation does this, include an emphasis on oneness. Display the "seven ones" in church bulletins, on bulletin boards, or church signs. Lead the congregation in reciting the seven "ones" in the worship services.

If we say, "This is who we are, one body, with one Lord," it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Behavior follows belief.

Finally, let us always be hopeful and pray. Sometimes it seems that oneness is a pipedream. Paul, however, was hopeful and

Ephesians, we would include in the center also the end result of praising God. For more on this model see Jack O. Balswick and Judith K. Balswick, *The Family: A Christian Perspective on the Home*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991, 21f. For some ideas on promoting oneness through the church's educational procedures, see H. Edward Everding, Clarence H. Snelling, Jr., and Mary M. Wilcox, "A Shaping Vision of Community for Teaching in an Individualistic World: Ephesians 4:1-16 and Developmental Interpretation," *Religious Education* 83, No. 1, (Winter 1988): 423-37.

PAUL'S PRAYER FOR THE EPHESIANS

Willie J. Nettle

INTRODUCTION

God, the Father, has a great ability to figure out the prayers of his children. Such is true even when the petitions are coming forth from the lips of a well-educated apostle (Rom. 8:26,27).¹ Many of Paul's prayers have been recorded in Scripture.² Surely, God knew this great missionary's heart when he first mouthed these intercessions. When Bible students read them today, however, it may take them a little work to figure out what each prayer is truly about.

This paper will carefully examine Paul's prayer for the saints at Ephesus, as recorded in Ephesians 1:15-23. First of all, it will point out the basic message and purpose of Paul's epistle to the Ephesians. Secondly, it will zoom in on chapter one and show how this chapter, and in particular this prayer, functions in the overall letter. Finally, it will dissect verses 15-23 of chapter one, pointing out why Paul addresses God the way he does, the substance of his intercession, and the leading concern of his heart as he prays without ceasing for the saints at Ephesus.

BASIC MESSAGE AND PURPOSE OF EPHESIANS

A casual reading of Ephesians reveals that Paul's audience is primarily pagan in background (1:13; 2:1,2, 11-14, 17, 19; 3:1; 4:17ff). In times past they were Gentiles in the flesh, and the very fact that the Jews called them the "uncircumcision" (2:11) showed the separation between the two races of people. Physically, they lacked the ancient sign of the covenant. Also, they had no part in

Israel's national or religious life. When it came to knowing and believing in the true and living God, they were atheists (2:12).

But now in Christ Jesus they have been adopted as God's children and have come to share in the calling and inheritance of Israel (2:13ff). They have come into the one church along with their Jewish counterparts. But unlike those "who first hoped in Christ" (1:12), they have come in from a pagan past, void of a good concept of the one true God. They have grown up "in homes where the great themes that once thundered on Sinai were not held in great esteem."³ They do not have a good understanding of the calling ethic. Hence, over and over again in the practical section of the letter, Paul tells them to quit certain practices that are unworthy of their new calling.⁴

In the first three chapters of Ephesians, Paul places particular emphasis upon what God has done for his Gentile readers in calling them to be holy and blameless children in Christ. Then, in the last three, he says in effect, "Here's the difference all of this should make in your daily life." He writes this letter with at least three purposes in mind: (1) To cause the Ephesians to appreciate God's scheme of redemption and the blessedness of their calling as sons and heirs (1:3-14); (2) to instruct them on the nature of Christ's church, with particular emphasis upon the reconciliation of both Jew and Gentile unto God in one body (1:3--4:16; 5:22-33); and (3) to exhort them to live a life worthy of their Christian calling (4:1--6:20).

CHAPTER ONE AND PAUL'S PRAYERS

After Paul's usual greeting (1:1.2), he confronts his Gentile readers with a rather unusual series of three different kinds of prayers. All of these prayers occur in chapter one. The first is called a *berakah* or eulogy (cf. the Greek word *eulogetos* in 1:3). By means of exalted, liturgical language, Paul praises God for his glorious plan of salvation, a plan that blesses both Jew and Gentiles

alike.⁵ He mentions such lofty ideas as election (1:5), his grace (1:6), redemption (1:7), forgiveness (1:7), wisdom (1:9), the mystery (1:9), and the consummation of all things (1:10). It is fair to admit that the *berakah* introduces and prefigures many of the main themes of the letter.⁶ In the words of Jerry Jones, it develops "the theme of who we are or what our calling is."⁷

Paul's second prayer is a brief thanksgiving report (1:15f). It follows hard upon the *berakah* and its application to the recipients (1:13f), and probably points back to the whole paragraph (1:3-14). It does not introduce any new themes. It makes a general reference to the addressees, stating the grounds for Paul's thanksgiving to God. Peter T. O'Brien correctly observes that Paul's introductions consistently employ

*Eucharisteu...*for God's work in the lives of the addressees and *eulogetos* for blessings in which he himself participated. This distinction is preserved in Ephesians 1: the introductory *berakah* includes the writer within the sphere of blessing (*ho eulogesas hemas*, v. 3), while the thanksgiving report has reference to the recipients (*akousas ten kath' humas pistin...ou pauomai euchariston huper humon*).⁸

The third and final prayer in chapter one is an intercessory prayer report (1:17-23). This long prayer is grammatically conjoined with the thanksgiving report (1:15f). Together they form one long Greek sentence, with a minor break at the end of verse 21.⁹ O'Brien contends that the intercession looks back to some of the motifs in the eulogy.

For example, the address *ho theos tou kuriou hemon Iesou Christou ho pater tes dochses* (v. 17) is not unlike the words of v. 3, while *dochses* is found in the request of v. 18; "a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him" (v. 17) is an echo of "he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will" (v. 9); and the terms *ploutos*, *sophia*, *kleronomia*, *elpis* or their synonyms also reappear. Note too the repeated themes of faith and

God's power.¹⁰

Therefore, he concludes that Paul's "intercession is a prayer that the ideal of v. 3ff may be realized in the recipients."¹¹ John R.W. Stott concurs by dividing the first chapter of Ephesians into two neat sections: A great benediction (1:3-14) and a great intercession (1:15-23). "First he blesses God for having blessed us in Christ; then he prays that God will open our eyes to grasp the fullness of this blessing."¹²

In chapter three of Ephesians Paul records another prayer (3:1, 14-19). Some scholars contend that the petition of this chapter is a completion of the intercession in chapter one. Carroll Osburn, for example, argues that Paul interrupts his prayer with background material recorded in chapter two. Then in chapter three, he takes up and expands the prayer and then concludes the first half of his letter with a doxology (3:20f).¹³

PAUL'S INTERCESSION AND THE OVERALL LETTER

If the above is correct, then Paul's intercessory prayer recorded in chapter one not only looks backward to some of the motifs in the eulogy, but also looks forward to the new prayer of chapter three. The apostle is praying that the blessings described in the introductory eulogy may be increasingly realized in the experience of his Gentile readers. He is very concerned "that those who have been so richly blessed may learn about hope, glory, and power,"¹⁴ and thereby live holy and blameless lives (1:4) on the streets of Ephesus. "He wants them to get the big picture and open their hearts to all God is trying to do with them."¹⁵

THE OCCASION OF PAUL'S INTERCESSION (1:15-16)

As previously stated, Paul's intercessory prayer is conjoined with his thanksgiving report and looks backward to the introductory eulogy. Because of all that God has done for his readers through

Christ, Paul finds himself always giving thanks for them (1:16). The particular occasion that prompted his thanksgiving is mentioned in verse 15: "Because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints." Paul's Gentile readers have heard the glorious message of salvation, a message of planning, sovereign action, and love. By their own free choice, they have believed in Christ, just like Paul and other Jewish Christians (1:12-13). They have been adopted as children by the Father (1:5), redeemed by the blood of Christ (1:7), and sealed with the promised Holy Spirit (1:13, 14). Paul has great cause for thanksgiving when he hears about their faith response toward the Lord Jesus.

He also thanks God because of their love, which is directed not simply to other Gentiles, but "towards all the saints" (v. 15). The word for "love" is not found in some important ancient Greek manuscripts. The omission "appears to be the result of an accident in transcription."¹⁶ Basing his argument upon Paul's intention, G.B. Caird believes that the word dropped out accidentally due to haplography. The readers' non-discriminatory love

is proof of the breaking down of ancestral barriers between Gentile and Jew [and] is central to the argument of the letter (cp. 2:11-12). It is the immediate cause of Paul's thanksgiving, because it is the sign that the divine purpose he has just described is now taking effect.¹⁷

God's eternal scheme to gather into one the whole created universe and to restore harmony among his creatures and between them and himself is finding fulfillment among the saints at Ephesus.

THE GOD OF PAUL'S INTERCESSION (1:17)

With thanksgiving in his heart over the faith and love of his readers, Paul intercedes to "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1:17) on their behalf. It is no accident that the apostle speaks of the God of Jesus Christ (cf. 1:3). There is no recognition here of

the pre-existence and divinity of Christ,¹⁸ but a conscious emphasis upon his humanity. In Paul's view, "God's relation to the human Jesus, as his God and Father, forms the pattern for his relationship with other men."¹⁹ The earthly Jesus demonstrated so well what it means for a man to have God as Father. By his dependence on God, faith in him, and obedience to him, he teaches all of God's children how to live holy and blameless lives (1:4) before their Father. Indeed, "Christ's knowledge of God and his human, filial relationship with God are the chief of the spiritual blessings [1:3] which he is able to share with his followers."²⁰ His experience is to become that of his disciples.

Paul also refers to God as the "Father of glory" (1:17). The phrase is a Hebraism,²¹ and "means that God the Father is not only glorious, and the source of all glory, and the summation of all glory in Himself, He is also prepared to manifest and to impart that glory."²²

He has already conferred it on Jesus²³ and is ready to give it to anyone entitled to be called his heir.²⁴ As Paul will indicate in his intercession, the same power that raised and exalted Christ to glory is now available to the saints at Ephesus (1:19-23) to move them forward in the present process of being glorified (2 Cor. 3:18).

THE SUBSTANCE OF PAUL'S INTERCESSION (1:17-19)

After purposely addressing God the way that he does, Paul gets into the substance of his intercession. First of all, in verse 17 he prays that God would give them "a spirit of wisdom and revelation" so that they might know him better. Then, in verses 18 and 19, he describes what that means. He wants the eyes of their hearts to be enlightened to the point that they will know three specific things: (1) "The hope to which he has called you;" (2) "the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints;" and (3) "the immeasurable greatness of his power in us who believe." He is simply praying that his Gentile readers will better grasp who God

is, what God is all about, and what God has done and made available for them. His prayer will form the foundation for the admonitions to holy living found in the second part of the letter (chapters 4--6).²⁵

Paul is not praying that they will receive the Holy Spirit. They have already been "sealed with the promised Holy Spirit" (1:13) and indwelt by him.²⁶ Nor is he praying for greater knowledge of facts about God. He is praying for the activity of the Spirit in illuminating and enlightening their hearts that they might attain to a maturer knowledge of God.²⁷ The chief idea is that they might know God, not only in mind, but also in experience.

As stated earlier, Paul has a three-fold goal for this illumination. The first is a better understanding of the hope to which God has called them to be "holy and blameless before him" (1:4), "to be his sons through Jesus Christ" (1:5), and "to live for the praise of his glory" (1:12). As Caird observes, "hope" here "does not refer to life after death...but to all the possibilities of spiritual growth that have opened up for those whom God has called."²⁸

The second goal of this illumination is that Gentile Christians might better appreciate the riches of the inheritance which they now share with Jewish believers.²⁹ They have come into their Christian commitment from a pagan background. Paul will expand this idea in the next two chapters, seeking to create awe in his Gentile audience over all that God has done for them.³⁰ They have only just begun to realize the scope of the blessings that God has for them.

THE LEADING CONCERN OF PAUL'S HEART (1:19-23)

Finally, Paul wants his readers to be enlightened so that they might experience the tremendous power of God at work in their lives. This last goal appears to be the leading idea gripping the apostle's heart as he writes.³¹ He wants his formerly-pagan readers to realize that they can find escape from the control of fate and

destiny, have freedom from the grip of evil gods, and receive deliverance from the vast powers of darkness. All of this can be achieved without resorting to demonology, astrology, magic, mystery religions or any other futile, first-century, paganistic solutions.³²

Deliverance is theirs through the incomparably great power of God, the same power that was unleashed in the resurrection, ascension, and exaltation of Christ (1:19-23). Like Christ, they too have been raised from the dead and made to sit in "the heavenly places" (2:1-6)³³ "far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come" (1:21). They have been delivered from "the prince of the power of the air" (2:2) by the "Savior" and "head of the church" (5:23), who is also the "Master" (6:5-9) of their lives. Now it is up to them to unleash by faith the immense power of God into their daily lives (1:19) and thereby start living like who they are. This is Paul's gripping concern as he petitions the Father on their behalf.

NOTES

1. All English Scripture references are from the RSV.
2. See Rom. 1:8ff.; 1 Cor. 1:4ff.; Eph. 1:15ff.; 3:14ff.; Phil. 1:3ff.; Col. 1:3ff.; 1 Thess. 1:2ff.; 2:23, 3:9ff.; 2 Thess. 1:3ff., 2:13f.; Philem. 4ff.; 1 Tim. 1:12 ff.; 2 Tim. 1:3ff.
3. Carroll Osburn, "Expository Preaching From Ephesians," Pepperdine University Bible Lectureship, 1984. (Cassette)
4. Richard Oster, Class Lecture Notes, Paul's Prison Epistles, Harding University Graduate School of Religion, Fall, 1984.
5. Peter T. O'Brien, "Ephesians I: An Unusual Introduction to a New Testament Letter," *New Testament Studies* 25 (July 1979): 509.
6. Ibid., 510-12.

7. Jerry Jones and David Bearden, *Living The Worthy Life*, Bridgeton, MO: Mid-America Book and Tape Sales, n.d., 10.
8. O'Brien, "Ephesians," 513.
9. *The Greek New Testament*, 3rd. ed., Edited by Kurt Aland, Matthew Black, Carlo Martini, Bruce M. Metzger, & Allen Wikgren. London, England: United Bible Societies, 1975.
10. O'Brien, "Ephesians," 514.
11. Ibid.
12. John R.W. Stott, *God's New Society*. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1980, 51-52.
13. Osburn, (Cassette).
14. O'Brien, "Ephesians," 516.
15. Bob Hendren, *Chosen for Riches*, Austin, TX: Sweet Publishing Co., 1978, 19.
16. Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, United Bible Societies, 1971, 602. Contrary to Metzger, some argue for the shorter reading because it is "harder...and therefore more likely to be the correct one." See Robert G. Bratcher and Eugene A. Nida, *A Translator's Handbook on Paul's Letter To The Ephesians*, United Bible Societies, 1982, 29.
17. G.B. Caird, *Paul's Letters From Prison*, Oxford University Press, 1976, 43-44.
18. Paul clearly believes in these concepts. See 2 Cor. 8:9; Phil. 2:6; Col. 2:9. Such teaching, however, is irrelevant to his point in Ephesians.
19. Caird, *Paul's Letters*, 33.
20. Ibid.
21. This is a form of expression frequently found in the Hebrew language and is used many times in Scripture. See 2 Cor. 1:3; Heb. 12:9; Jas. 1:17.
22. David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *God's Ultimate Purpose: An Exposition of Ephesians 1:1 to 23*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1978, 335.
23. See Jn. 17:5; 1 Cor. 2:8; 2 Cor. 3:18, 4:4-6.
24. See Rom. 5:2, 8:21; 1 Cor. 2:7; Phil. 3:21; Col. 1:27, 3:4.
25. Biblical scholars have known for some time that Paul's opening prayers are related in some way to the main theme(s) of his letters. See Paul Schubert, *Form and Function of the Pauline Thanksgivings*, Berlin, Germany: Verlag Von Alfred Topelmann, 1939, 180-85, and Peter T. O'Brien, *Introductory Thanksgivings in the Letters of Paul*, Leiden, Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1977, 13-15.
26. See Acts 2:38.

27. Is. 11:2 mentions this activity of the Spirit. Also see Phil. 3:15 and Ps. 119:18.
28. Caird, *Paul's Letters*, 45.
29. Ibid. "Saints" in verse 18 refers to Jewish Christians, just as it does in 2:9, where Paul elaborates on the blessings that his Gentile readers now enjoy.
30. Oster, Class Lectures Notes.
31. See Eph. 3:7, 16, 20.
32. Don Jackson, Class Lectures Notes, Seminar on Paul and His Teachings, Magnolia Bible College, Fall, 1982.
33. Also see 1:3, 20: 3:10. This phrase refers to the realm of God's presence.

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