

NOTES ON THE EPISTLE TO THE EPHESIANS

* * * **THE REVELATION OF THE MYSTERY TO PAUL** * * *

S.L.H.
Soli Deo Gloria!

"If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery..." **Ephesians 3:2-3a**

AUTHOR: Apostle Paul (c. 60 AD)

AUTHORSHIP AND DATE. Ephesians is one of Paul's four prison epistles¹ (cf. Eph3:1; 6:20), written from Rome about 60 AD. It was carried from Rome to Ephesus by Tychicus (Eph6:21).

HISTORICAL CONTEXT. The Bible gives more information concerning the church at Ephesus than any other local church: 1) Paul's multiple visits to Ephesus, or with the Ephesian elders, are documented in Acts (Act18:18-19:41; 20:17-38), 2) Paul wrote the Epistle to the Ephesians (Eph1:1), 3) Paul wrote his two epistles to Timothy while he was ministering in the church at Ephesus (1Tim1:3), and 4) the Lord Jesus Christ dictated a letter to the church of Ephesus in the Book of Revelation (Rev2:1-7). The church at Ephesus was founded as a result of the preaching of Paul and Apollos in the synagogue of that city (cf. Act18:19-20,24-26; 19:8-10,17). Consequently, the church at Ephesus had a large number of **believing Jews** in its membership.

In its foundation and early years, the church at Ephesus was blessed with notable leadership: 1) the Apostle Paul (Act20:31), 2) Aquila and Priscilla (Act18:18-19), 3) Apollos (Act18:24), 4) Timothy (1Tim1:3), and 5) the tradition of the early Church asserts that the Apostle John lived in Ephesus after his release from Patmos.

With the possible exception of Athens, no city of the first century was more wholly given over to paganism than Ephesus. The majority of the citizenry of Ephesus, not to mention the very economy of the city, were devoted to the worship of the moon goddess Diana/Artemis (cf. Act19:23-35). The Temple of Diana (Artemis) in Ephesus operated for more than a thousand years, being finally destroyed c. 401 AD, and was known as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Because of its cultural and historical setting, the church at Ephesus was under constant assault by false teachers and false doctrines (cf. Act20:29-30; 1Tim1:3-11; 4:1-6; 2Tim3:1-13; 4:1-4; Rev2:2).

THEME OF EPHESIANS. The overarching theme of the Epistle to the Ephesians is the revelation of the mystery doctrines concerning the Church as the Body of Christ (Eph1:22-23) and the present Dispensation of Grace (Eph3:2-3), which Paul asserts were disclosed exclusively to him by the risen and glorified Lord Jesus Christ (Gall1:11-12; Cp., 2Pet3:15-16). Whereas most of Paul's epistles deal with issues/order in local churches, his epistles

¹ Paul's so-called prison epistles (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon) were written during his first imprisonment in Rome (cf. Act28:16-31).

to the Ephesians and the Colossians deal with truths concerning the nature and position of the **universal Church** (i.e., the mystical Body of Christ comprised of all believers between Pentecost and the Rapture); both include revelation concerning the relationship between Christ (as Head) and the Church (as His Body), with Colossians focusing on the Head and Ephesians focusing on the Body. The concept of **positional truth** is emphasized in Ephesians; since the Church as the Body of Christ is in a mystical union with the risen, glorified, and ascended Lord Jesus Christ as Head of the Church, what is true of Him is also true of the Church (Eph2:5-6; 5:32), and the believer is exhorted to walk worthy of his exalted position in Christ (Eph4:1).

KEY TO PROPERLY UNDERSTANDING EPHESIANS. Rigorous attention to grammar in interpreting Scripture is the hallmark of Dispensationalism, and this proves to be critical in the proper understanding of Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians. Care must be taken to distinguish between two different groups addressed in Chapters 1-3, noted by the use to two sets of pronouns: "we" and "us" vs. "ye" and "you". The Apostle Paul is the author of the epistle (Eph1:1), and since he does not list any coauthors (as he sometimes does in other letters; Cp., 2Cor1:1; Philip1:1; Coll1:1; 1Thess1:1; 2Thess1:1; Philem1:1), his use of "we" cannot be explained as a reference to the author(s) of the epistle.

The "we" is a group that includes Paul and a subset of the recipients of the epistle. Since it is clear from Ephesians 2:11-13 that "ye" is a reference to believing Gentiles in the church at Ephesus, the "we" must be a reference to believing Jews (including Paul himself and those that are at Ephesus). A failure to recognize and honor this distinction within the Ephesian audience to whom Paul wrote has resulted in considerable misunderstanding by Christians.

KEY WORDS: Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians includes a number of key words that must be understood in their biblical context and usage in order to properly interpret the message of the book, namely: elect/"chosen", "predestinate", "adoption", "redemption", "mystery", and "dispensation"².

NOTE ON CALVINISM AND EPHESIANS. The book of Ephesians figures prominently in Calvinism's defense of its doctrines of total depravity, unconditional election/predestination, and the necessity of regeneration prior to faith (e.g., Eph1:3-6; 2:1-10). However, the traditional Calvinistic interpretation of these passages is a classic exercise in eisegesis (i.e., the importing of presuppositions into a text that are not taught by the text, or even the Bible), whereas the proper exegesis of these texts results in a very different understanding.

OUTLINE OF EPHESIANS.

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| I. DOCTRINE: Our Present Position (in Christ) | Ephesians 1-3 |
| II. DUTY: Our Responsibilities (in Christ) | Ephesians 4-6 |

² The KJV and NKJV translate the Greek word **οἰκονομία** as "dispensation". Sadly, modern English translations of the Bible have forsaken the use of this term, preferring to translate this Greek word as "stewardship" or "administration", thus removing from contemporary biblical vocabulary a term of vital theological import.

CHAPTER 1

SALUTATION

- [1] The epistle was written by "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ". Paul did not assume this office by his own desire or ambition, but "by the will of God" (Cp., Act9:15). Paul's apostleship was directed toward the Gentiles (Rom11:13; Eph3:1; 1Tim2:7; 2Tim1:11; 4:17), in contrast to Peter and the other apostles who were directed to the Jews (Gal2:7-9). The name "Paul" means *small* or *little*.

The epistle is addressed to the "saints" at Ephesus, which is a generic term used in the Bible for genuine believers. They are called "saints" because they are sanctified "in Christ Jesus". This is **positional** sanctification that has nothing to do with personal, practical holiness. God views the Christian in union with Christ exactly as He views Christ, with no basis for condemnation (Rom8:1) and made perfectly "accepted in the Beloved" (Eph1:6).

- [2] Paul's benediction to the churches to which he writes is always "grace", then "peace"³. Peace only comes after we are justified before God (Rom5:1), and the message of Ephesians is that justification is by grace (Eph2:8). Thus, the order is significant; if there were no grace from God, there could be no peace with God.

GOD'S BLESSING OF (BELIEVING) ISRAEL

Paul begins the epistle with a section of praise for the historical blessing of God for His chosen people, the nation of Israel (Eph1:3-12). This sets the proper context for just how radical the revelation of the mystery (i.e., the union of Jew and Gentile with equal standing in the Body of Christ, which is unique to the present Dispensation of Grace; Eph1:13-3:12) really is.

- [3] In Ephesians 1:3-12, Paul makes use of first person, plural pronouns (i.e., "we" or "us"), which means he is discussing a group of people that includes himself. Note that no coauthor of the epistle is mentioned (cf. Eph1:1). While this group could, in principle, include all those to whom he writes at Ephesus, such a possibility is precluded by the fact that he also introduces the use of second person, plural pronouns (i.e., "ye" or "you") beginning in Ephesians 1:13 to address believing Gentiles (cf., Eph2:11-13). Thus, it must be concluded that when Paul uses "we" or "us" he is referring to believing Jews (which includes himself). The proper interpretation of the message of Ephesians must account for this change in personal pronouns, yet this distinction is entirely missed (or ignored) by almost all Bible students.

It is Abraham and the nation that would come from him (i.e., Israel) that God unilaterally and unconditionally committed Himself to bless (Gen12:1-2; Isa61:6-9). While all Jews are blessed by virtue of being members of the covenant nation (Cp., Rom3:1-2), "all spiritual blessings in heavenly places" (i.e., salvation) must be appropriated

³ When Paul writes epistles to individual persons, his benediction adds "mercy" (cf. 1Tim1:2; 2Tim1:2; Tit1:4).

by individual Jews⁴ by personal faith "in Christ". God's blessing for all others (i.e., Gentiles) will come through Israel and especially the work of her Messiah (Gen12:3; 22:18; Gal3:8).

- [4] If asked, "Who are the chosen people of God?", good Bible students ought to respond: **Israel**. In "[God] hath chosen us", the "us" is the nation of Israel (cf. Deut7:6; Ps33:12; 135:4; Isa41:8-9; 1Pet1:1-2; 2:9) chosen by Jehovah "in love" (cf. Deut7:7-8). It is the nation of Israel that was chosen to "be holy" (Lev11:44; 19:2; 1Pet1:15-16). Note also that God's choice of Israel was "in Him" (i.e., in the Messiah; v6; Isa45:21-25; Jer23:5-6); no Israelite (i.e., Jew) is saved apart from personal faith in Christ.

Election and the Elect. Calvinism has taken Biblical words, "election" and "elect", and constructed from them a doctrine of salvation in which God chooses individuals to be saved (i.e., the elect) or damned (i.e., the reprobate) before they are born and independent of any foreseen faith-response on their part. Thus, in Calvinism: 1) the objects of God's election are individuals, and 2) the purpose of God's election is their personal salvation.

The term "elect" (Greek, *ἐκλεκτός*) simply means **chosen**, and "election" means *to be chosen*. In the Bible, these terms are used of: 1) Messiah/Christ, 2) the holy angels, and 3) the nation of Israel. The Lord Jesus Christ is perfect and without sin, so His election by God cannot have anything to do with personal salvation. The holy angels are unfallen, such that they do not require salvation (and the fallen angels are not eligible for salvation). However, by far the most common use of elect/election relates to the nation of Israel. The nation of Israel has always been comprised of both believing and unbelieving Jews⁵ (cf. Rom3:3; 9:6), so the election of Israel cannot pertain to the salvation of individual Jewish persons.

Biblical "election" is God's choice of a person or persons for a particular purpose in His divine plan. Christ was chosen by God to be the redeemer of believing humanity (Jn3:16). The angels were chosen by God to be His governing and ministering spirits within the creation (Heb1:14). And the nation of Israel was chosen by God for a multitude of reasons, but primarily to be His principal channel of revelation to fallen humanity, through which God brought forth both the Holy Scriptures (Rom3:1-2) and the Person of Messiah (Rom9:3-5). These purposes have nothing to do with the personal salvation of the objects of God's election.

- [5] In the Greek text, "adoption as children" is one word (*υιοθεσία*) and is more appropriately rendered "adoption as sons" (Cp., Rom9:4; Gal4:5). To apply our modern understanding of adoption to the interpretation of the N.T. would be anachronistic. In the Greco-Roman world of the 1st century, only sons were the subjects of "adoption", and adoption applied to biological sons born into the

⁴ Those Jews within the nation of Israel that believe are referred to as the "remnant"; the remnant of Israel is always small in number, but it exists even during the present Dispensation of Grace (cf. Rom11:5).

⁵ Note Romans 11:28, which uses "election" in reference to the *unbelieving* nation of Israel during the Church Age.

family⁶; "adoption" was the formal procedure of designating a child to be an heir upon reaching full age/maturity (cf. Gal4:1-7; Eph1:11). In the Bible, it is clear that "adoption as sons" pertains to the nation of Israel (cf. Exod4:22; Hos11:1; Rom9:4; Gal4:5).

In the Bible, "predestinat[ion]" is a final outcome predetermined (or decreed) by God, which He providentially brings to pass (Cp., Isa46:9-11). It is used only four times in the Bible, twice in Romans 8 (vv29,30) where it pertains to the ultimate sanctification (i.e., glorification) promised for believers, and twice in Ephesians 1 (vv5,11) where it pertains to the inheritance ensured for the adopted sons of God. It is never used to refer to the salvation of particular individuals. It is believing Israel that will become the adopted sons of Jehovah (Cp., Jn1:11-12); in contrast, the Church is the Body/Bride of Christ.

- [6] Finally, God's choice of Israel (i.e., believing Jews) to become His adopted sons and to play a unique role in His plan/purpose for history is "according to the good pleasure of His will" (v5) and "to the praise of the glory of His grace", especially since through Israel God intends to bless all families/nations (Gen12:3; Gal3:8). God's choice of Israel "before the foundation of the world" (v5) has nothing to do with the salvation or damnation of individuals (neither Jews nor Gentiles).

Relative to being "accepted in the beloved", consider the prophetic references to the nation of Israel being accepted in the LORD/Messiah (Isa45:21-25; Jer23:5-6).

Note on Calvinism. If Calvinism's interpretation is correct, an eternal decree of God that foreordained the damnation⁷ of non-elect persons (before the creation of the world, and independent of any foreseen faith-response on their part) brings glory to God and deserves to be praised, which appears to be inconsistent with the heart of God as revealed in Scripture (Cp., Ezek18:23,32; 33:11; 2Pet3:9).

- [7] No one in any dispensation is redeemed apart from the work of Jesus Christ. His work of propitiation (1Jn2:2), which included the offering of His own "blood" before God in the heavenly tabernacle (cf. Heb9:11-28), is what makes "the forgiveness of sins" possible (Rom3:26). The offer of salvation "through faith in his blood" (Rom3:25) is "according to the riches of [God's] grace". Redemption through the blood of Christ is offered to all in the present dispensation, although here it is in reference to Israel (cf. Zech9:11; Matt26:28). Whereas individual Jews who believe have received this "redemption", the "redemption" of the nation of Israel is a future event (cf. Jer31:33-34; Rom11:26).

⁶ Adoption was the formal procedure to designate as heir a biological son who had been born into the family and had reached adulthood; it was not, as we know it today, a procedure to bring a child born outside the family into the family. This is why adoption (as used in the Bible) pertains to Jews, not to Gentiles.

⁷ The damnation of responsible creatures who freely and willfully reject Christ does bring glory to God in that it demonstrates His divine attribute of justice. This is very different, however, than the fore-ordained damnation of individuals who have no ability to "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Act16:30-31).

- [8] Historically, God has "abounded toward [Israel]" (i.e., Israel above all others; cf. Deut7:6-8; 28:13; Rom3:1-2) in all "wisdom" and "prudence". Knowledge of the One true God is the ultimate measure of "wisdom" (Prov9:11), and "prudence" is the proper application of "wisdom".
- [9] Here is the first use of "mystery" in Ephesians. As used in the Bible, "mystery" relates to doctrinal truth "which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit" (Eph3:5). In other words, a "mystery" is a doctrine that: 1) can only be known by revelation from God, 2) was not revealed in the O.T., but 3) has been revealed for the first time in the history of the world by the N.T. prophets (i.e., writers of Scripture). There are numerous mysteries revealed in the N.T., and more than one in the Epistle to the Ephesians.
- [10] This "mystery" (v9) is that "in the dispensation of the fullness of times" (i.e., that dispensation which consummates the plan of God in the present creation, the Millennial Kingdom) God intends to "gather together in one all things in Christ" (cf. Ps8:4-6; Heb2:5-8). The "all things" are further characterized as "both" (i.e., "all things" are really two things), namely those things which are "in heaven" (i.e., the Church, which is raptured to heaven prior to the Tribulation; 2Thess2:1-3) and those things which are "on earth" (i.e., Israel, which will be converted as a nation during the Tribulation and persevere on earth to the end of it; Matt24:13-14). The "mystery" is not the fact of the coming Kingdom, nor Israel's place in it (both of which are subjects of much revelation throughout the O.T.), but the revelation that the Church (which is itself a mystery; Coll:24-27) will also have a role in it.
- [11] Israel is the "we" that has "obtained an inheritance" from God as His "predestinated" and adopted sons (cf. vv4-5; Gal3:14-18).

Note on Calvinism. Calvinism has misused the phrase "according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will" to construct a worldview in which everything that comes to pass has been predetermined/foreordained by God, completely excluding the possibility of freewill choices on the part of fallen men. Such determinism is a pagan notion (not a Biblical one), embodied in the Greco-Roman concept of **fate**. Hector, the Trojan adversary of Achilles, reveals the pagan concept when he laments, "And fate? No one alive has ever escaped it, neither brave man nor coward, I tell you—it's born with us the day that we are born."⁸ In contrast to the deterministic, pagan worldview which necessarily gives rise to hopelessness on the part of men, the Biblical worldview exalts hope (Rom8:24-25).

- [12] The group comprising the "we" up to this point in the epistle is here identified as those "who first trusted in Christ". This cannot mean the Ephesian believers in general, since those in Ephesus did not hear the gospel and believe until Acts 18:24ff (Paul's so-called third missionary journey; c. 54 AD). Those "who first trusted in Christ" is a reference to **the Jewish people** (in contrast to the Gentiles), as all those recorded to have trusted in Christ in the Gospels and in the early history recorded in Acts were Jewish; the

⁸ From Homer (The Iliad).

first Gentile to be saved without proselyting into the nation of Israel/Judaism was Cornelius (cf. Act10:34-11:1; c. 41 AD).

GOD'S PRESENT WORK AMONG (BELIEVING) GENTILES

- [13] Paul now introduces the plural pronoun "ye". In contrast to the "we", who are believing Jews, the "ye" are believing Gentiles. Gentiles were not those "who first trusted Christ" (v12), but have now "also trusted" in Him. Note the order of events that lead to Gentile salvation: 1) they "heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation", 2) they "believed", and 3) they "were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise". It is the sealing of the believer with the Holy Spirit that results in eternal security (i.e., a believer who has been sealed can never lose his salvation; 1Pet1:5).

Note on Calvinism. An axiom of Calvinism necessitated by its unbiblical definition of total depravity is that *regeneration precedes faith*. That is, no fallen person is able to believe the gospel until after God regenerates him by a sovereign work of the Holy Spirit. But Ephesians 1:13 teaches that the believer is sealed with the Holy Spirit "after" one believes, not before. In the Bible, trust/belief/faith always comes after hearing the gospel/word of God (cf. Rom10:17), not after a regenerating work of the Holy Spirit.

- [14] "Who" refers back to the Holy Spirit (v13). But, whereas He has been given to believing Gentiles, He is the "earnest" (i.e., guarantee, or promise of future payment in full) of "our inheritance". The pronoun "our" is the genitive case of the plural pronoun "we". Thus, the Holy Spirit given to believing Gentiles is actually the "earnest" of believing Jews (i.e., Israel; Ezek36:27; Jn14:17). The "earnest" is the promise of future "inheritance", which is designated for Israel as the adopted sons of God (cf. v11). The "redemption of the purchased possession" is speaking of Israel⁹. Israel is the treasure hidden in a field which Christ so desired that He sold all that He had in order to buy the whole field for the sake of the treasure it contained (Matt13:44).

Trinitarian Structure of Ephesians 1:3-14. Note the implicit Trinitarian structure: Eph1:3-6 describe blessings that emanate from the **Father**, Eph1:7-12 describe blessings that emanate from the **Son**, and Eph1:13-14 describe blessings that emanate from the **Holy Spirit**. Each section closes with a doxology to that Member of the Godhead (Eph1:6,12,14b).

⁹ Redemption is the buying back again of a possession formerly purchased, but lost. This most directly applies to Israel. God purchased Israel as a nation at the Passover/Exodus (Exod15:16). God lost the nation of Israel because of her rebellion against Him, but He redeemed (bought back) Israel at the cross of Christ. This is portrayed typologically in great detail by the prophet Hosea (Hos1-3). While providing the payment (i.e., propitiation) necessary to redeem believing Israel at the cross, God also purchased believing Gentiles (Act20:28; Cp., Matt13:44-46). This pattern is also seen in the account of the Lord Jesus' healing of the Gentile woman with an issue of blood while on the way to raise Jairus' daughter (Luk8:41-56); the healing of the Gentile was incidental, Jesus' objective was to raise the Jew.

- [15] Here, "your faith" is the faith of the Gentiles. The fact that Paul has only "heard of your faith" recently confirms that they cannot be included among the "we", those "who first trusted in Christ" (v12). Paul's source of joy is that the Gentile believers in Ephesus "love" the "saints" (i.e., Jewish believers).
- [16] In his "prayers" to God, Paul is faithful to remember to "give thanks" for the believing Gentiles who love the Jewish believers.
- [17] His prayer for the Gentile believers is that God would give them "wisdom" and "knowledge" concerning his "revelation" to them of the "Lord Jesus Christ". Wisdom is just the proper application of knowledge. Whereas the Jews had been the recipients of thousands of years of divine revelation concerning their coming Messiah (Rom3:1-2), this is all brand new for the Gentiles.
- [18] Here, "enlightened" is used to refer to illumination (Cp., Heb10:32). Illumination is not revelation, which is the prophetic imparting of new information previously unrevealed, but a spiritual ability to understand revelation already given (1Cor2:10,14). It is God's desire that believers "know" (i.e., understand) His future plans for them (i.e., prophecy).

The "hope of his calling" refers to God's invitation during the present dispensation (i.e., the Church Age) for both Jews and Gentiles to receive unique spiritual blessings, which include "the riches of the glory of his inheritance". There is no uncertainty associated with this "hope"; the believer should confidently expect these blessings, since they rest upon the promises of God. Whereas Israel's inheritance comes by virtue of their position as the adopted sons of God (Eph1:5), the Christian's "inheritance" comes by virtue of his position in the mystical Body/Bride of Christ; as the Body/Bride of Christ in union with Him, the Christian will inherit all that Christ, as the only begotten Son of God, inherits (Eph3:6).

Note on Calvinism. Calvinism inextricably links God's so-called effectual call to election (i.e., only the elect are called), but this is not Biblical. In the Bible, the nation of Israel is the subject of election, but both Jews and Gentiles are called (cf. 1Cor7:18-20).

- [19] Now, Paul's use of the pronoun "us" is expanded to include all "who believe" (i.e., both Jews and Gentiles). God's "working of his mighty power" is the resurrection/ascension of Jesus Christ (v20).
- [20] Much more than just the resurrection of Christ, His ascension as a resurrected Man into "the heavenly places" is most especially in view. There is a cosmic warfare motif in the Epistle to the Ephesians that should not be missed. At the incarnation of Christ, Satan and his angelic host launched an all out assault on Jesus as the Son of Man (e.g., Matt2:16; 4:1-11; Luk4:1-3; Jn13:21-27; cf. Dan7:13-14). In the ascension, the Man Christ Jesus has taken the high ground in that battle; this implies that although the battle is not yet over, victory is assured.
- [21] The high ground that Jesus Christ as a resurrected Man has taken in His war with Satan is "far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion", which are references to Satan's angelic host

(Eph6:12; Cp., Rev12:7). Although Christ was made "a little lower than the angels" (Heb2:7) in His humiliation (Philip2:7-8), He has been exalted "far above" them in His glorification (Philip2:9-11). Christ's exalted position will endure forevermore, "not only in this age, but in that which is to come".

- [22] Jesus Christ as a resurrected and glorified Man now has dominion over "all things".
- [23] The identity and position of "the church" and its relationship to Jesus Christ is revealed in vv22-23. The "church" is the "body" of Christ, and Christ is "head" of the "body". The "church" (which began at Pentecost and will be complete at the Rapture) is a new creation (2Cor5:17) in which the glorified Lord Jesus Christ is even today in mystical union with every member (Cp., Coll:24-27); thus, the universal Church as a "body" is a manifestation of the "fullness" of Christ. In the future, the Body of Christ will become His Bride (Eph5:30-32; Cp., Rev19:7-8).

CHAPTER 2

SALVATION IN THE DISPENSATION OF GRACE

The same "mighty power" of God that "raised [Christ] from the dead" and "set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places" (Eph1:19-20) is that which regenerates the believer during the Dispensation of Grace, making him "a new creature" in Christ (2Cor5:17).

- [1] In this verse, "you" refers back to the Gentiles who have "also trusted" in Christ (Eph1:13). Quickening (i.e., making alive) is God's supernatural work of regeneration (Tit3:5), or the new birth (Jn3:5-8), which results in a "new creature" in Christ (2Cor5:17); God's work of regenerating the believer was a promised blessing of the New Covenant¹⁰ (Ezek36:26). To be "dead in trespasses and sins" is *positional truth* relative to the unbeliever. All are born "dead" in Adam (Rom5:12-15), but through the new birth the believer is made "alive" in Christ (1Cor15:22; Eph2:5).

Note on Calvinism. While Scripture asserts that the unregenerate man is "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph2:1), Calvinism understands this assertion to mean that "the sinner is so spiritually bankrupt that *he can do nothing pertaining to his salvation*"¹¹; he cannot even respond to God by exercising personal faith required for salvation (Acts 16:30-31) without first being sovereignly regenerated by God¹². From Paul's use of the word "dead" in Ephesians 2:1, Calvinists construct a metaphor of the unregenerate man as a corpse (R.C. Sproul) or a cadaver (John MacArthur); since a literal corpse would not be able to respond to God in any way, they posit the unregenerate man cannot either. Metaphors (by definition) are partial, incomplete representations of reality; they inevitably break down when pressed

¹⁰ Being a promised blessing of the New Covenant (Ezek36:26), regeneration of believers did not occur before the resurrection/ascension of Christ (cf. Heb9:15-17); O.T. saints were not regenerated.

¹¹ David N. Steele and Curtis C. Thomas, *The Five Points of Calvinism* (Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Company, Phillipsburg, NJ, 1963) 25.

¹² An axiom of Calvinism is that regeneration precedes faith.

too far. The Calvinist's metaphorical construct of a physical corpse for the unregenerate man goes too far. For example, a physical corpse, in addition to being unable to believe, is also unable to walk, talk, think, or even sin, and yet the unregenerate man can do all these things; "the dead" can even hear the voice of God and respond to it (Jn5:25). Scripture presents the scenario in which all men are commanded by God to believe in order to be saved (e.g., Isa45:22; Mk1:15; Act16:30-31), along with the clear implication that it is possible for unregenerate men to do so (e.g., Jn3:16; 6:40; 7:37; 20:31; Rev22:17).

- [2] Before their conversion, Gentile unbelievers ("ye") are characterized as being subject to the influences of "this world" (Cp., Rom12:2) and the Devil (Cp., 1Pet5:8), referred to as "the prince of the power of the air"; this is what being "dead in trespasses and sins" (v1) means.
- [3] To the temptations of the "world" and the **Devil** (v2) are added those of the "**flesh**". All these temptations are experienced by Jews ("also we") and Gentiles alike. Such temptations do not cease after conversion; the difference is that before conversion an unregenerate man has no power to resist these influences and inevitably yields to them. Thus, both Jews and Gentiles are "children of wrath", meaning they deserve God's judgment for sin (cf. Dan9:5-9; Rom1:21-25; 3:23).
- [4] The only thing that alters this dire state of affairs (i.e., that all men deserve God's judgment) is God's "great love" for, and desire to show "mercy" to, "us". In the present context of Paul, "us" still refers to Israel.
- [5] The blessings of the New Covenant, made possible by the work of Christ, mean that Jews who believe are now "quickened"/regenerated (Ezek36:26-27). At this point, Paul (parenthetically) notes that "ye" (i.e., believing Gentiles) are "saved" by "grace". This should not be taken to suggest that believing Jews are not saved by grace (indeed they are; Eph1:7); rather, the contrast Paul is building toward is that God's redemptive work on behalf of Israel was necessary/required because of the covenants into which He entered with the nation, whereas He is under no such covenant commitment with the Gentiles (cf. vv11-12). Thus, while Jewish salvation is by grace, God's offer of salvation to the Gentiles is even more gracious!
- [6] Since the Church is the Body of Christ (Eph1:22-23), in mystical union with Him, believers during the Dispensation of Grace (Eph3:2) are reckoned as "in Christ" and viewed by God as having the same position as Him. Since Christ has been "raised up" and now "sit[s] ... in heavenly places", this is positionally true for the Church as well.
- [7] One of the purposes of God during the Dispensation of Grace (Eph3:2) is to build the Church (Matt16:18), which includes "visit[ing] the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name" (Act15:14). The Gentiles are not a party to the covenants God made with Israel, so He is under no obligation toward them whatsoever; that God would choose to bless the Gentiles in this way will be used as a display of "the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness" in "the ages to come" (Cp., Eph3:10).

- [8] The salvation of any individual person (Jew or Gentile) is, always has been, and always will be, "by grace". Salvation is "the gift of God" that is offered to all (Jn3:16; Rom10:13; Rev22:17), but must be personally received "through faith". Thus, all are not saved, only those who exercise personal "faith" (i.e., believe; cf. Jn3:16; Act16:30-31).

Note on Calvinism. Calvinism asserts that in Ephesians 2:8, the antecedent of the demonstrative pronoun "that" is "faith", making faith "the gift of God". From this Calvinism constructs its doctrine that God must sovereignly bestow upon the elect (but unregenerate) person even the "faith" required to receive salvation, consistent with its axiom that regeneration precedes faith. While this interpretation appears grammatically viable in our English translations, it is not possible in the original Greek text. For a discussion of the grammatical issues involved in Ephesians 2:8, see the article: "**Is Faith the Gift of God?**".

- [9] Being "by grace" (v8), salvation is necessarily "not of works"; grace and works are mutually exclusive (cf. Rom4:4). Since salvation does not come as a response to "works" on the part of the recipient, it excludes all "boast[ing]".

Note on Calvinism. Calvinism asserts that even a requirement for an individual to exercise personal faith (rather than receiving faith itself as a sovereign gift of God; cf. v8) is to demand a "work"¹³ on the part of the creature. However, the Bible clearly teaches that faith is not a work (Rom4:5).

- [10] Here again, "we" is best understood in this context to be believing Jews (i.e., the nation of Israel "walk[ing]" in obedience to Jehovah). The O.T. clearly teaches that Israel is the LORD's "workmanship" (cf. Deut32:6; Ps100:3; Isa43:21; 44:21; 60:21), created by Him to fulfill specific "works" He "ordained" for them. The O.T. is filled with prophecies concerning the role Israel is to play in the plan of God, including bringing forth the Messiah who (in fulfillment of the Abrahamic/New Covenant) would bring salvation and blessing not only to Israel (Jer31:31-34), but to "all families of the earth" (Gen12:3; cf. Gal3:8-9); there are no such prophecies concerning Gentiles or the Church in the O.T.

PRIOR POSITION OF THE GENTILES

- [11] In contrast to Israel, Paul characterizes the standing of "Gentiles" (addressed as "ye") with God prior to the work of Christ and the building of His Body, the Church.
- [12] In the O.T. under the Mosaic Covenant, the path to a right standing with "God" for Gentiles was to unite themselves with "the commonwealth of Israel" (e.g., Ruth1:16); the Law of Moses explicitly addressed strangers (i.e., Gentiles) living among Jews in the land of Israel (e.g., Deut10:19), but even this was an inadequate

¹³ Calvinists often characterize personal faith exercised by an unregenerate person as the greatest of all possible works, which they view as incompatible with salvation by grace.

relationship for the Gentile (cf. v14). Gentiles were/are "strangers" to all of the major covenants in the O.T. (i.e., Abrahamic, Land, Davidic, New, and Mosaic) in that they were covenants made between Jehovah and the nation of Israel (not Gentiles or the Church). From the O.T. perspective, Gentiles had "no hope" in that "God" had not obligated Himself to provide for them as He had for Israel, especially in the unconditional covenants He made with the nation (Cp., Rom9:4-5).

- [13] In the present dispensation, however, this has changed because of the work of Christ. Gentiles, who had been "far off" (from God) have now been "made nigh" (i.e., near to God); this does not mean all Gentiles are now saved any more than all Jews, but all Gentiles now have an access to God and the propitiation provided for the sins of the whole world (1Jn2:2) by "the blood of Christ". Now, any Gentile can be saved by being incorporated (i.e., baptized; 1Cor12:13) into the Body of Christ (not the Nation of Israel¹⁴; cf. Act15:14).

JEW/GENTILE NOW ONE IN THE CHURCH (THE BODY OF CHRIST)

- [14] The work of Christ has brought "peace" to the relationship between Jew and Gentile, and between both with God. The "middle wall of partition" is a reference to the wall in the Temple that prevented Gentiles (i.e., proselytes) access to the brazen altar; even for the Gentile proselyte who had united himself with the nation of Israel, he had no ability to offer the sacrifices required by Jehovah under the Law of Moses. Under the previous dispensation, Jews and Gentiles did not have equal access to God (v13), irrespective of the issue of personal faith. Furthermore, even Jews did not all have equal access to God. In the Temple, Jewish women could only go as far as the Court of Women, only Jewish men had access to the brazen altar, only priests could access the Holy Place, and only the high priest could access the Holy of Holies (i.e., the very presence of God).
- [15] Such overt "enmity" (i.e., discrimination) between Jew and Gentile (v14) was part and parcel of "the law of commandments contained in ordinances" (i.e., the Mosaic Covenant). However, this discrimination was "abolished" with the death of Christ. Here, the "one new man" is a metaphor for the Body of Christ (i.e., the Church), in which no such discrimination exists.
- [16] The "cross" (i.e., the work of Christ) has made possible the "reconcil[iation]" of both Jew and Gentile "in one body", the Body of Christ (i.e., the Church)—not in the nation of Israel, for such a relationship was impossible under the Law of Moses.
- [17] Now, in the present dispensation, the "preach[ing]" of the cross of Christ is to be carried out indiscriminately, both to "you who were afar off" (i.e., Gentiles) and to "them that were nigh" (i.e., Jews).

¹⁴ In contrast to Dispensational theology, which understands blessing coming to Gentiles through their incorporation into the Church, which is the Body of Christ, which is distinct from the nation of Israel, and which began at Acts 2 (and will be completed at the Rapture), Reformed/replacement theology views the Church as the "new" or "true" Israel, thus granting the N.T. Church direct access to the O.T. covenants and promises Jehovah made to Israel; the Reformed understanding necessarily requires that a multitude of Scripture passages be allegorized, since they simply cannot be interpreted in a literal way relative to the Church.

Note that in the Greek text, no personal pronouns are used; it is simply "to the far off and to the near".

- [18] In the present dispensation, "we both" (i.e., Jews and Gentiles) have "access"¹⁵ to God "the Father" by "one [Holy] Spirit", "through" Christ (note the explicit reference to all three Persons of the Godhead).
- [19] Under the Law of Moses, even believing Gentiles who united themselves with the nation of Israel remained "strangers" and "foreigners", never becoming full-fledged "citizens" of the nation. But "now", in the present dispensation, believing Gentiles are "fellow citizens with the saints" (i.e., believing Jews) in "the household of God" (used as a metaphor for the Church; 1Tim3:15).
- [20] Viewed under the metaphor of a "house" (v19), the Church's "foundation" is "the apostles and prophets". These would be N.T. prophets (i.e., writers of N.T. scripture who were not apostles), not O.T. prophets, since the Church was a mystery (cf. Eph3:9-10; Col1:24-27); that "apostles" are listed before "prophets" is consistent with this understanding. Note that although the Church will become largely Gentile in composition, its "foundation" is entirely Jewish (cf. Rom3:1-2). Furthermore, "Jesus Christ" is the "chief corner stone" (i.e., the indispensable feature which must be set in place first; Cp., 1Cor3:9-11).
- [22] This new "building", the Church (prophesied by Christ as yet future during His earthly ministry; Matt16:18), in which the presence of God in the Person of the Holy "Spirit" now dwells corporately, has become the "holy temple" during the present dispensation (Cp., 1Cor3:16), the "holy temple" simply designating the place of God's "habitation" on earth.

CHAPTER 3

THE MYSTERY OF THE CHURCH

In Ephesians 3 Paul reveals the mystery of the Church as the Body of Christ, being built during the present dispensation, in which believing Jew and believing Gentile have equal standing before God and equal access to God. It is not that the Gentile has been elevated to the position of the Jew in the former dispensation, but that in the Church both Jew and Gentile have been elevated to an even higher position.

- [1] Paul, a Jewish man, asserts that he is "the prisoner of Jesus Christ" (i.e., he is literally imprisoned in Rome because of his testimony for Jesus Christ; Act28:20-28) specifically for the "Gentiles" (Cp., Gal2:7-9).
- [2] Paul is the apostle to whom God gave the revelation concerning "the dispensation of the grace of God", the unique age in which we live and in which Christ is building His Church—an age which Peter (after

¹⁵ Note that it is not the case that in the present dispensation Jews and Gentiles have equal access to God (which is true), whereas in the previous dispensation they had *unequal* access (which is not true); in the previous dispensation Gentiles had **no access** to God (Eph2:11-12).

its revelation by Paul) characterized as a time when God "did visit the Gentiles to take out of them a people for his name" (Act15:14).

- [3] God's exclusive "revelation" to Paul included "the mystery" of the Body of Christ, which is the Church (Eph1:22-23). Since the "mystery" concerning the Church and this present "dispensation" were first revealed to Paul, revelation concerning them will not be found in either the O.T. or the gospels (cf. v5).
- [4] It is Paul's desire that the Ephesians (and we) "understand" the "knowledge" God gave to him of this "mystery" concerning "Christ" (i.e., His Body). This is not a subject we should ignore or neglect.
- [5] Here is the definition of "mystery" as used in the N.T. A "mystery" is truth "not made known" in previous "ages", but which is "revealed" for the first time in history through the "holy apostles and [N.T.] prophets" (Cp., Rom16:25-26). Thus, revelation concerning anything designated a "mystery" in the N.T. cannot be found in the O.T.
- [6] The mystery is not that "Gentiles" could or would be saved; although very little is said about it, this can be found in the O.T. (Cp., Gen12:3; Deut32:21; Isa42:6-7; 65:1; Rom9:24-33; 10:19-21). The mystery is that during the Dispensation of Grace (v2), believing "Gentiles" will be made "fellow heirs" and "partakers" along with believing Jews in the "same body" (the Body of Christ), which is the Church (Eph1:22-23). Such an equal position before God for both the Jew and the Gentile was not the reality in any prior dispensation, and it will not be the case in the coming dispensation (i.e., the Kingdom; cf. Deut28:13; Zech14:16-21); it is absolutely unique within the Church formed during the Dispensation of Grace.
- [7] The revelation of the mystery concerning the Church, the Body of Christ, was "a gift of the grace of God given unto" the Apostle Paul, who calls himself a "minister" of Christ and a "steward of the mysteries of God" (1Cor4:1).
- [8] Paul was the apostle charged by God to evangelize the "Gentiles" (Cp., Rom15:16; Gal2:7-9). Paul calls himself "the least of all saints" because he persecuted the Church (1Cor15:9; Gall:13; 1Tim1:13). The "riches of Christ" that Paul was called to "preach" are described as "unsearchable"¹⁶, meaning they cannot be searched out or discovered (i.e., by studying the O.T.), consistent with the mystery character of the revelation given to Paul.
- [9] God's purpose in the preaching of Paul was bigger than merely the evangelization of the Gentiles (v8). It was also "to make all [men] see what is the fellowship of the mystery". Note that "men" is in italics, which means it has been supplied in the English translation (it is not present in the Greek text). God's intended audience is not just men (i.e., humanity), but also includes the angelic host (v10). The "mystery" of the Church includes a "fellowship" (Greek, **κοινωνία**; often translated "communion" in the N.T., denoting an intimate, personal relationship) between Jew and Gentile in union with Christ that is utterly unique in history.

¹⁶ The Greek word translated "unsearchable" does not mean unknowable or incomprehensible, as is suggested by some of the modern translations (e.g., "unfathomable" in the NASB).

- [10] God's audience includes "the principalities and powers in heavenly places" (i.e., the angelic host). There is a sense in which the Church is an elaborate object lesson by which God is teaching both men and angels (i.e., all of creation) something of His "manifold wisdom" (i.e., multi-faceted plan). In that the age in which God is building the Church is designated "the dispensation of the grace of God" (Eph3:2), His primary lesson would seem to center upon grace. God's maximum display of grace is realized in the Church. In that angels no nothing of the grace of God experientially¹⁷, they learn about the grace of God most perfectly by observing the Church.
- [11] Although the Church was a mystery not revealed in history until the time of the Apostle Paul, that does not mean it was a "Plan B" conceived by God after Israel's failure (at the first Coming of Christ). God's "eternal purpose" always included the Church, which would be the Body and Bride of "Christ".
- [12] In the Church, which is the Body of Christ, both Jew and Gentile have "access" to the grace of God that would have been previously unimaginable. The believer today can come to God through Christ with "boldness" and "confidence" (Cp., Heb4:16). This is possible now, but not before, because of "the faith of him". By this is not meant our faith *in* Christ (as there were certainly those in the previous dispensation who exercised personal faith in the coming Messiah), but the **faithfulness** of Christ (i.e., the completed work of Christ).

PAUL'S PRAYER

- [13] Paul does not want the Ephesians to "faint" (i.e., lose heart, become discouraged) over his "tribulations", namely his imprisonment in Rome.
- [14] Paul has willingly submitted his life and circumstances "unto [God] the Father" for the "cause" of "Christ". The "Father" is to be the recipient of the prayers of believers (Cp., Matt6:9).
- [15] Here, "the whole family in heaven and earth" is probably an allusion to all believers, who are "named" after God "the Father" (v14; Cp., Act17:26,29).
- [16] Paul's prayer for the believers at Ephesus is not that they would be delivered from their tribulations, but that in tribulation they would be "strengthened" by the Holy "Spirit" in their "inner man" (i.e. the spiritual dimension of the believer; cf. Rom7:22; 2Cor4:16).
- [17] This is the only verse in the Bible that alludes to the fact that "Christ" dwells in the "hearts" of believers, which makes it possible for us to be "rooted and grounded in love".
- [18] The sentence structure in this verse is difficult, both in the Greek and the English, appearing to be incomplete (but not so). It is Paul's prayer, and God's desire, that the Ephesian believers "comprehend" the multi-dimensional (note, four dimensions are listed,

¹⁷ Unfallen angels do not require grace from God, and fallen angels are not offered grace by God.

probably as a superlative literary device) or multi-faceted (Cp., v10) wisdom/plan/work of God "with all saints". What was in the prior dispensation understood (incompletely) as God's work with Jews through the nation of Israel and her prophesied Messiah has in the present dispensation been more fully revealed to include Gentiles in the Body/Bride of Christ (heretofore a mystery).

- [19] This petition of Paul's is that believers "be filled with all the fullness of God", knowing as now revealed "the love of Christ" (for both Jews and Gentiles), while recognizing our comprehension is still incomplete since perfect understanding of an infinite God "passeth knowledge" (i.e., is incomprehensible).
- [20] Paul concludes his prayer with one of his typical doxologies. As God reveals ever more of His "manifold wisdom" (v10) to us, His work on our behalf (both Jews and Gentiles) is seen to be "exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think".
- [21] Indeed, "throughout all ages" (i.e., past and future dispensations) God will receive maximum "glory" as a result of what He is doing during the present dispensation "**in the church** by Jesus Christ".

CHAPTER 4

THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE BELIEVER

In the pattern typical of Pauline epistles addressed to churches, the first part (Ephesians 1-3) focused on new revelation and the exposition of doctrine, whereas the last part (Ephesians 4-6) focuses on applications and exhortations (i.e., responsibilities) for the believer relative to the doctrine that has been revealed/expounded. Since the position of the believer in the Church, the Body of Christ, is so highly exalted (cf. Eph2:6; 3:6-10), the responsibilities that derive from that position are extraordinary.

A WALK WORTHY OF OUR HIGH CALLING

- [1] The word "beseech" denotes a gracious appeal, in contrast to a requirement or predeterminate result; it introduces an expectation of the believer that does not have to be done (for salvation), but ought to be done (in response to salvation). The believer who (by the grace of God) has been made a member of the Body of Christ (Eph1:22-23; 2:6-7) ought to "walk worthy" of that highly exalted "vocation" (i.e., calling). The Greek word translated "worthy" is **ἀξίως**, from which the English word *axiom* is derived. An axiom is a self-evident truth that requires no proof; that a believer ought to "walk worthy" of his highly exalted position in the Body of Christ should be self-evident. Note that this exhortation comes from the pen of the Apostle Paul, a "prisoner of the Lord" in Rome at the time of its writing.
- [2] The attributes of "meekness" (i.e., submission to proper authority) and "lowliness" should characterize the believer, as was exemplified by both Moses (Num12:3) and Jesus (Matt11:29; Phil2:5-8). To "love one another, as I have loved you" was the "new commandment" (Jn13:34) Jesus gave to His disciples.

UNITY IN TRUTH (DOCTRINE)

- [3] God desires for the Church (the Body and future Bride of Christ) to be united, rather than divided, for the sake of "peace". However, doctrinal compromise for the sake of "the unity of the Spirit" is never acceptable, since the very nature of the Holy Spirit is the "Spirit of truth" (Jn14:17; 15:26), and God must be worshiped "in spirit and in truth" (Jn4:24).
- [4] Unity in seven (doctrinal) truths is essential. (1) While there are many (local) churches, there is only "one body", which is the Body of Christ (Rom12:5; 1Cor12:12). The Body of Christ is comprised of all who believe between Pentecost (the birth of the Church) and the Rapture (the completion of the Church). (2) There is only "one Spirit", the Holy Spirit. Believers have been warned not to be deceived by "another spirit" (2Cor11:3-4); all other contrary spirits are demonic (1Tim4:1; 1Jn4:1-3). (3) Believers in the present dispensation have only "one hope", which is not the conversion of the world or the triumph of the Church on earth¹⁸, but the return of Christ to claim His Bride (Jn14:1-3; 1Cor15:51-54; 1Thess4:13-18; Tit2:11-13).
- [5] (4) There is only "one Lord", the Lord Jesus Christ. Believers have been warned that many false Christ's will seek to lure us away from Him (Matt24:4-5; 2Cor11:3-4; 2Thess2:1-12). (5) There is only "one faith". Biblical faith is the content of that which is believed by the Church, which came by revelation from God (i.e., the Bible; 2Tim3:16-17), the pinnacle of which is the gospel (of grace) by which one is saved (1Cor15:1-8). Believers have been warned that there will be false gospels that compete for their faith (2Cor11:3-4). (6) There is only "one baptism". This refers to spirit baptism (Matt3:11; Act2:3-4; Rom6:3-4), not water baptism. Spirit baptism is the means by which the believer during the present dispensation is incorporated into the Body of Christ (1Cor12:13).
- [6] (7) Finally, there is only "one God and Father", who is at all times omnipresent, but during the present dispensation manifests Himself in the spiritual temple made up of all members of the Church (1Cor3:16).

DIVERSITY IN (SPIRITUAL) GIFTS

While there ought to be unity in doctrine (vv3-6), there will be diversity in the spiritual gifts God gives to believers (vv7-16). Failure to recognize, accept, and submit to the divine purpose in the diversity of God's distribution of gifts among members of the Body of Christ results in: 1) inappropriate division within the Church, and 2) inefficient (at best) or ineffective (at worst) ministry in and by the Church.

¹⁸ The mission of the Church during the present dispensation is the evangelization (not the conversion) of the world (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 1:8). However, speaking of modern churches, Scofield observed that "they have turned aside the greater part of their resources to the attempt to reform the world, to educate the world, and in short, to anticipate the next dispensation in which those things belong, and to do the work that is distinctly set apart for restored and converted Israel in her Kingdom Age" (from C.I. Scofield, *The Biggest Failure of the Church Age*).

- [7] It is the prerogative of the risen and glorified Lord Jesus Christ, as Head of the Body, to give "gift[s]" to "every one of us" (i.e., every member of the Body of Christ receives at least one spiritual "gift"). Spiritual gifts are given according to the "grace" of "Christ", meaning they are not deserved or merited in any way by those who receive them.
- [8] This verse includes an allusion to a prophecy in Psalm 68:18. Consistent with the cosmic warfare motif in Ephesians, this allusion pictures believers as those who had been held "captive" (by Satan), who but have been freed by the Lord Jesus Christ "when he ascended up on high" (Cp., Eph1:20-21); the "gifts" are viewed as the spoils of war the victorious general distributes among his soldiers. Jesus told His disciples that such an expanded ministry of the Holy Spirit would not be possible until after His death/resurrection (cf. Jn16:7).
- [9] Verses 9-10 are parenthetical. Before His resurrection/ascension, Christ "descended first into the lower parts of the earth" (i.e., Hell). At that time, Hell was made up of two sides. One side, called Abraham's bosom (Luk16:22), contained the souls of all believers who had died prior to the Cross (i.e., O.T. saints); the other side was the place of torment of all the souls of the unbelieving dead (Luk16:23). Following His work on the Cross, Jesus "descended" into Hell in order to: 1) release the souls of believers in Abraham's bosom to ascend into heaven, and 2) triumphantly proclaim His victory to the souls of the unbelieving dead and imprisoned spirits (1Pet3:19-20).
- [10] After this descent into Hell, Christ "ascended up far above all heavens" (i.e., the Ascension; Eph1:20-21), and by doing so He now is able as a glorified Man to "fill" (i.e., control; Cp., Eph5:18) "all things". Again, in the cosmic warfare motif, the fact that the risen and glorified Lord Jesus Christ has taken the high ground over Satan and his host of fallen angels means His ultimate victory is assured.
- [11] There are multiple lists of spiritual gifts given in the N.T. (e.g., Rom12:6-8; 1Cor12:8-11; Eph4:11). Some gifts appear in only one list, some are repeated in more than one. This suggests that these lists are not exhaustive, but illustrative.

In the present context, four (or five) spiritual gifts listed are: "apostles", "prophets", "evangelists", and "pastors and teachers"¹⁹. It is apparent that two of these four gifts, "apostles" and "prophets", have been "done away" with as no longer necessary upon completion of the N.T. (1Cor13:8-10) since their function was foundational (Eph2:20) and revelatory. The two remaining gifts endure to the present and are necessary for the primary preaching/teaching ministries of the Church: "evangelists" proclaim the Word of God, especially the gospel, to those outside the Church, whereas "pastors and teachers" instruct those within the Church.

¹⁹ The construction of the list of gifts in the Greek text of Ephesians 4:11 suggests that "pastors and teachers" is viewed as a single gift (i.e., "pastors", that is the "teachers").

- [12] Proper use of these gifts leads to the "perfecting of the saints". The purpose of the gifts is: 1) to perfect (i.e., bring them to maturity) believers to "do the work of the ministry" both inside and outside of the Church. The "work of the ministry" is to be performed by all believers, not just the "pastors and teachers"; it is the "pastors and teachers" that prepare believers for this work. And 2) to "[edify] the body of Christ". The purpose of a gift given to any particular believer is not for his own edification, but that of the entire Body of Christ. This presupposes/necessitates the regular assembly and cooperation of believers in local churches.
- [13] The goal of the proper use of these spiritual gifts is "unity of the²⁰ faith" (i.e., doctrine; vv3-6) within the Church. It is most important that the Church be in unity relative to "the knowledge of the Son of God". The final state of a believer's process of sanctification is to become a "perfect man", just like "Christ" (Cp., Rom8:29; 1Jn3:2).
- [14] A "perfect man" (i.e., increasingly mature believer; v13) exercises doctrinal faithfulness and stability in the face of those who would "deceive" (cf. Matt24:4; Eph5:6; 2Thess2:3; 1Jn3:7), in contrast to spiritual "children" (Cp., 1Cor3:1-3) who are "tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine".
- [15] The believer must "**speak the truth** in love". The Word of God (i.e., the Bible) is "truth" (Jn17:17). It is never loving to omit, dilute, compromise, or deny "truth" in our communications with others. The example of this, and the standard of sanctification for members of the Body of Christ, is Christ our "head" (Rom8:29).
- [16] This verse metaphorically summarizes the purpose of Christ in giving gifts to the Church. By the proper and regular exercise of the gifts of all its members, the Church (which is the Body of Christ) becomes a healthy, fully-functional, and effective "body". The contrast is equally true; where members of a church fail to properly and regularly exercise their gifts, that church is unhealthy, dis-functional, and ineffective.

WALK AS A NEW MAN LED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

- [17] Addressing again believing "Gentiles", Paul exhorts them to no longer "walk" (used as a metaphor for *living*) as they formerly did. He characterizes their prior life foremost as a "vanity of [the] mind". **An unbeliever does not think properly** (cf. Rom1:18-25). By rejecting *revelation* (from God), the unbeliever creates his pagan worldview based on *rationalism* (i.e., human reasoning). However, reasoning based upon incomplete information can never result in truth²¹.
- [18] The "understanding" (Greek *διάνοια*, *way of thinking*) of unbelievers is characterized as "darkened", resulting in "ignorance" and "blindness". Their pagan worldview created based on rationalism has,

²⁰ When an article precedes the noun "faith", it is always the content of what is believed (i.e., doctrine) that is in view.

²¹ Since rationalism presupposes naturalism, it arbitrarily excludes the supernatural *a priori*. Thus, it is impossible for rationalism as a system to reason its way to God (cf. Prov1:7; 9:10; Jn17:17; Col2:2-3).

by definition, "alienated [them] from the life of God". Unbelievers always think they are intellectually superior to believers, but the opposite is true (Rom1:22).

- [19] Pagan worldviews constructed by unbelievers result in their "being past feeling" any personal accountability to God, which is the normal restraint to sinful behaviors (Cp., 1Tim4:2). Thus, they are freed to "[give] themselves over unto lasciviousness... uncleanness... greediness". This is the goal and inevitable result of the unbeliever's **idolatry**.

The Essence of Idolatry. In both the O.T. and N.T., God consistently emphasizes the prohibition of idolatry (cf. Ex20:3; Deut5:7; 1Jn5:21), even above immorality. The reason is that idolatry always (logically) comes first, with immorality inevitably following (cf. Rom1:18-32). Romans 1:18-22 indicates that God's revelation of Himself in the creation (i.e., general revelation) is clearly seen by all men, everywhere. The pagan mind must re-engineer its perception of reality in order to suppress the implications of this clear revelation, which is his personal responsibility to his Creator. **This re-engineering of reality to suppress God's clear revelation of Himself is the essence of IDOLATRY.** [Even if man's idolatry gives lip service to other "gods", they are gods made by man, after man's likeness, acceptable, manageable, etc. Whereas Jehovah declares that fornication is a sin, Baal has no such hang up.] Once the creature's accountability to his Creator has been dismissed, he is free to engage in any form of immorality with a 'clear conscience' (so to speak). This is why idolatry always comes first, even today, where modern "science falsely so called" (1Tim6:20) rationalizes the origin of the universe/life by means of a big bang/evolution cosmogony, thereby eliminating the need for a creator; and this is why God's prohibition of it always takes precedence, even above immorality. In a certain sense, it is idolatry that enables immorality.

- [20] The believer, however, has not "learned" of "Christ" through a rationalistic process.
- [21] Rather than constructing a worldview based on human reasoning, the believer has "heard" of "Jesus", and been "taught by him", through Scripture (i.e., revelation). The "truth is [found] in Jesus" (Jn14:6; Cp., Col2:2-3).
- [22] The "old man" is the unbeliever before conversion, who lives an immoral life enabled by his rationalistic and idolatrous worldview. But after hearing Jesus and being "taught by him" (v21), the believer's life ought to change. First, a believer should "put off" his "former manner of life". This is repentance from sin, but it comes after belief/conversion, not as a pre-condition for salvation (Cp., Act16:30-31; Rom10:9).
- [23] Second, a believer's "mind" should be "renewed" (Rom12:2). He should think differently. His thinking in every area of life (i.e., his worldview) should be informed and molded by the Bible (i.e., revelation), since God's Word alone is "truth" (Jn17:17).
- [24] Third, a believer should "put on" the "new man". The "new man" is the believer's new nature "created" by "God" upon belief/conversion

(i.e., regeneration; 2Cor5:17). The new nature is "righteous" and holy and cannot sin (1Jn3:9), since it is Christ formed in the believer (Col1:27) through which he "[partakes] of the divine nature" (2Pet1:4). However, the new nature does not replace or erase the old nature, since the old nature is inextricably linked to the mortal body; thus, the believer continues to live with both natures until he receives a new body at the resurrection. For this reason, the believer must choose to "put off" the "old man" (v22) and "put on" the "new man" (cf. Rom6:12-13).

COMMANDS FOR THE NEW MAN

- [25] Beginning in this verse and continuing through Ephesians 6:20 are a series of commands given to the "new man". Whereas "lying" is a behavior of the old man that must be "[put] away", the new man is to "speak ... truth" to "every man" since "we are members one of another"; in the Body of Christ, each member is mystically connected not only to the Head (Jesus Christ) but also to every other member.
- [26] The command is to "be ye angry". There are things that ought to anger the believer. Anger for a righteous cause is not a "sin" (Matt5:22), but it can lead to sin if unchecked. For this reason, the believer is commanded to not allow anger to continue from one day to the next.
- [27] Grammatically, this verse is connected to the previous verse. The "devil" will use unchecked anger as an opportunity to exploit for his gain (cf. Eph6:11-12).
- [28] The opposite of "steal[ing]" is "labor". Stealing is a sin that should be put away. The command is for the believer to "labor", which was God's primeval purpose for man (Gen2:15). The coming Kingdom of God will not be a time when man ceases from "labor", but a time when man's "labor" will be maximally joyful, productive, and rewarding (cf. Gen3:17-18; Isa65:21-23; Amos9:13-14).
- [29] The believer is commanded to put away all "corrupt communication" and speak so as to "edify" and "minister grace" (Cp., Jas3:1-12).
- [30] The "Holy Spirit of God" is a Person and can experience the emotion of grief. It is the "Holy Spirit" who has "sealed" the believer (Eph1:13-14), securing his salvation despite continued sinning until "the day of redemption" of his body (i.e., the resurrection). Until the believer receives a new body, he is still capable of sin. To refrain from sin, he must "put on the new man" (v24), elsewhere called "walk[ing] in the Spirit" (Gal5:16). Every failure to do so "grieve[s]" the "Holy Spirit".
- [31] If not understood properly, this verse might be seen to contradict v26, since it appears to say "put away ... anger". The one being addressed in this verse is "you with all malice". That is, the one motivated by "malice" (i.e., an intent to inflict harm without justification) rather than righteousness is commanded to "put away" his "bitterness", "wrath", "anger", "clamor", and "evil speaking". The verse is a command for righteous rather than malicious intentions.

- [32] Finally, this verse commands believers to show grace to "one another" in the same way "as God, for Christ's sake" (i.e., because of the propitious work of Christ; Rom3:23-26), has shown grace to them (i.e., believers, those God has "forgiven").

CHAPTER 5

The commands relative to the expected behavior of believers who "put on the new man" (Eph4:24) continue through Chapter 5.

- [1] The word translated "followers" literally means *imitators*. Just as "children" naturally follow/imitate their fathers, so believers ought to imitate "God" the Father.
- [2] Believers should "walk in love", the standard of which is "as Christ" (Cp., 1Jn4:16). Christ demonstrated His "love" in giving Himself an "offering" and a "sacrifice to God" for us (Rom5:8). That Christ's "sacrifice" is described as having a "sweet-smelling savor" to God emphasizes it was freely given (cf. Lev1:3,9; 2:1,2; 3:1,5). Believers benefit from both the life and death of Christ; His life is an example for us to imitate (v1), and His death was a propitiation for our sins (1Jn2:2).
- [3] In contrast, "fornication", "uncleanness", and "covetousness" should "not be once named among [believers]". These three sins (or classes of sins) seem to be viewed together as one, since the singular pronoun "it" is used to refer to all of them in the command. Fornication used in its connotative sense encompasses all sexual immorality. While the believer living in the Church Age (i.e., the Dispensation of Grace) is not under the Mosaic Covenant (Rom6:14-15; Gal5:18), God very explicitly defined sexual immorality in scope and detail in that covenant's law code (Lev18:1-23; 20:10-21); God's definition of sexual sins does not change, so the definition given in the Law of Moses applies in all dispensations²².
- [4] In this context, the sins of "filthiness", "foolish talking", and "jesting" are seemingly all related to a believer's speech. Filthiness probably refers to the use of obscenities. Jestings, used in a negative sense, means to twist words from their objective meaning. Speech of this kind is not "convenient" (which has the archaic meaning of *fitting, suitable, or proper*) for the believer. Rather, the speech of a believer should be used for the "giving of thanks".
- [5] The "fornicator", "unclean person", or "covetous man" refer back to the sexual sins of v3. Those guilty of these sins will not have "any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God". First, it is clear in the Greek text that "the kingdom of Christ and of God" refer to the same thing, not two different kingdoms; it is the Messianic Kingdom, the future one-thousand year reign of Christ on this present earth (the final dispensation). Second, idolatry is connected to covetousness in the N.T. (Cp., Col3:5). Covetousness is the lustful desire for what one does not, or cannot, have; the essence of

²² As an illustration of this, note that God judged the Gentile peoples indigenous to Canaan for committing the sexual sins listed in Leviticus 18 and 20, even though they were not parties to the Mosaic Covenant (cf. Lev18:24-30; 20:23).

idolatry is the construction of a man-made, pagan worldview for the purpose of giving license to covetousness. Furthermore, sexual licentiousness or marital unfaithfulness (i.e., adultery) is often used in the Bible in a figurative to mean idolatry (i.e., the worship of gods other than Jehovah; cf. 1Chron5:25 Jer3:6-9; Ezek23:17-21; Hos9:1). Beyond these straight-forward observations, this verse presents some challenges in interpretation.

Incorrect Interpretations. (1) This verse cannot mean that those guilty of sexual sins or idolatry cannot be saved, since elsewhere Paul alludes to the fact that many Gentile believers were guilty of such sins in their past lives (Cp., 1Cor6:9-11; 1Thess1:6). (2) The Calvinistic/Reformed (e.g., Lordship Salvation) tradition understands this verse to mean that professing believers who continue to habitually commit such sins are not genuine believers, thus they are not saved. The problem with this understanding is two-fold: 1) the number of times or frequency of committing these sins necessary to qualify as continual/habitual is undefined and subjective, and 2) the expectation of a specified behavior in order to be genuinely saved adds works to grace (cf. Rom4:2-6; Eph2:8-9).

Proper Interpretation. Use of the word "inheritance" applies to the nation of Israel and the Mosaic Covenant (not the Church or the New Covenant). Israel was promised "inheritance" in the Messianic Kingdom contingent upon obedience under that covenant (Exod19:5-6; cf. Matt25:34). In this verse, Paul is making an allusion to Israel under the Mosaic Covenant to illustrate how heinous God considers sexual sins to be. Sexual sins were proscribed under the Law of Moses, and the Law required that persons guilty of such sins be executed (e.g., Lev20:10,13,15-16) or cut off from the nation (e.g., Lev20:17-18), thereby preventing them from inheriting "the kingdom of [Messiah]" had He suddenly appeared to the nation. In contrast, the Church has no promised "inheritance" in the Messianic kingdom, but will participate in it (by grace) as the Bride of Christ. Nevertheless, the heinousness of sexual sins has not changed, and they should "not be once named among" members of the Body of Christ (v3), especially since the relationship between Christ and the Church is characterized under the metaphor of a covenant of marriage (cf. Eph5:22-32).

- [6] Paul warns against being "deceive[d]" by "vain words" relative to the seriousness of sexual immorality/idolatry. Indeed, it was for the sin of idolatry that Jehovah brought "wrath" (i.e., righteous judgment) upon the nation of Judah in the past (cf. 2Chron33:1-9; Jer15:4) and will do so again upon the nation of Israel during the Tribulation (cf. Ezek20:33-40).
- [7] Paul's command is that the Church not "partake" in the same sins that brought wrath upon the nation of Israel.
- [8] Since believers have received "light" (i.e., illumination, which gives understanding of spiritual things; cf. 1Cor2:9-16) from "the Lord", they are expected to "walk as children of light". Our lives ought to be changed by the truth we "now" know.
- [9] The "fruit of the Spirit" here is said to include "goodness", "righteousness", and "truth". This list is abbreviated relative to the list Paul gives in Galatians 5:22-23, and only "goodness" is

common to both. Thus, these lists should be considered illustrative, not exhaustive.

- [10] Believers walking as children of light (v8), thereby exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit (v9), "prov[es] what is acceptable (i.e., pleasing) unto the Lord" (Rom12:1-2), in the same way that gold demonstrates its purity when subjected to fire (Cp., 1Pet1:7).
- [11] Believers should separate from those who practice "unfruitful works of darkness" (Cp., 2Cor6:14-17), but also "reprove them" on the basis of Scripture (2Tim3:16-17) so that our avoidance cannot be confused with acceptance or implicit approval.
- [12] Some sins "done ... in secret" are so vile it is "a shame even to speak" of them, since the mere description of them would defile the minds of both speaker and hearer. Believers should refrain from speaking of such things.
- [13] Here, the metaphor of "light" is defined as "whatever doth make manifest"; that which exposes sin and reveals truth is "light". For these reasons, Scripture applies the metaphor of "light" to both Jesus Christ (Jn1:4-9; 8:12) and the Word of God (Ps119:112,130; 2Pet1:19).
- [14] This may to be an allusion to Isaiah 26:19 together with Isaiah 60:1, although this is not certain. The English translation makes it sound sequential, but the construction in Greek does not demand this. Believers "awake" from sleep and "arise from the dead" because "Christ" has given us "light".
- Note on Calvinism. Calvinists have argued from the English translation of this verse that awakening from sleep/rising from the dead is a metaphor for regeneration, which is followed by receiving light; thus, they see this sequence as supporting their axiom that *regeneration precedes faith*. First, it is not at all clear, or necessary, that regeneration is the subject in view. Second, the necessary sequence is not sustained in the Greek text.
- [15] Believers are commanded to "walk circumspectly", which means to take into consideration all available information, but especially to allow God's revelation (i.e., the Bible) to inform all decisions (Prov1:7; 9:10). Those who make good decisions are "wise"; those who make bad decisions are "fools".
- [16] One of the most important decisions a believer must make is how to most wisely make use of his "time", especially in light of the fact that "the days are evil" in two senses: 1) Satan is always working to deceive the world (2Cor4:4; Rev20:3), and 2) the duration of a believer's "days" (i.e., lifetime), during which he can oppose Satan and serve the Lord, is both uncertain and short (cf. Job14:1-5; Ps90:1-12; Jas4:14).
- [17] For the believer to "[understand] what the will of the Lord is" is given as a command; this can only come as a result of the study of Scripture (Ps119:169; 2Tim2:15).
- [18] Drunkenness is a sin that often leads to "excess" (i.e., indulgence in additional sins; debauchery). Furthermore, it is a foolish use of

the believer's limited time (v16). Rather than be filled with "wine" (which results in drunkenness), the believer is commanded to "be filled with the Spirit". The parallel passage in Colossians 3:16 says "let the word of Christ dwell in you richly", and the parallelism of Proverbs 1:23 sets "I will pour out my spirit unto you" and "I will make known my words unto you" as synonymous. Thus, to be "filled with the Spirit" is to be overflowing with a knowledge of Scripture.

- [19] The life of a Spirit-filled (v18) believer should be evidenced by four activities. First, "speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs", which is communication that is saturated with the words of Scripture and Biblical themes. Ordinary believers in the first century did not enjoy the blessing of having Bibles and/or books in their homes; as a result, much of their Biblical knowledge was set in memory as a result of singing in their assemblies. Second, "singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord". The joy believers possess (Act13:52) ought to naturally result in singing, metaphorically (i.e., "in your heart") if not literally.
- [20] Third, "giving thanks always for all things". Since "we know that all things work together for good to them that love God" (Rom8:28), the believer should be diligent to thank "God ... the Father" for "all things". Implicit in this verse is the Biblical convention for prayer; it is to be addressed to "God the Father" (Matt6:9) and offered "in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Jn14:13-14; 15:16).
- [21] Fourth, "submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of the Lord". That is, exhibiting proper (Biblical) submission in all of our earthly relationships. Illustrations of this are the subject of Ephesians 5:22-6:9.

PROPER (BIBLICAL) SUBMISSION IN RELATIONSHIPS

In the Bible meekness is not weakness, but the voluntary submission to proper authority. The two persons Scripture offers as human standards for meekness are Moses (Num12:3) and the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt11:29; 2Cor10:1). The fruit of the Spirit in the life of the believer includes "meekness" (Gal5:23). Meekness is the idea behind the command for believers to "[submit] yourselves one to another in the fear of the Lord" (Eph5:21). Meekness in the life of the believer manifests itself differently in different relationships, and for different parties in those relationships. How Biblical meekness/submission manifests itself in three important relationships is illustrated in Ephesians 5:22-6:9: 1) the husband/wife relationship (Eph5:22-33), 2) the parent/child relationship (Eph6:1-4), and 3) the master/servant relationship (Eph6:5-9).

(1) HUSBANDS AND WIVES

- [22] Marriage is a divine institution²³. In the marriage relationship, "wives" should "submit ... unto your own husbands". The standard of

²³ **Divine institutions** are social structures defined and instituted by God Himself at the very beginning of creation. They are the foundations for human civilization and apply to the entire human race (both believers and unbelievers) in all places and at all times. The divine institutions include: 1) human dominion, 2) marriage, and 3) family. It should be no surprise that all the divine institutions are subject to unrelenting attack from demonic and human enemies of God.

this submission is "as unto the Lord" (i.e., a wife should submit to her husband as if he were the Lord Jesus Christ). A believer's submission "unto the Lord" is a voluntary response to His proffered love and grace (Cp., v25).

- [23] The marriage relationship is a model (i.e., type) of the relationship between Christ and the Church. As "Christ" is the "head" of the "church" (Eph1:22; Col1:18), the "husband" is to function as the "head" of the "wife" in the same way. Here, "savior of the body" is a reference to the Body of Christ.
- [24] The headship of husbands in the marriage relationship means that "wives" should "subject ... themselves to their own husbands in everything" in the same way that "the church is subject unto Christ". Note that submission of the wife to the husband is not an historical or cultural convention that can be dismissed today, but was God's original plan for the divine institution of marriage (cf. Gen2:18; 1Cor11:3,8-9). Subjection within relationships is not demeaning, but is necessary for order (1Cor14:40).
- [25] Conversely, "husbands" should "love" their "wives" in the same way that "Christ ... loved the church" (Cp., Jn15:12); thus, an infinitely high standard is set for men as "husbands". Christ so loved the Church that He "gave himself for it" (Act20:28); similarly, the husband should give himself for his wife in every way, up to and including his own death.
- [26] Christ gave Himself for the Church (v25) first to "cleanse it", then to "sanctify" it²⁴. A rendering of this verse in English that better follows the grammatical structure/syntax of the Greek would be:

That having cleansed [the Church] with the washing of the water,
he might sanctify it by the word;

The Greek word translated "washing" means *to bathe* and is used metaphorically in reference to regeneration (Tit3:5). The process of sanctifying the believer follows regeneration and comes "by [means of] the word". Here, "word" is $\rho\acute{\eta}\mu\alpha$, which generally connotes the spoken word (Cp., Jn15:3); nonetheless, it is the Word of God that is the means of sanctification in the life of the believer (cf. Jn17:17). This same metaphorical pattern of first a one-time bathing of the entire body (i.e., justification/regeneration) followed by routine foot-washing (i.e., sanctification) was taught by Jesus to His disciples (Jn13:10).

- [27] The work of Christ in the regeneration/sanctification of the Church pertains to much more than saving individual members of the Body of Christ; it has in view the preparation of the Church to become the Bride of Christ (cf. 2Cor11:2; Eph5:32; Rev19:7-8).
- [28] Man's love of himself is not commanded, but presumed (Cp., Luk10:27b). That being said, a man's self-esteem should be evident in his "love" for his "wife".

²⁴ That the order is sequential, first cleansing and then sanctifying, is clear in the Greek text.

- [29] Even a man who is unsatisfied with his own body "nourisheth and cherisheth it". In the same way, "the Lord [nourisheth and cherisheth] the church".
- [30] All believers during the Dispensation of Grace (i.e., the Church Age; Eph3:1) become "members" of the "body" of Christ (Eph1:22-23; Col1:18) by means of Spirit baptism (1Cor12:12-13), even to the extent that Paul speaks of believers as "members" of Christ's *physical* body (i.e., "flesh" and "bones"). These are the same terms in which Adam spoke of his bride (Gen2:23).
- [31] This is a quotation of Genesis 2:24 relative to the very first marriage (i.e., Adam and Eve), thus establishing the supremacy of love and devotion between husband and wife within the divine institution of marriage. In the same way that Eve literally came from the body of Adam and became his wife (Gen2:23-24), so the Church is the Body of Christ that will become His Bride (Rev19:7-8).
- [32] That the divine institution of marriage is a model (i.e., type) of the relationship between "Christ and the church" is a "**great** mystery" (i.e., truth unrevealed until the Apostle Paul; cf. 2Cor11:2; Eph3:3-5). Since Adam is a type of Christ (1Cor15:45,47), Eve must be a type of the Bride of Christ. It is because marriage is the supreme type of the relationship between Christ and the Church that any dissolution of it is prohibited (Matt19:3-6).
- [33] This verse summarizes the expectations for husband and wife in marriage. Wives need the "love" of their husbands, and husbands need the "reverence" of their wives.

CHAPTER 6

(2) PARENTS AND CHILDREN

- [1] "Children" should "obey [their] parents". Note that "obey" and "submit" are not identical (cf. Eph5:22); submission relates to *rank* or *role* instituted for the purpose of order. The family is also a divine institution. Whereas earthly marriage is (in effect) the training ground for the believer's relationship to Christ, the earthly family is the training ground for the believer's relationship to God (the Father); that is, the believer should obey God and submit to the Lord Jesus Christ. Children that do not learn to honor and obey their parents will not honor and obey God (Cp., Prov22:6).
- [2] To illustrate the importance of the divine institution of the family, Paul points to the fact that the command to "honor thy father and mother" was included in the Ten Commandments of the Mosaic Covenant (Exod20:12; Deut5:16), and that the "promise" attached to keeping that particular command was actually enshrined with it.
- [3] Paul paraphrases the promise attached to honoring parents in the Mosaic Covenant as that "thou mayest live long on the earth". In both Hebrew and Greek, there is only one word meaning both land and earth, with the distinction made from context. In the context of the Mosaic Covenant, the living long promise related to dwelling in the promised "land" of Israel (dispersion from the land of Israel was the ultimate curse of the Mosaic Covenant; Lev26:32-39; Deut28:63-68).

Here, Paul seemingly makes a spiritual application to the believer in the Dispensation of Grace that a long life on this "earth" depends (in part) on honoring the divine institution of family.

- [4] In the divine institution of family, the human "father" is a model (i.e., type) of God the Father. On the negative side, "fathers" should "provoke not [their] children" with arbitrary or unreasonable demands; on the positive side they should "bring them up in "nurture" and "admonition of the Lord". The Greek word translated "nurture" relates to the training of children that includes the use of discipline to correct mistakes (cf. Prov29:15); "admonition of the Lord" relates to instruction in the Scriptures (cf. Deut6:4-7; 2Tim3:15).

(3) MASTERS AND SERVANTS

- [5] Though not as immediately obvious, the relationship between "masters" and "servants" relates to the divine institution of dominion (i.e., human labor). "Servants" should "be obedient to" (same as v1) their "masters" relative to work assignments (in our contemporary context, the expectations associated with the master-servant relationship probably best applies to the employer-employee relationship).
- [6] Human labor is a noble endeavor. Responsible labor that is consistent with God's primeval dominion mandate (cf. Gen1:26-28) for the human race is "the will of God".
- [7] Servants should labor for their human masters just as they would for "Christ" (v6) or the "Lord".
- [8] Responsible, honest, and "good" labor can expect to "receive" a reward, if not from a human master in the present life, then "of the Lord" (cf. Rev22:12). The final clause, "whether he be bond or free", indicates that these expectations apply to the laborer regardless of whether his service is compelled or given voluntarily.
- [9] As for the "masters", they should "do the same things" (i.e., conduct themselves nobly), "knowing" they will be held accountable to their own "Master ... in heaven" (i.e., God), with whom there is no "respect of persons" (i.e., God does not view the role of "master" as spiritually superior to that of "servant").

THE BELIEVER AND SPIRITUAL WARFARE

The cosmic warfare motif latent throughout this epistle reaches its climax in Ephesians 6:10-20. The believer is expected to recognize the existence and nature of the war raging around him, avail himself of the spiritual resources the Lord has provided for his use, and personally enter the battle. While many have speculated that Paul's inspiration for this discourse came as he observed the soldier(s) guarding him continuously during his imprisonment in Rome, it should be noted that the metaphors used come from O.T. descriptions of Jehovah's own armor.

- [10] The believer has no innate strength/power, he is to "be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might" (Cp., Zech4:6; Phil4:13). The verb translated "be strong" is in the present tense, imperative mood,

passive voice, and might be understood more literally as to *be made strong* by the Lord, and with the power of His might (i.e., the armor described below is His armor).

- [11] The believer must choose (moment-by-moment) to “put on the whole armor of God”. The “armor” is God’s armor. The Greek word translated “whole armor” is *πανοπλία*; its transliteration is the English word *panoply*, and it means a complete/full suit of armor (including weapons). Note that: 1) it should be “put on” in its entirety, else a vulnerability will exist that the enemy can exploit, and 2) it should be “put on” prior to entering the battle.

The purpose in putting on God’s armor is so that the believer “may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil”. The word “wiles” means *schemes designed to deceive*. Deception has been, is, and always will be the “devil[’s]” primary means of attack (Cp., 2Cor2:11; Eph4:14; Rev20:3).

Spiritual Warfare in the Context of Ephesians. Why did the Holy Spirit choose to put the “whole armor of God” discourse in the context of the Epistle to the Ephesians? Two profound truths are asserted/revealed by God in Ephesians: 1) the gospel of pure grace (Eph2:8-9; Cp., Gall:6-9), and 2) the mystery nature of the Church (Eph3:1-10). Paul previously prophesied that Satan would attack the church at Ephesus (Act20:29-30) in order to pervert these truths.

- [12] The believer’s battle is “not against flesh and blood” (i.e., men; Cp., 2Cor10:3-4). Unbelieving men are captives (of Satan; 2Tim2:25-26) in this war; they are not enemies to be destroyed, but prisoners to be liberated (by the gospel; 2Cor4:4).

Rather, the believer’s battle is “against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in [the heavenly realm]” (i.e., the highly-organized spiritual forces of Satan). Satan and his fallen angels are the declared enemies of God, and their eternal damnation has already been decreed (Matt25:41); they are to be given no quarter, offered no mercy, but destroyed (Heb2:14).

God’s Holy Wars. Holy War is war commanded by God for the purpose of destroying an enemy that is the subject of His damnation. The example of Holy War in the O.T. is Jehovah’s command for Israel to utterly destroy the Canaanites (Deut7:1-2), a people cursed by the LORD (Gen9:25). In the N.T., the Church is commanded to wage Holy War against the fallen host of heaven (Eph6:12) that has been damned by God (Matt25:41; Rev20:10). Holy War is God’s war waged against His enemies, men are merely soldiers in it. Holy War only occurs in the absence of grace, when God has determined to judge.

- [13] The believer is commanded (using military terminology) “to stand” (i.e., stand fast, do not retreat). If he has put on “the whole armor of God”, he will “be able to withstand” every assault of the “devil” (v11; Cp., 1Pet5:8-9). The “evil day” is not the Day of the LORD, which is called “great and terrible” (Mal4:5); rather, it is the “day” (i.e., age) in which we live (2Tim3:13).

[14] It may be that some have made more of the metaphors that occur in verses 14-17 than is warranted. Rather than a myopic focus on the details of the armaments, a broader view is probably more appropriate. Just as every component of a complete suit of armor (i.e., a panoply) was necessary to equip the ancient warrior to "stand" in battle, so it is essential that a believer be armed with each and every spiritual provision available to him from God (Cp., 2Tim3:17); any component that is lacking creates a vulnerability that can be exploited by the enemy. The seven (7) elements that comprise the "whole armor of God" are:

1) "having your loins girded about (i.e., girdle/belt) with **truth**" (cf. Isa11:5). The conflict between God and Satan is a war over "truth". God has provided "truth" in the Person of Jesus Christ (Jn14:6) and the Bible (Jn17:17), and Satan ever attempts to deny (e.g., Gen3:4) or pervert (e.g., 2Cor2:17; 2Pet3:16) the "truth". The spiritual warrior must be armed with "truth" (Jn4:23-24).

2) "the breastplate of **righteousness**" (cf. Isa59:17). This is not personal righteousness (Isa64:6; Rom3:10), but the righteousness of Christ (i.e., God) imputed to the believer (Rom1:16-17; 2Cor5:21). The spiritual warrior must be armed with "righteousness" (Heb12:14).

[15] 3) "feet shod with ... **the gospel** of peace" (cf. Isa52:7; Nah1:15). In this dispensation, there is only one gospel that has the power to liberate those held captive by Satan (2Cor4:4), the gospel of grace (Act16:30-31; 1Cor15:1-4; Gall:6-9). The spiritual warrior must be armed with "the gospel" (Rom10:14-17; 1Cor1:21-23).

[16] 4) "the shield of **faith**" (cf. Prov30:5; Ps115:11). "Above all" indicates "faith" holds greater importance than all the others. In its broadest sense, "faith" is believing all that God has said (i.e., the Bible; cf. Rom4:19-21; 10:17; Heb11:1-3). The spiritual warrior must be armed with "faith" (Heb10:23).

[17] 5) "the helmet of **salvation**" (cf. Isa59:17). Since the believer's "salvation" is secure and can never be lost (Jn10:27-29; Eph1:13; 1Pet1:5), he has confidence to "stand" (vv13-14) even to the point of death knowing that ultimate victory is sure (1Cor15:54-57; Rev2:13; 14:13). The spiritual warrior must be armed with "salvation" (2Cor6:2).

6) "the sword of the Spirit, which is **the word of God**" (cf. Isa49:2; Cp., Rev1:16; 19:15). Here, "word" is **ῥῆμα**, which generally connotes the spoken word. As Jesus quoted God's word when tempted by Satan (Matt4:4,7,10; Luk4:4,8,12), so the weapon of the believer should be "the word of God" (2Cor10:4-5; Heb4:12). A believer whose mind is not so saturated with "the word of God" that it can be quoted from memory as needed is not prepared for battle (Ps1:1-2; 119:11). The spiritual warrior must be armed with "the word of God" (2Tim2:15; 3:16).

[18] 7) "praying always" (**prayer**; cf. Ps64:1). Prayer is not always recognized as a component of "the whole armor of God" (v13), but it is essential. No soldier can survive completely on his own, but needs the support of others. As the modern soldier radios for artillery or air support, so prayer is the spiritual soldier's channel of communication to call upon God to provide help from afar

(Ps50:15; Matt7:7-11). The spiritual warrior must ever avail himself of prayer (Luk22:40; 1Thess5:17).

The prayer of a believer is not only offered on his own behalf, but also "for all saints" who are similarly engaged in their spiritual battles.

- [19] Paul requests prayer for himself, especially so that in the face of much opposition he will be emboldened to "make known the mystery of the gospel". The saving "gospel" (even for Gentiles) can be found in the O.T. prophets (cf. Isa49:22-23; Joel2:32; Rom10:11,13) and is never said to be a "mystery" (cf. Jn3:16; 1Cor15:1-4). Here, by "the mystery of the gospel" Paul must mean the unique aspect of the Dispensation of Grace in which the Jew and the Gentile who believe "the gospel" are made equal before God in the Body of Christ (Eph3:1-6); he previously noted that his apostleship was to "make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery" (Eph3:9).
- [20] Indeed, it was Paul's preaching of the mystery (i.e., equality of Jew and Gentile in the Church) that resulted in his being put into "bonds" (Act22:21-22). Here Paul asserts himself to be an "ambassador"; elsewhere he teaches that Christians are citizens of heaven (Phil3:20) who are ambassadors for Christ (2Cor5:20).

CONCLUSION

- [21] "Tychicus", whom Paul characterizes as "a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord", carried this epistle from Paul in Rome to the church at Ephesus.
- [22] Tychicus is mentioned five times in the N.T., generally noted to be Paul's companion or emissary (cf. Act20:4; Col4:7; 2Tim4:12; Tit3:12).
- [23] "Peace" is the standard farewell in Hebrew (i.e., *shalom*); Paul addresses it to "the brethren", by which he may have in mind the Jewish believers (Cp., Rom9:3-4).
- [24] Paul closes Ephesians as he does all his epistles by commending his readers to "grace" (cf. 2Thess3:17-18). No one understood the grace of God better than the Apostle Paul, who had benefited so immensely from it (cf. 1Cor15:9-10; 1Tim1:12-15). This farewell he addresses to "all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity", by which he may intend to include the Gentile believers. He affirms the truth of the inspired words of this epistle with "Amen" (i.e., the Hebrew word meaning *truth*).

--- S.D.G. ---

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