

Study of Ephesians

Wiersbe, W. W. (1992). [*Wiersbe's expository outlines on the New Testament*](#). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Introductory to Ephesians

I. The City

Ephesus was one of the great cities of Asia Minor: a Roman capital, a center for the worship of Diana, and a wealthy commercial center, located on an ample harbor that invited world trade. The temple of Diana was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, and the worship of this goddess was jealously guarded (see Acts 19:23ff). Ephesus was the chief city of that area, so it is no wonder Paul stayed there for three years (Acts 20:31) and that from the city the Gospel spread out to “all Asia” (Acts 19:10).

II. The Church

Paul paid a brief visit to Ephesus on his second journey, leaving his associates Priscilla and Aquila there (Acts 18:18–28). He returned to Ephesus on his third journey and remained there for three years (Acts 20:31). He began his ministry in the Jewish synagogue; when his countrymen rejected his message, he moved into the school of a teacher named Tyrannus (Acts 19:9) and preached and taught for about two years. His ministry had a tremendous effect on the city: those who practiced witchcraft turned to Christ and burned their books of magical incantations; many people were won to the worship of the true God; and the profits of the silversmiths (who sold shrines of Diana) were greatly undermined. Paul's clear teaching and preaching of the Word of God so aroused the enemy that a riot resulted, and Paul was forced to leave the city. Later (Acts 20) he met the Ephesian elders while he was traveling back to Jerusalem.

III. The Letter

Paul was a Roman prisoner when he wrote this letter (Eph. 3:1; 4:1). How he became a prisoner is recorded in Acts 21:15ff. While in Jerusalem, Paul went to the temple and was arrested on false charges. His “trial” was indecisive, but he was imprisoned for two years at Caesarea (Acts 21:27–26:32). When Paul appealed for a trial before the emperor, he was then sent to Rome (Acts 27–28). While a prisoner in his own house, Paul was free to receive visitors, and it was at this time that he wrote Ephesians. The letter was carried by Tychicus (6:21), who probably also helped to deliver the letter to Colosse, along with Onesimus (Col. 4:7–9).

While the letter was directed to the church at Ephesus, there is reason to believe that it was circulated among the many churches of Asia Minor. You will note that the letter deals with church truth in general, not the kind of local problems you would find in

the two Corinthian letters or 1 Thessalonians. In every sense, Ephesians is Paul's greatest word on the church, teaching us what the church is in the mind of God, and what it ought to be in practice before the eyes of men. Paul's theme is Christ and the church, the eternal plan of God to gather together all things in Christ Jesus. The letter begins in eternity past and carries us to eternity future! We see the believer seated in the heavenlies, but also walking with Christ on earth and fighting against Satan. While Ephesians does not tell us all God wants us to know about the church, there is no part of the Bible that soars any higher in church doctrine or practical Christian living. It is interesting to compare the description of Paul's Ephesus ministry in Acts 20 with the doctrines taught in the Ephesian epistle.

IV. The Church in Ephesians

In the prison letters (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians), Paul deals with the church collectively as the body of Christ, the bride, and the temple. In the pastoral epistles (such as Timothy and Titus), he deals with the church serving Christ as a local body. Both emphases are necessary for a balanced ministry. Certainly God sees the whole body with Christ as the Head; but as far as the ministry is concerned, He works through the local assemblies in different places. The "church universal" (body of Christ) into which the believer is baptized by the Spirit is a valid concept; but the "universal church" concept is not a substitute for the action of the local church. The "universal church" never sent out a missionary, built a hospital, observed the Lord's Supper, or helped a needy family. It is the local church that receives the greater emphasis in the NT, but the ministry of the local church will be stronger if the members realize their position in the body of Christ.

Ephesians 1

The key thought in this chapter is the wealth of blessings we have as Christians, spiritual blessings that are ours because we are in Christ (1:3). Paul informs us that each Person of the Godhead has blessed us (vv. 1–14), and then he prays that we might understand these blessings and the power they can be in our lives (vv. 15–23).

I. Blessings from the Father (1:1–6)

A. He has chosen us (vv. 3–4).

This is the wonderful doctrine of election, a doctrine that we cannot fully explain but one we can fully enjoy. Do not try to explain away the mystery of grace. God did not choose us in ourselves; He chose us in Christ, by grace. Note 1 Cor. 1:26–29; 2 Thes. 2:13–14; and John 6:37.

B. He has adopted us (v. 5).

"Election" refers to persons; predestination to purposes for those persons. God elects us to be saints (set-apart ones), then predestines that certain purposes in our lives shall

come to pass (see Rom. 8:28ff). “Adoption” in the NT refers to the official act of a father who bestows the status of full adulthood on a son of minor status. It is not the taking in of an outsider; it is the placing of a family member into the privileges and blessings of adulthood. This means that even the youngest Christian has everything that Christ has and is rich in grace.

C. He has accepted us (v. 6).

In ourselves, we are not acceptable to God, but in Christ, we are “made accepted.” Read the Epistle to Philemon for a beautiful illustration of this truth. Paul wrote, “Receive your slave Onesimus as you would receive me” (Phile. 17). Though we have sinned, Christ says to the Father, “Receive this saint as you would receive Me.” Trace that wonderful phrase “in Christ” throughout Paul’s letters—you will be thrilled!

II. Blessings from the Son (1:7–12)

A. He has redeemed us (v. 7a).

By giving His life on the cross, Christ purchased us from the slavery of sin. We have a present redemption in that He has delivered us from the penalty and power of sin; we shall have a future redemption (v. 14) when Christ delivers us from the presence of sin at His return.

B. He has forgiven us (v. 7b).

The word “forgive” literally means “to send away.” Sin is a terrible burden that is sent away when a sinner turns to Christ. Christ carried the burden on the cross (1 Peter 2:24). It is pictured by the scapegoat on the Day of Atonement, taken into the wilderness (Lev. 16:20–22).

C. He has revealed God’s will to us (vv. 8–10).

A “mystery” is a divine truth known only by God’s people through revelation. In Christ we are a part of God’s eternal purpose to gather together “all things in Christ” (v. 10). This present world is falling apart with war, strife, and sin. But one day God will usher in a new creation, with all things united in Christ.

D. He has made us an inheritance (vv. 11–12).

God has not only given us an inheritance in Christ (1 Peter 1:3–4), but He has made us an inheritance for Christ. The church is His body, temple, and bride; we shall some day share His glory.

III. Blessings from the Spirit (1:13–14)

A. He has sealed us (v. 13).

This important verse outlines the way of salvation. The sinner hears the Word of Truth, trusts in Christ, receives the Holy Spirit, and is sealed forever. “After that ye believed” ought to be “when ye believed,” for the Spirit enters the heart the instant the sinner trusts Christ. This sealing means God owns us and will keep us. Nobody can break God’s seal!

B. He has given us an earnest (v. 14).

“Earnest money” in business means money given as a down payment for a purchased possession. Christ has purchased our future for us, but we have not yet entered into all the blessings. God has given us His Spirit as the “down payment” to assure us that we will experience total redemption and receive God’s promised blessings in glory.

Please note that at the end of each of these three sections, Paul tells why the Father, the Son, and the Spirit have given us these blessings: “To the praise of His glory” (vv. 6, 12, 14b). Salvation is by God’s grace and for God’s glory! God does not have to save anybody; when He does save the sinner, He does so for His own glory.

IV. Prayer for Understanding (1:15–23)

There are two prayers in Ephesians: (1) “that you might know,” 1:15–23; and (2) “that you might be,” 3:13–21. The first is for enlightenment, the second for enablement. Paul prays first that we might know what Christ has done for us; then he prays that we might live up to these wonderful blessings and put them to work in our daily lives. Notice Paul’s requests:

A. That God may give you spiritual understanding (vv. 17–18a).

Spiritual truths must be spiritually discerned (1 Cor. 2:9–16), and this understanding can come only from the Spirit. He wrote the Word; He alone can teach us what it says.

B. That you might know the hope of His calling (v. 18b).

Because God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, we have a blessed hope for all eternity that depends not on our goodness but on His grace. Review vv. 4–6, where this calling is summarized for us. The Christian who does not know his high calling (Phil. 3:14), holy calling (2 Tim. 1:9), and heavenly calling (Heb. 3:1) will never be able to walk worthy of that calling (Eph. 4:1, where “vocation” is “calling”).

C. That you might know the riches of His inheritance (v. 18c).

We not only have an inheritance in Christ, but we are an inheritance to Christ (see v. 11). The word “riches” appears often in Ephesians, suggesting that there is nothing lacking, nothing more that we need. Christians mature in the Lord when they learn how much they mean to Christ and then start living to bring joy to His heart.

D. That you might know His power (vv. 19–23).

The very power that raised Jesus from the dead is available for our daily lives! Christ has already won the victory over sin, death, the world, and Satan. God’s people do not fight for victory but from victory! We are seated with Him in the heavenlies, where there are power, peace, and victory.

Of course, all these blessings are only for those who meet the conditions set forth in vv. 1–2. Note that Paul writes to living saints (not dead ones), people who have put faith in Christ. These saints (set-apart ones) have experienced God’s grace and now enjoy God’s peace. Nowhere does the Bible teach that the church makes people saints; only God can make a sinner a saint. And the sinner must become a saint while he is still alive, for after death is the judgment (Heb. 9:27).

Ephesians 2

Chapter 1 emphasized our possessions in Christ; chapter 2 emphasizes our position in Christ. Your position determines your possessions and authority. Regardless of where the President of the United States may be physically, his position as the man who sits behind the desk in the White House gives him power and authority. So with the Christian. Regardless of where we might be physically (Paul was a prisoner when he wrote this letter), we have power and authority in the spiritual realm because of our position in Christ.

I. We Are Raised and Seated on the Throne (2:1–10)

A. *What we were (vv. 1–3).*

What a picture of the lost sinner! To begin with, sinners are dead spiritually; that is, the inner man is dead to spiritual things and cannot respond to them. The Gospels describe the resurrections of three people that Jesus raised from the dead: (1) a twelve-year-old girl, Luke 8:49–55; (2) a young man, Luke 7:12–15; and (3) an older man, John 11. Each of them was dead; the only difference was their state of decomposition. Lazarus had been buried for four days and had begun to smell! All sinners are dead, regardless of age; the only difference between the unsaved church member and the vagrant on skid row is the state of decay. Sinners are not only dead, they are enslaved by the world and live for its pleasures and fashions. Tell them that this world is under the condemnation of God and is passing away, and they will laugh at you. They are also enslaved by Satan, who is at work in the lives of unsaved people. This does not mean that he necessarily makes them drunkards or murderers; his usual tactic is to give people false security through self-righteousness. Jesus called the Pharisees “children of the devil” (John 8:44), yet they were religious, upstanding citizens.

We are born by nature children of wrath; when we reject Christ knowingly after reaching an age of accountability, we become children of disobedience by choice. When we trust Jesus Christ, we become children of God.

B. *What God did (vv. 4–9).*

“But God!” These words are among the greatest in the Bible. God could have allowed us to go on in sin and live eternally with the devil in hell, but instead He chose to save us. He gave us life (quicken us), raised us from the grave of sin, and took us out of the graveyard! More than that, He made us members of Christ! We have been quickened together, raised together, and we sit together in the heavenlies. God did this because He is rich in mercy and great in love. Mercy means that God does not give me what I do deserve; grace means that He gives me what I don’t deserve.

C. *What we are now (v. 10).*

We are His workmanship, His new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). Read Phil. 2:12–13 and dare to believe that God works in you! What does the future hold? We do not know, but we do know who holds the future. The same loving Father that chose me, called me, and saved me has also marked out a wonderful plan for my life! “Oh, to grace how great a debtor, daily I’m constrained to be!”

II. We Are Reconciled and Set into the Temple (2:11–22)

In the first half of this chapter, Paul has been telling us what God has done for sinners in general; now he discusses Jews and Gentiles in particular. God had made no messianic covenants with the Gentiles, but God had promised the Jews a kingdom. What is the status of Jews and Gentiles in God's program today?

A. *What the Gentiles were (vv. 11–12).*

God makes a distinction between Jews and Gentiles racially (1 Cor. 10:32), but not individually (Rom. 10:11–13). The Gentiles were without Christ; that is, they had no promise of a Messiah. They were not a part of the nation of Israel; in fact, the OT laws put a great gulf between Jews and Gentiles. Instead of being "the people of God," the Gentiles were aliens. They were strangers, without hope and without the true God in the world. Contrast this sad plight with the privileged position of Israel described in Rom. 9:4–5. Verse 13 sums up the Gentiles' condition in two words: "far off." While the problem of sinners in general (vv. 1–10) was spiritual death, the problem of the Gentiles in particular was spiritual distance from God and His blessings. Note in the Gospels that whenever Christ helped a Gentile, He did it at a distance (Matt. 8:5–13; 15:22–28).

B. *What God did (vv. 13–17).*

"But now" in v. 13 parallels "But God" in v. 4. When Christ died on the cross, He broke down every barrier that stood between Jews and Gentiles. In the Jewish temple, there was a wall that separated the "Court of the Gentiles" from the rest of the structure; and on this wall was a sign giving warning that any Gentile who passed beyond it would be killed. Jesus Christ tore down that wall! He tore down the physical wall, for in Christ all are made one (v. 15, and see Gal. 3:28–29). He tore down the spiritual wall and brought the "far off" Gentiles near (v. 13). He tore down the legal wall, for He fulfilled the Law in Himself and ended the reign of the Mosaic law that separated Jews and Gentiles (vv. 14–15). Christ not only made peace between sinners and God (Rom. 5:1), but He also made peace between Jews and Gentiles. He took sinful Jews and sinful Gentiles and through His cross made a "new man"—the church.

Keep in mind that the mystery of the church was revealed through Paul (as we shall see in chapter 3), and that it took some time for the Jewish Christians to understand God's new program. For centuries, God had kept Jews and Gentiles separated, and the Jews had taught that the only way a Gentile could be brought near to God was by becoming a Jew. Now the truth was revealed that the cross of Christ condemns both Jews and Gentiles as sinners, but also reconciles to God in one body those that believe on Jesus.

C. *What the Gentiles and Jews are now (vv. 18–22).*

Both have access to the Father in the Spirit. Under the Jewish economy, only the high priest could go into the presence of God, and that only once a year. But in the new creation, every believer has the privilege of coming into the holy of holies (Heb. 10:19–25). Both Jews and Gentiles now belong to the household of God, and the Jew can no longer claim greater privileges. It is through faith in His blood that Jews and Gentiles are justified.

Paul closes by picturing the church as a temple. This would be a fitting image not only for the Jews, who revered their holy temple at Jerusalem, but also for the Ephesians, who had the great temple of Diana in their city (Acts 19:21–41). Each believer is a living stone set into the temple (1 Peter 2:4–8). The apostles and prophets (NT prophets, 4:11) are not the foundation; they laid the foundation since they were the first to proclaim the message. Christ is the foundation of the local church (1 Cor. 3:11) and the chief cornerstone of the whole building. The church today is a living, growing temple; when it is completed, Christ will return and take the temple to glory. God dwelt in the Jewish tabernacle (Ex. 40:34), in Solomon’s temple (2 Chron. 7:1), in the temple of Christ’s body (John 1:14 and 2:18–22), and today in the individual believer (1 Cor. 6:19–20) and the church (Eph. 2:21–22). What a privilege to be the very habitation of God through the Spirit!

Ephesians 3

This chapter closes the first half of Ephesians in which Paul has described our wealth in Christ. Paul is about to move into the practical section (our walk with Christ), but first he pauses to pray. He begins his prayer in v. 1, but does not continue until he gets to v. 13! The intervening verses form a long parenthesis, but they are important, because they explain Paul’s special ministry to the church body and to the Gentiles.

I. Paul’s Explanation of His Ministry (3:1–12)

The first thing we note is that Paul calls himself a prisoner and that he connects his imprisonment to the Gentiles! Go back to Acts 22 for the explanation. Paul had been arrested in Jerusalem and was making his defense to his people. They listened to him until he got to the word “Gentiles” (Acts 22:21), and then a riot broke loose! The relationship of Gentiles to Jews was even a problem among the early Jewish believers, as Acts 10 and 15 reveal.

Paul explains that God had given him a special revelation and a special stewardship (dispensation). He terms this revelation “the mystery of Christ.” (It would be well for you to review the introductory notes to Acts, as well as the notes for Romans 9–11.) In the OT, God revealed through prophecy His program for the people of Israel: that He would establish them in their kingdom when they received their Messiah, and then through Israel He would convert the Gentiles. God offered them the kingdom through the ministry of John the Baptist (Matt. 3:2), whom the Jews permitted to be slain; through Christ’s ministry (Matt 4:12–17), whom the Jews asked to be slain; and through the apostles and Stephen (Acts 2–7), whom the Jews themselves actually killed (Acts 7:54–60). Three offers of the kingdom were made to Israel, but the nation rejected each of them. They had rejected the Father, who had sent John; the Son; and the Spirit, who was energizing the witnessing apostles. With the death of Stephen, the offers of kingdom ceased temporarily; the message went out to the Samaritans and the Gentiles (Acts 8 and 10); in the meantime Paul was saved miraculously in Acts 9.

Paul's ministry was to the Gentiles, and his message was that of grace, Paul's special task was to share the truth of the one body, the mystery of the church. Note Rom. 16:25–26; Col. 1:26–27 and 4:3–4; as well as Eph. 6:19. Here in v. 6, he states the mystery clearly: that believing Gentiles and Jews are one body in Christ. This mystery had not been made known before this time; but now God had revealed it to His apostles and NT prophets by the Spirit. To say that the twelve apostles from the beginning understood the mystery of the church is to deny Paul's inspired words here. Even Peter had to have a vision from heaven in Acts 10 before he would go to the Gentiles. The truth of the one body was given to Paul and its significance dawned gradually upon the early church.

“Unsearchable riches” in v. 8 is literally “untraceable riches.” You cannot detect the mystery of the one body in the OT Scriptures; it was a mystery hidden in Christ. In vv. 9–10 we see a dual ministry: Paul was to make known the dispensation (“fellowship,” same word as v. 2) of the mystery to people in general; the church was to reveal the wisdom of God to angelic beings (“principalities and powers,” see 6:12). Angels are learning about God's grace through the church! (See 1 Peter 1:10–12.) Satan knows the Scriptures; by keeping His program for the church hidden, God prevented Satan from hindering the plan. Satan took Christ to the cross, and by so doing sealed his own doom! It is tragic today when we see pastors and churches wandering about aimlessly in their ministries because they do not understand God's purpose for the church in this age. If they would move out of the message of Acts 1–6 and into that of Ephesians and Colossians, they would not be wasting time, talent, and money “building the kingdom” but instead would be building the church.

II. Paul's Intercession for the Saints (3:13–21)

You will recall that the two prayers in Ephesians (here and in 1:15–23) complement each other. The first is a prayer for enlightenment; the second is for enablement. Paul wants the Ephesians to learn all they have in Christ and then live what they have learned. He prays for God's family in heaven and earth, for that is where His family is; none are “under the earth” (see Phil. 2:10). This means there is no purgatory where people are being prepared for heaven. He prays that the inner person might know spiritual strength. How carelessly some Christians treat the inner person! The Holy Spirit empowers us from within through the Word of God and prayer. In vv. 20–21, Paul points out that as we pray, God's Spirit goes to work in us; and 1 Thes. 2:13 (along with Col. 3:16) teaches that God empowers us through His Word. The early saints gave themselves to “prayer and the Word of God” (Acts 6:4), and God worked mightily in them and through them.

He wants Christ to “feel at home” (dwell, v. 17) in their hearts. Of course, Christ does dwell in the heart of every true believer, but not every heart is a comfortable home for Him. Christ loved to go to Bethany because his friends there loved Him, fed on His Word, and served Him. When Christ came to earth to talk to Abraham (Gen. 18), He sent two angels ahead to visit Lot (Gen. 19) because He did not feel at home in the house of a worldly believer. Does He feel at home in our hearts?

Christ feels at home in our hearts when He finds faith and love. “Rooted” (v. 17) suggests a steady position, a habit of faith and love, like a tree rooted in the soil. Too many Christians want the fruits of the Spirit without being rooted in spiritual things.

“Comprehend” in v. 18 should be “apprehend—lay hold of.” Paul has already prayed that they might understand; now he prays that they might lay their hands on these wonderful blessings and grasp them for themselves. By faith we lay hold of God’s promises. Paul especially wants them to lay hold of God’s immeasurable love, a love that fills all things. Far too many Christians think of God as an angry Judge or a stern Master instead of a loving Father.

“Filled with all the fullness of God” (v. 19): this is God’s ultimate purpose for our lives. Read carefully John 1:16 and Col. 2:9–10. “You are complete in Him” states Col. 2:10, NKJV. Why live like paupers when God has given us His fullness? An empty life is disappointing and dangerous; if the Spirit of God does not fill us, then the spirit of disobedience (2:2) goes to work and we fall into sin.

Verses 20–21 declare a thrilling benediction, closing this first section of the letter. God works in us! God works through us! God is glorified in us! What a wonderful salvation we have! This power works in us as we open our hearts to Christ, cultivate this abiding fellowship, pray, and submit to the Word. There is no reason for us believers to be “down in the dumps” when we are seated with Christ (2:6) and filled with God’s fullness.

As we close this first section, it would be helpful to note Paul’s “spiritual postures,” for they give us the secret of God’s blessing. Paul is seated with Christ (2:6), built upon Christ (2:20), and is bowing his knees to the Father (3:14). This is what makes it possible for him to walk (4:1), grow up (4:15), and stand against Satan (6:14ff). Our spiritual position in Christ makes possible our victorious walk on earth.

Ephesians 4

We now begin the second half of the letter, which emphasizes the Christian’s walk (4:1, 17; 5:2, 8, 15). The Christian life is compared to a walk because it starts with one step of faith, involves progress, and demands balance and strength. If we do not learn to walk, we will never be able to run (Heb. 12:1–2) or stand in the battle (Eph. 6:11ff).

I. Walk In Unity (4:1–16)

We have been called to one body; therefore, as we seek to walk in unity, we are walking worthy of the calling (vocation) we have from God. Paul has described this high calling in chapters 1–3; now he pleads with us to live up to these blessings. We do not live for Christ to get something; we live for Christ because He has already done so much for us! Note that Paul does not tell us to manufacture unity, but to maintain the unity already existing in the body. This is not organizational uniformity, a “super church”; this is organic, living union and unity. Note John 17:20–23.

The grounds for this unity are listed in vv. 4–6. You will note that the central item in this list is “one Lord.” The fact that there is “one body” does not minimize the importance of the local bodies of believers. You will notice that Paul is dealing here with spiritual truths relating to the whole program of God. When we read his other epistles (such as Corinthians and the letters to Timothy and Titus) we see the practical outworking of these truths. The major emphasis in the NT is on the local assembly; but the administration of the local assembly must be based on what Paul teaches about the “one body.”

The gifts for unity in the church are given in vv. 7–11. When Christ ascended, He gave gifts to His people through the coming of the Holy Spirit. He also gave these gifted people to the local assemblies. While vv. 1–6 deal with the one body and its unity, vv. 7–11 deal with the many local bodies and the diversities of gifts.

The goal of the church is described in vv. 12–16. The pastor-teacher is to nourish the saints with the Word of God and equip them for service; the saints, in turn, perform the work of the ministry. As each saint grows and wins others, the entire body grows in Christ. Verse 12 should read: “For the maturing of the saints unto the work of the ministry, unto the building up of the body of Christ.” Each saint shares in the growth of the church. Unfortunately, there are some Christians who are still babies (v. 14, and see 1 Cor. 3:1ff), who are unstable and easily led astray. Satan and his ministers (see 2 Cor. 11:14–15) are waiting to tear down the church with their lies. The church is edified (built up) through the Word of God (Acts 20:32 and 1 Cor. 14:4). Churches are not built up and strengthened through man-made programs, entertainment, recreation, or “drives.” The church is a body and must have spiritual food; this food is the Word of God. When the body is completed, Christ will return and take His body (of which He is the Head, 1:22–23) home to glory.

II. Walk In Purity (4:17–32)

The first part of this chapter described the believer’s relationship to the church; now Paul deals with the believer’s relationship to the world. Certainly we are “in Christ” and a part of the body; but we are also in the world, where there is temptation and defilement. We cannot depart from the world because we have a responsibility to witness to it; but we must walk in purity and not allow the world to defile us.

Paul starts with the negative: do not walk the way the unsaved heathen walk. He explains the reasons for their godless walk: (1) their minds are darkened because they believe lies and have not received the truth; (2) they are spiritually dead; (3) they have surrendered themselves to do all kinds of sin. Compare this description with 2:1–3 and 2 Cor. 4. We might summarize their plight by saying they were walking in the wrong way because they did not know the truth and had never received the life. Only the Christ of John 14:6 could meet their spiritual needs.

The Christian life must be radically different from the old life. Paul expected the Ephesians to experience changes, and he gave three admonitions: “put off” (vv. 22–23), “put on” (v. 24), and “put away” (vv. 25ff). Romans 6 teaches us that the old self has been crucified and buried, and that, as we reckon this to be true, we “put off” the old man. God has done His part; it remains for us to believe what He has said and “change clothes.” The instruction Jesus gave concerning Lazarus applies to each believer:

“Loose him—take off the grave clothes—and let him go!” But it is not enough simply to die to the old life; there must also be resurrection and the manifestation of the new life. We put off the “grave clothes” of the old life and put on the “grace clothes” of the new life. We are a part of God’s new creation (v. 24 and 2:10) and therefore we walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:4).

We must “put away” (once-for-all) certain sins, and he names these in 25ff. Note how Paul ties each commandment to a spiritual truth: we are members of each other (v. 25); we are sealed until the day of redemption (v. 30); God has forgiven us (v. 32). Doctrine and duty are twin blessings in the Bible, both the Christian’s wealth and his walk in Christ.

If we belong to the truth, how can we indulge in lies? Satan is the father of lies (John 8:44); his spirits tell lies (1 John 2:21, 27); one day the whole world will believe “The Lie” (2 Thes. 2:9–11).

There is an anger that is not sinful (Mark 3:5). If we are angry at persons, then sin will come along; if we are angry at sin and sinful principles, we can maintain a holy walk. How easy it is for Christians to call their tempers “righteous indignation”! The wrath of man never brings about the righteousness of God (James 1:20).

Giving place to the devil (v. 27) involves both lying and anger; for Satan is a liar and a murderer. Do we realize that lies and hypocrisy and anger give Satan a foothold in our lives? Cain’s lies and anger led to murder (Gen. 4).

Verse 25 ties in with 1 Thes. 4:11 and 2 Thes. 3:6–12. The unsaved thief used to rob to please himself; now that he is saved, he should work to be able to give to others. This is the wonderful change grace makes in the heart of a person.

Our lips should speak that which builds up (Col. 4:6; Ps. 141:3). Corruption from the lips only means that there is corruption in the heart. The Spirit has sealed us (1:13–14); we should not grieve Him by allowing these sins of action and attitude to be in our lives. In Scripture, the Spirit is pictured as a dove (John 1:32), and a dove is a clean bird that loves peace. Anger and clamor should be done away with by means of forgiveness and Christian love.

Ephesians 5

Paul continues his description of the Christian’s walk.

I. Walk in Love (5:1–6)

“Followers” (v. 1) means “imitators, mimics”; as God’s children, we should imitate our Father. God is love, and we should walk in love. The example of Christ’s love should inspire us. See John 15:9 and 12 and 1 John 3:16–18. Here Paul pictures Christ as the sweet-savor offering, bringing joy to the heart of God as He gives Himself for sinners.

Of course, the right kind of love implies that we hate certain things (Rom. 12:9). There are some sins that should not even be named among saints. In v. 4, Paul is not objecting to humor, but to unsuitable and unclean jesting. Certainly no Christian should

use his or her lips to spread questionable stories. We should never have to say, “Take this with a grain of salt” because our speech should always be seasoned with salt (Col. 4:6). False teachers may say that you can be a Christian and live in habitual, deliberate sin; but Paul calls these teachings “empty [vain] words.” Compare vv. 5–6 with Gal. 5:21ff and 1 Cor. 6:9–10. We were “children of disobedience” (2:1–3); now we are children of God, and we ought to walk in love.

II. Walk in the Light (5:7–14)

The word translated “partakers” (v. 7) implies having in common; it is often translated “fellowship” or “partnership.” Christians are partakers of: (1) the divine nature, 2 Peter 1:4; (2) God’s promises, Eph. 3:6; (3) Christ’s sufferings, 1 Peter 4:13; (4) holiness, Heb. 12:10; (5) the heavenly calling, Heb. 3:1 and (6) God’s glory, 1 Peter 5:1. Since we have this wonderful partnership with God, how could we ever become partners with that which belongs to sin and darkness? “What communion has light with darkness?” asks 2 Cor. 6:14 (NKJV). We are children of light and ought to walk in the light. Darkness produces sin and lies; the fruit of the light (a better translation of v. 9) is goodness, righteousness, and truth. The light cannot compromise with the darkness; it can only expose it. Note John 3:19–21 and 1 John 1:5–10.

III. Walk Carefully (5:15–17)

The word “circumspectly” (v. 15) carries the idea of looking around carefully so as not to stumble. It means walking intelligently and not in ignorance. How foolish to stumble along through life and never seek to know the will of the Lord! Instead of walking “accurately” (which is equivalent to “circumspectly”), they miss the mark, miss the road, and end up suffering on some detour. God wants us to be wise and understand His will for our lives. As we obey His will, we “buy up the opportunities” (redeem the time, v. 16) and do not waste time, energy, money, and talent in that which is apart from His will. Lost opportunities may never be regained; they are gone forever.

IV. Walk in Harmony (5:18–6:9)

This section concludes in chapter 6 and deals with harmony between husbands and wives, parents and children, and workers and masters.

The secret of harmony in the home and on the job is the fullness of the Spirit. The unity of the church and the harmony of the home both depend on the Spirit (4:3; 5:18). It is power from within, not pressure from without, that holds the church and the home together. Note the evidences of a Spirit-filled life: joy (v. 19), gratitude (v. 20), obedience (v. 21ff). Compare Col. 3:15–17 and you will see that when Christians are filled with the Word of God they will have the same characteristics. In other words, to be filled with the Spirit of God means to be controlled by the Word of God. The marks of a Spirit-filled Christian are not unusual emotional experiences, miracles, and tongues, but rather Christian character.

The principle of headship is what helps bring harmony to the home. “As unto Christ” is the motive. Wives are to submit to their husbands as unto Christ; husbands are to

love their wives as Christ loves the church; and children are to obey as unto the Lord. Family members who are right with the Lord will be right with each other.

The church is pictured as the bride of Christ. It is interesting to compare the church to the first bride in the Bible, Eve (Gen. 2:18–25). She was taken from Adam's side, and Christ's side was pierced for us on the cross. She was formed when Adam was asleep, and Christ experienced the sleep of death to create the church. Eve shared Adam's nature, and the church partakes of Christ's nature (vv. 30–31). Eve was the object of her mate's love and care, and Christ loves the church and cares for it. Adam was willing to become a sinner because of his love for his wife (1 Tim. 2:11–15), and Christ willingly was made sin because of His love for the church. Eve was formed and brought to Adam before sin entered the human family; the church was in the mind and heart of God before the foundation of the world. Note Rom. 7:4 and 2 Cor. 11:2 for the application of this truth of marriage to the individual believer and the local church.

What is Christ's present ministry to the church? He is sanctifying and cleansing the church through the Word of God, and He does this by the work of the Spirit in His chosen servants (4:11–16). The water in v. 26 is not baptism. For one thing, Paul is talking about a continuous process, and no Christian is baptized continuously. Water for washing is a symbol of the Word of God (John 15:3 and 13:1–12). When Christ takes His church to glory, it will then be perfect, spotless, and without blemish. See John 17:22–24.

The Word is not only water that cleanses the church, but it is also food that nourishes the church (v. 29). It is the spiritual food for the new nature of the believer.

In 6:1–9, Paul applies the same truth to children and to servants. Children are to obey their parents for several reasons: (1) it is right; (2) it is commanded; (3) it brings blessings. The father who honors the Lord will have little trouble winning the love and respect of his children or the sincere love of his wife. Paul also warns fathers in v. 4 to refrain from provoking their children with undue demands. The Golden Rule applies to the home, and children must be treated like people and not things. Fathers are to discipline children (nurture) and counsel them (admonition) in the Lord.

Servants must remember that they serve Christ first of all. To be double-minded and try to serve two masters will lead to trouble (Matt. 6:24); singleness of heart means the heart is fixed on pleasing Christ, and not on worldly gain. "Eyeservice" means working when the master is watching and loafing when he is gone; but if we serve Christ on the job, we are aware that He is always watching us!

Ephesians 6

This final section (6:10–24) tells us how to walk in victory. It is a sad thing when believers do not know the provisions God has made for victory over Satan. Christ has completely overcome Satan and his hosts (Col. 2:13–15 and Eph. 1:19–23), and His victory is ours by faith.

I. The Enemy We Fight (6:10–12)

Satan is a strong enemy, so Paul exhorts us to be strong. Paul knows that the flesh is weak (Mark 14:38) and that we can overcome only in Christ's power. Note that before Paul tells us to stand in v. 11, he commands us in v. 10 to be strong. How do we receive this strength to stand? By realizing that we are seated with Christ in the heavenlies far above all of Satan's principalities and powers (1:19–23), and that the very power of God is available to us through the indwelling Spirit (3:14–21). We must sit before we can walk, and we must walk before we can stand. We must understand our spiritual position before we can have spiritual power.

Many Bible students believe that Satan was the anointed cherub whom God placed in charge of the newly created earth (Ezek. 28:11–19). Through pride, he fell (Isa. 14:9ff) and took with him a host of angelic beings who now make up his army of principalities and powers. Satan has access to heaven (Job 1–3), but one day will be cast from heaven (Rev. 12:9ff). He is the deceiver (2 Cor. 11:3) and the destroyer (Rev. 9:11, where Abaddon means “destroyer”), for he goes about as a serpent and a lion (1 Peter 5:8–9). We Christians need to realize that we do not fight against flesh and blood but against the “spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience” (Eph. 2:2, NKJV). Just as the Spirit of God works in believers to make them holy, so the spirit of disobedience (Satan and his demons) works in the lives of unbelievers. How foolish to fight flesh and blood when the real enemy is merely using that flesh and blood to obstruct the Lord's work. This is the mistake Peter made in the Garden of Gethsemane when he tried to overcome the devil with the sword (see Matt. 26:51). Moses made the same mistake when he killed the Egyptian (Acts 7:23–29). The only way to fight spiritual enemies is with spiritual weapons—the Word of God and prayer.

We must beware of the wiles of the devil (Eph. 6:11) which means his strategy, devices (2 Cor. 2:11) and snares (1 Tim. 3:7). He is the ruler of darkness and uses darkness (ignorance and lies) to further his cause (2 Cor. 4:1ff; Luke 22:53).

II. The Equipment We Wear (6:13–17)

It is important that the Christian not “give place to the devil” (4:27), that is, leave any area unprotected so that Satan can get a foothold. The armor Paul describes is for protection; the sword (God's Word) is for actual battle. Each part of the spiritual armor tells us what believers must have if they are to be protected against Satan:

Truth—Satan is a liar, but the Christian who knows the truth will not be deceived.

Righteousness—This means the consistent daily walk of the Christian. Satan is the accuser (Rev. 12:10), but the believer who walks in the light will give Satan no opportunity to attack. We stand in the imputed righteousness of Christ, and we walk in the imparted righteousness of the Holy Spirit.

Peace—Satan is a divider and a destroyer. When the believer walks in the way of peace, the Gospel way, then Satan cannot reach him. The Christian's feet should be clean (John 13), beautiful (Rom. 10:15), and shod with the Gospel. Christians who are ready to witness for Christ have an easier time defeating the evil one.

Faith—Satan is the source of unbelief and doubt. “Has God indeed said?” is his favorite question (Gen. 3:1). Faith is what overcomes every foe (1 John 5:4). As believers use the shield of faith, the fiery darts of unbelief and doubt are kept away.

Salvation—This verse (17) probably refers to our ultimate salvation when Christ returns (see 1 Thes. 5:8). The believer whose mind is fixed on Christ's imminent coming will not fall into Satan's traps. The blessed hope must be like a helmet to protect the mind. Satan would love to have us believe that Christ is not coming back, or that He may not come back today. Read Matt. 24:45–51 to see what happens to the person who takes off the helmet of salvation.

These pieces of armor are for the believer's protection; the sword of the Spirit and prayer are weapons for attacking Satan's strongholds and defeating him. The Christian must fight spiritual enemies with spiritual weapons (2 Cor. 10:4), and the Word of God is the only sword we need. God's sword has life and power (Heb. 4:12) and never grows dull. Christians conquer as they understand God's Word, memorize it, and obey it.

III. The Energy We Use (6:18–24)

Armor and weapons are not sufficient to win a battle; there must be energy to do the job. Our energy comes from prayer. We use the sword of the Spirit, and we pray in the Spirit: the Holy Spirit empowers us to win the battle. Read again Eph. 3:14–21 and dare to believe it. The Word of God and prayer are the two resources God has given the church to overcome the enemy and gain territory for God's glory. Note Acts 20:32 and Acts 6:4; also 1 Sam. 12:23.

Christian soldiers must pray with their eyes open. "Watch and pray" is God's secret for overcoming the world (Mark 13:33), the flesh (Mark 14:38), and the devil (Eph. 6:18). We should also "watch and pray" for opportunities to serve Christ (Col. 4:2–3).

We should not only pray for ourselves, but we should also pray for our fellow soldiers (6:19ff). Paul was never too proud to ask for prayer. He wanted to have the power to be able to share the mystery (see 3:1–12), the very message that had brought him to jail. "Ambassador in bonds" is a peculiar title, yet that is exactly what Paul was. Chained to a different Roman soldier every six hours, Paul had a wonderful opportunity to witness for Christ.

Paul closes this magnificent epistle with several personal items, knowing that his friends would want to know his condition. Certainly they could pray for him more intelligently if they knew his needs. But Paul wants to give them comfort, too (v. 22). Paul was a true saint, drawing upon God's supply for his every need.