

EPHESIANS

GOD'S RECREATION



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PREFACE

In the Fall of 1983, while I was pastor at Triumph Lutheran Brethren Church in Moorhead, Minnesota, I had the good fortune of being invited to teach an advanced Greek course in the nearby Lutheran Brethren Seminary in Fergus Falls. It seemed good to me to use the opportunity for giving the students in that class some exposure to the practical skills of moving from New Testament Greek passages to the rudiments of sermons, sermons which they might well deliver in the not so distant future.

For length and convenient structure I chose to base the course on the Epistle to the Ephesians. Little did I realize, as I began to prepare for the course, what a satisfying and even thrilling experience lay ahead of me, not just in teaching but in learning, both from the text and from my students.

Out of that study there emerged in my mind a scheme for understanding the book of Ephesians and its message which has in many ways revolutionized my conception of God's purposes in sending His Son to be one of us. The following pages attempt to lay before the reader that vision.

In the years following that happy experience I have used this material some three or four times in adult Sunday school classes and midweek Bible studies, and in the summer of 1986 it formed the basis of a week of teaching at a family Bible camp for the Advent Christian Church of the Pacific Northwest. Its present shape is partly the result of an assignment to contribute the section on Ephesians to the forthcoming *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*, edited by Walter Elwell and published by Baker Book House of Grand Rapids, Michigan. I express my thanks to the publishers for their kind permission to issue it here under separate cover (together with added study questions) for the use of adult Bible study classes or for personal edification strongly urge that it be used solely in connection with the biblical text itself, for it is intended merely as a guide to the understanding of Ephesians, not as a substitute for that marvelous document.

Finally I wish to dedicate this little study to the nine men who formed that advanced Greek class in 1983, and who did so much to stimulate me toward working out this view of the letter. They are Jonathan Blikstad, Steven Brue, Daniel Hacking, Brent Juliot, John Osugo, David Overland, Jeffrey Seaver, Rodney Spidahl, and Hiroshi Suzuki.

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INTRODUCTION

AUTHORSHIP

The crucial problem in the study of the Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians is whether Paul wrote it. It claims unambiguously to come from Paul's hand, both in the very first word of the letter, and in numerous other personal references throughout. Doubts among scholars as to the literal truth of these claims have arisen from a number of factors, however. Some of these include the obviously limited acquaintance with his readers which the author betrays, something highly puzzling if Paul is writing to his friends in Ephesus, where he spent nearly three years. Likewise, the literary relationship between this letter and that to the Colossians shows that if they were not written at the same time by the same person, then one was modelled on the other. Yet the vocabulary and style of Ephesians are considerably different from what is found in Colossians, suggesting that the two documents are not authored by one person. Furthermore, the teaching of Ephesians is thought to reflect situations in the early church which post-date the death of Paul by several decades in some cases (eg., the references to "apostles and prophets" in 2:20, 3:5). All these factors in their detailed evidence add up to a high probability that Paul himself is not the author of Ephesians. Nevertheless, taken one by one, the separate pieces of evidence can be adequately explained on the assumption of Pauline authorship. It is their accumulation which carries the greatest weight against authenticity. Yet even the accumulation of evidence is not a watertight case, but only a case for probability, and history is replete with the improbable. Without being either dogmatic or credulous, we may still with good conscience approach Ephesians as a letter from the Apostle Paul.

DATE, ORIGIN AND DESTINATION

If Paul wrote Ephesians, it must of necessity pre-date his death in Rome under Nero, c. A.D. 65 or 66. Assuming that the references to chains and imprisonment are to be taken literally, we should date the letter in the early 60s, probably from Rome. But to whom was it written? Clearly Paul is not well acquainted with the intended readers (cf., e.g., 1:15), which would be strange if they were Paul's congregation at Ephesus. But oddly enough, certain important and early manuscripts of the letter do not have the words "in Ephesus" (1:1), giving rise to the suspicion that the document was never meant for that congregation at all, but for some other which Paul had never visited. Perhaps it was a circular sent to a number of enclaves which may have sprung up around the vicinity of Colossae. At any rate, the real destination and, if not Ephesus, the origin of the insertion "in Ephesus," remain conjectural.

BASIC THEOLOGY

Central to the message of Ephesians is the re-creation of the human family according to God's originally intended design for it. As such, this new creation shatters the opinion long held by the Jewish community that God accepts the Jew and rejects the non-Jew. The traditionally assumed criterion of distinction between the Jew and the non-Jew is obedience to the Law, but this criterion, fostering pride and pharisaism, was abolished in Christ's sacrificial death. Consequently, there remains no more hinderance to reuniting all humanity as the people of God, with Christ as the head of it. The fact that even within the church itself, let alone outside the church, this reunification does not fully seem to be in effect, is the result of the "merely" partial arrival of the new age of God's rule. During the interim between this new age's first in breaking with the first coming of Christ and Pentecost, and its final consummating arrival at the second coming of Christ, God has endowed his new family with the power of the Spirit to keep them and to enable them to live out their new life as it will be done in the future. Thus the emphasis of Ephesians is on the unity of the Church in Christ, through the power of the Spirit.

OUTLINE OF THE CONTENTS

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INTRODUCTION (1:1-2)

The author identifies himself by name and calling and greets his readers in the manner usual in Pauline epistles, except that he is alone here, without the usual companions. The point to note is the address, "in Ephesus," which has been dealt with above.

I. RE-CREATING THE HUMAN FAMILY: WHAT GOD HAS DONE (1:3-3:21)

A. THREE SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS IN CHRIST (1:3-14)

This opening section, which sets the agenda for the rest of the letter, is itself opened in vv. 3-5. [1:3] God, who in Jesus Christ originated the solution to our dilemma of sin, is blessed (thanked) for blessing us in Christ with every spiritual blessing. The word bless therefore carries two different senses, depending on whether God or a human being (with God as object) is the subject. "In the heavenly realms" evidently implies that these blessings are secured in the very essence and character of God himself, and not subject to the uncertainties of earthly life. This is borne out repeatedly in this very section by the emphasis on God's decision, will, and purpose.

[4] God has made his choice, before the creation of the world: we (humans? Christians?) are to be holy, his alone, and unaccusable before him; [5] because he loved us and simply because it pleased him to do so, he has marked us out, before we had done anything to deserve it, to be his own adopted family. [6] The stated purpose of this sovereignly independent choice is that we might praise the glorious grace of God which he has freely given us in this way. This is not an indication of a megalomaniac, egotistical God, but of one who knows better than we do that if his creatures concentrate their praise and aspirations on him, all their own creaturely potential will be realized.

Threaded throughout this tone-setting passage is the key to the entire argument of the letter: it is all done for us "through Jesus Christ," "in the Beloved One," "in Christ," "in him." The solution to the human dilemma is in Christ the Lord, whose Father is none other than the Blessed God.

In him, in Christ, three spiritual blessings (vv.7, 11, 13) have been made ours, which together amount to a whole new God-determined existence. [7] The first of these is *redemption*, which is made available through the payment of a price, the blood, or death, of Christ. It consists in the forgiveness of sins, the necessary first step toward the re-creation of a truly holy, blameless family. Redemption is the foundation of God's work on behalf of humanity, that without which nothing else could be done. It deals effectively with the reason why the human family must indeed be re-created namely the sin which spoiled the original creation.

[8] We have this redemption, this new standing with our Creator, not according to our own worthiness, but simply according to the wealth of his grace - another assurance of the security of the situation. He has heaped grace upon us beyond measure, [9] having (according to his own wise understanding) made known to us what he has wanted to do all along, something which gives him pleasure, something which he decided to accomplish at the proper time in Christ, namely the "mystery of his will." [10] And what is this mystery, hidden in God's will, which has been revealed to us? Nothing less than that everything in creation, heavenly and earthly, human and nonhuman, be subsumed and united in Christ - again, *in Christ*.

[11-12] The negative value of the first blessing (redemption *from*) is balanced by the second blessing, which indicates what we have been redeemed *for*. In Christ we have been appointed, we have been *allotted a place*, been chosen to participate. The purpose of this is that we may praise God's glory and so be enabled to fulfill our proper destiny as creatures of a holy God. What place we have been allotted has been hinted at already in vv. 5, 10, and will be spelled out in more detail in 2:11-22 (just as the nature of redemption is elaborated in 2:1-10). It is a place in God's new family, whose head is Christ. Again it is stressed that God himself is the author, decider, planner, and accomplisher of this; he has desired it when we did not. And desiring it, he can and will do it. Indeed he has already done it.

[13] To this point Paul has been speaking in the first person plural, which could mean either that he includes his readers or that he does not, contrasting them instead (as he in fact is doing) with some other group to which he himself belongs. This other group he has called "we who were the first to hope in Christ" (v.12). Now he draws the readers into the picture by centering the third blessing on them. They have heard the "word of truth," the true message, the good news which brought them, too, into God's salvation once they had believed it. Thus they are also "in Christ," and in him have received the third blessing: *the seal of the promised Holy Spirit*. Just as Pilate sealed the tomb of Christ and thereby prohibited unauthorized tampering with it, God has set his seal upon his adopted family, proclaiming to all beings whose interference would endanger them that they belong to him and are not to be harmed. [14] But there is more: the Spirit is a downpayment, a "deposit guaranteeing our inheritance" (the word translated "inheritance" is related to that in v. 11

translated “chosen”) while we wait the *full* redemption of God’s possession. As will be seen in 3:14-19, however, the presence of the Spirit implies more than a passive guarantee; it also means the power necessary to live out in *this* doomed age the ethics of the new age to come, which in Christ has already entered the scene. This new ethic, good for us and for everyone else, is rooted in the praise of the glorious Creator.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Name the three spiritual blessings which Paul says we have in Christ, and describe each of them in terms of their purposes.
2. What are two benefits which come to us as a result of our being given God’s Holy Spirit?
3. What is the mystery which it is God’s will to bring about? What is meant here (1:10) by “all things in heaven and earth,” and how does Christ unite them?
4. What does Paul probably mean by the expression “in the heavenly realms” (1:13)? How else is this same profound theological truth expressed in this section? (Cf. 1:12.)
5. What bearing does our good or bad performance as Christians, or even our faith, have on the completeness and finality of God’s three-fold work on our behalf? On anyone’s behalf?

B. THE IMPORTANCE OF KNOWING ABOUT IT ALL (1:15-23)

The immense significance of this three-fold work of God on behalf of humanity makes it imperative that people hear about it and come to understand it. For the more they do so, the greater their ability will be to stand steady and grow in their new relationship with God and each other. [15] Therefore (“for this reason”), Paul prays for his readers, whose faith he has heard about, that they may increase in understanding. Their two-dimensional faith is worth noting since it capsulizes the sort of faith which the epistle promotes. It consists of (a) faith in the Lord Jesus and (b) love toward all the saints. In other words, it is a relationship of confidence in the work of God in Christ which itself issues in a relationship of loving concern for fellow members of the new family, no matter who they may be, acted out in attitudes and concrete deeds. The epistle in fact divides itself into halves which respectively treat these twin aspects of the Faith. [16] That Paul never stops giving thanks for this church or praying for it is not to be taken literally. He simply means that they are now a regular concern of his; he is in fact loving them just as they love all the saints.

[17] The burden of his prayers for these people is that God would cause them to understand. He asks that God give them (a) the Spirit (a spirit?) of wisdom and revelation and (b) enlightened hearts. It seems unlikely that he contemplates here their need to receive the Holy Spirit since v. 13 already declared that they do have him. What is meant rather is that they need to receive *from* the Spirit a revealing of the divine wisdom, the Mystery, the purpose of which is that they might themselves know God (or perhaps Christ). [18a] The “eyes of the heart” refer to the spirit of a person - the mind, the inner soul - in its power to grasp ideas. To this, God is asked to give illumination, the implication being that if he does not, it cannot be had.

[18 b-19] Paul is specific about what he wishes God to enable the Christians to understand with their enlightened hearts. There are three things: (a) the hope to which they have been called, (b) the glorious abundance of his inheritance, and (c) God’s more than sufficient power for us who believe. These three concepts bear a surprising similarity to the three spiritual blessings which Paul enumerated earlier. That they are not precisely parallel may simply work to expand and unfold their significance. As a matter of fact, both the hope and the inheritance seem more closely connected to the second blessing that of a place in the new family of God, than hope does to redemption, the first blessing. The power of God for the believer can, on the basis of the way in which the notion of power is connected with the Spirit in 3:14-19, be paralleled with the third blessing the sealing with the Spirit. The prayer that these three concepts be understood better by the believers is not left behind without further thought; in the course of the next two chapters, and indeed over the course of the remainder of the entire letter, Paul himself puts feet to his prayers by elaborating on the meaning of these things himself (see the outline).

[20] Before beginning to do so, however, Paul makes an extremely important connection between these ethereal, abstract concepts (and blessings) on the one hand, and down-to-earth history on the other. The very same power which God has in such abundance for the Christians is the power which he exercised in Christ by

raising him from the dead. It may be difficult to lay hold of the truth of one's membership in the redeemed, Spirit-sealed family of God, newly re-created on earth. Emotionally and mentally, perhaps, we are too weak to hold fast to these things in the onslaught of any number of reasons to doubt their reliability. God has, however, anchored them in a concrete historical event, the physical resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth from the tomb. These truths then are no less secure and reliable than the fact that Christ is no longer dead; in fact they would not be true if that event had not occurred.

Moreover, this same exercise of power which raised Christ from the dead and secured for us our hope and inheritance has also seated Christ at the place of supreme honor in the Universe, the right hand of God. [21] Consequently, whether viewed from below or above (v.22), Christ sits far above all competitors for power, potential or real. Rulership and authority, power and dominion, and titles upon titles are given both in this evil age which will end and in the glorious age to come which will never end. But none of them and none of their possessors takes precedence over the Lord's Christ. The fact that some of his competitors (and all of us in our fallen natures are in that category) are permitted to compete with him and with each other is characteristic of this present age. The future age has already been initiated, however, in the life, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus Christ, for [22] all things have been subjected to him (a quotation from Psalm 8:6), regardless of anyone's awareness of it. He has been made Head, uniting in himself the restored Universe, for the sake of the Church, [23] his body, the new, all-encompassing family of God (v.10b).

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is the importance of knowing about God's work on our behalf? What implications are there here for sermons, communion, Bible study, memorization, meditation, fellowship?
2. How might 1:15 and the whole structure of Ephesians be related to James 2:14-26?
3. What do you think, judging by 1:17-18, Paul would approve of more: faith without question, or the honest questioning even of things of the faith?
4. What relationship do you see between 1:3-14 and 1:15-23?
5. Discuss the difference between an event like the resurrection of Jesus and such truths as redemption from sin and the hope of future glory. What is the importance of the former for the latter? For our assurance?

C. REDEMPTION: CLEARING THE GROUND (2:1-10)

Returning to the first blessing redemption, Paul elaborates what is implied in it. Through the work of Christ, by divine fiat, God has swept clear the ground upon which he recreates the spoiled creation.

[2:1-2] The human predicament is described first from the Gentile perspective (see v. 11, and contrast v. 3, which refers to Jews): they were formerly dead, in the estimation of God, since they had led their lives then in transgressions and sins. Their lifestyle, their code of behavior, had been determined according to this present worldly age, the selfish and competitive principle of which underlies all cultures, all political and economic systems. And behind that worldly system stands the satanic “ruler of the air” (“air” probably referring to the presumed dwelling place of the spirit-world), which even now encourages people, both groups and individuals, in their disobedience toward God.

[3] But among such disobedient people Paul now includes - with the Gentiles - the Jews themselves, all of them. Jews, too, lived in the influence of their “fleshly,” sinfully human desires. Existence on earth consisted of a continual struggle to satisfy the selfish demands of body and soul. Consequently, the Jew was *by nature* under the wrath of God just like the rest of humanity, namely the Gentiles.

But this is no insignificant remark! In the first place, it clearly precludes any member of humanity from supposing that he or she is not subject to judgment. All the race is subsumed under one or the other of the headings Jew and Gentile, and both groups are by nature condemned. But secondly, this is a statement of a Jew, to Gentiles, and as such it embodies, in a redeemed person, an attitude which is evidence of the newly created family of God (see 2:11-22).

[4-5] The human predicament is absolute; there is no escape. There is no way for people already condemned to avoid condemnation. Only from the outside can any effective solution come. Thus when Paul begins, “but God” it is with just such an interfering solution in mind God’s character as a boundlessly merciful God who loves human beings with a “great” love, has changed the picture. He remedied the hopeless situation in three ways with one sweeping act in Christ.

First, together with Christ, he brought these dead Jews and Gentiles back to life (the we in v. 5 now includes the Gentile readers). Anticipating the sum of the matter (stated in vv. 8-10), Paul asserts excitedly at this point that this salvation from death is wholly God’s doing an act of his grace. [6] He returns immediately to the point, however, to state the second and third ways in which God has interfered: God has raised us up together with Christ and has seated us together with Christ in that same heavenly place of honor which he had assigned to Christ himself. In other words, just as to us Christ is the manifestation of God on earth, so Christ, as the head of his body, the Church, is the manifestation of us to God: in Christ, God and humanity meet and are at peace.

[7] God's purpose in restoring us and honoring us as he has done, in being kind to his rebellious creatures, is that he might demonstrate for all coming time the surpassing bounty of his forgiving grace. The point is not that he needs the praise which would come from that demonstration, but that the creation needs to offer it.

[8] Paul now draws the all but obvious conclusion: if we were dead and therefore helpless, and if God intervened and by his own will revived us in Christ, then it is an act of his grace alone, a gift given to us. We receive it not by producing anything to exchange for it, but simply by succumbing to his gracious mercy, by entrusting our fate to God. In short, we are saved by faith. [9] This free salvation has a two-fold relation to human works. In the first place, works have no part in the production of salvation. If it were otherwise, we who produced such works would lift ourselves above our proper station; we would assert our independence over against God; we would in fact destroy ourselves in our boasting. [10] On the other hand however, it is in the doing of good works that we realize our God-intended potential. God has prepared a style of life to which we as his creation are ideally adapted. We were made to function best and to be happiest when we live according to the way in which God originally created us to live. Such a life-style implies above all a complete dependence upon God.

Thus at the heart of redemption is a return to the pristine relationship between God and humanity: total acceptance on the part of God and total dependence on the part of humanity, all embraced in a framework of love. Upon this cleared ground God can now recreate his family.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. How is 2:1-10 related to 1:3-14?
2. How does Paul show that salvation is totally by grace?
3. In what three ways has God stepped into the human predicament to change it?
4. If "Jews" in Paul's world meant those whom everyone supposed to be the people who were in a special relationship with God, who would be in the role of "Jew" today in twentieth-century America?
5. What do Paul's remarks about the equality of status before God for "Gentile" and "Jew" mean today for the church and the unchurched, for Christians and non-Christians?
6. In what sense, if any, are Christians better in God's eyes than non-Christians are?
7. What truth, if any, do you think there is in saying "It is our sins and not our goodness which have brought God to us; it is the recognition of our sins and not the knowledge of our goodness which has brought us to God"?

D. RE-CREATION: REMOVING THE BARRIERS (2:11-22)

One of the deepest yearnings of the human soul is to belong. Yet one of the basic tendencies of the *sinful* human soul is to exclude. We instinctively draw circles which include ourselves, giving us the coveted feeling of being a part of a group. Yet simultaneously we also need outsiders who desire to come within the circle, but who are excluded, for this gives us who are on the inside the coveted sensation of being superior. There can be no inner ring, as C. S. Lewis calls it, without the despised outsiders.

[11] The Jewish nation, God's "inner ring" in their own estimation, drew the circle at the Law, epitomized in bodily circumcision. Those not born into this nation, Gentiles in the flesh, were stigmatized as the "uncircumcision" as a way of self-exaltation on the part of the Jewish inner ring. Without the despised Gentiles, the Jew would cease to be distinctive in his own eyes. [12] Paul reminds his Gentile readers therefore that under such circumstances they were without Christ (who came to us through the Jewish nation); they were permitted no part in the only known family of the true God and thus had no access to the promises which God had made to that family; they were in short hopelessly alienated from their Creator and Savior. The instruments through whom God had intended that his grace be made known to humanity had turned themselves instead into the chief obstacle to that goal by erecting a barrier between themselves and their mission. The result, based in a natural enmity toward God, was enmity between groups of human beings and indeed between individuals within groups.

[13] But the outsiders, formerly excluded and far off, have now been brought near, within the circle, by the sacrificial death of Christ. [14] Bringing the Gentiles "near" implies the establishment of peace, and Christ Jesus himself is the peace; the bringing near is accomplished in him. By removing the criterion of judgment the Law, he has removed the barrier separating the two groups. By tearing down the wall symbolizing and perpetuating their hostility, he has made the two into one united group. [15] With his physical body he did away with the barrier, the Law as used by its Jewish guardians, the Law understood as a list of individual commandments and ordinances which could be satisfactorily fulfilled by human effort. His death fully satisfied the Law once and for all, and thereby eliminated it as a means of distinguishing between people.

The dual purpose which Christ had in doing this was (a) to create in himself one new humanity out of the two hostile groups, making peace between them, [16] and (b) in this one united body, to reconcile both groups to God by obliterating in himself their hatred toward God and toward one another. Thus not just Jew and Gentile, but any two (or more) persons who do not get along are deprived of all basis for castigating each other and are brought to peace both with each other and with God. It is precisely this two-directional restoration which is alluded to in 1:15.

[17] Not to let this stupendous act of grace go unknown to those it was intended to benefit, Christ preached peace both to the outsiders and to the insiders (Isaiah 57:19, 52:7); for, since the ground of the insiders'

security (namely the Law) had been taken away from them, they needed to have peace preached to them no less than did the outsiders. [18] Access to the Father, the goal of all human striving is to be had only through Christ, by one and the same Spirit, for both Gentile and Jew. Contrary to all expectation, God views the entire race as one, and deals with it all at one time, by grace, in one Person.

[19] Paul sums up: the Gentile Christians are no longer shut out from the family of God. They have been given a place within the ring. They belong, they are part of the household part of the citizenry of God's own (holy) people God has effected the premiere family reunion. [20-22] Shifting to a metaphor, Paul describes the situation as that of the construction of a temple, a dwelling place for God on the earth, among his people. Founded upon the "apostles and prophets," that is, upon the promises which God has made and with Christ himself as the cornerstone holding the whole structure together, the building grows continually as people of all kinds are added to it. This is presumably the Pauline way of describing what the Book of Revelation calls the New Jerusalem.

On this passage the whole message of Ephesians pivots. The recreation of the family of God upon the earth is the central purpose of Christ's coming. It is rebuilt upon the cleared ground of redeemed men, women, and children, established there by divine fiat, in Christ. It is brought to concrete, everyday reality in the lives of real everyday people by the power of God's Spirit working in them. This working of the Spirit's power, the third spiritual blessing is the subject, after a digression, of the next section.

Before moving on to the digression, however, it is important to observe the implication of this passage for our own situation. Paul spoke to a group of Gentile Christians who had been made to feel unworthy and inferior by those who felt themselves religiously privileged because of their own relationship to the Law. We who make up the Church of Jesus Christ today must be ready to recognize ourselves in the Jew of Paul's day. Whenever we assume that our code of behavior, our manner of dress and grooming our heritage, our habits (or lack of them), our attendance at one particular church rather than another, our work-ethic, our political opinions, or any other distinction we have over against other people - whenever we assume it is one or more of such considerations which have made us more acceptable to God than others are, we have taken upon ourselves the role, and the condemnation (Galatians 3:10), of hypocritical, pharisaical destroyers of God's family.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. How is 2:11-22 related to 1:3-14?
2. What is meant by and what is required for an "inner ring"? Name five or six contemporary situations, inside and outside the church and even spanning the church-world boundary, in which inner rings operate.
3. How might "inner-ringism" hinder the preaching of the gospel and the salvation of humanity?
4. Where had the "Jew," in order to shut out the Gentile, drawn the circle of his "inner ring"? Where do we in the church draw a similar one?
5. What is it that God has redeemed humanity for? At the bottom of it all, what is God's intention and purpose in redemption?
6. In light of the message of Ephesians so far, would you say that redemption (the forgiveness of sins) is the chief purpose for the coming of Jesus Christ, or is it the means to an even greater purpose?

E. DIGRESSION: PAUL, OUTSIDERS, AND GOD'S GLORY (3:1-13)

[3:1] Paul prepares now to take up the third spiritual blessing that of the Spirit's influence on the Church. Based upon the fact of God's having "in heavenly places," made the human family new again by eliminating through Christ all cause of division, Paul begins to say that he prays for the outworking of this reality in the present, earthly life of the Church through the Spirit's power (compare v. 14 and following below). But having mentioned the Gentile mission for which he is suffering imprisonment, he breaks off in mid-sentence to explain that mission more fully.

[2] He has been given by God a part in the administration of God's grace. Through the man Paul, God has seen fit to dispense to a particular segment of humanity the message of what has been accomplished in Jesus Christ. [3] As briefly stated earlier somewhere (1:9-10? Another letter, eg Galatians 1?), God has revealed to Paul this mysterious grace which centers in Christ. [4-5] Study of that earlier communication will convince the readers of Paul's grasp of this long-hidden plan, now made known by the Spirit to (and through) God's chosen instruments, the apostles and prophets (cf. 2:20 and introduction).

[6] From the viewpoint of the mission to the Gentile world, the essence of the mystery is this: by virtue of Jesus Christ, the non-Jew has a place among God's people alongside the Jew, partaking in every way in the inheritance, the unity, and the covenant promises. The astonishing thing about this (good) news from the Jewish (and the "Churchianity") perspective is that there is no mention of the necessity of a proper relationship to the Law for such participation. It is solely a matter of being "in Christ."

[7] Paul was made a servant of this good news as an undeserved honor, having been enabled, in spite of his natural human sinfulness, by the power of God. [8] This honor came to him who of all God's people was the least (deserving?), so at any rate in his own mind - probably a reference to his former activity in persecuting the very people to whom he now belongs (But of course, on the basis of grace, what one deserves is irrelevant!) It is now his privilege to broadcast to the Gentiles the news of this inexhaustible wealth which can be had in Christ, [9] and to make everyone possible aware that this mystery, hitherto concealed in the heart of the Creator God, is now available for all to know.

[10] God's purpose in revealing the mystery is that through the unlikely instrument of rebellious humanity now transformed into his own people in the form of the Church, he might make known to the whole Universe of beings how multifaceted, how unpredictable is his wisdom. [11] This age-old, unanticipated plan he carried through in the person and work of Christ, [12] in whom we have the right and, by faith, full confidence for coming freely and boldly into the very presence of our Creator and Judge.

[13] In view of all this and its indescribably rich benefits for the readers, Paul begs them not to be disheartened about his incarceration and other afflictions. He is, after all, a servant of the Gospel (v. 7), bound

to obey its purposes whatever the cost. Moreover it is for their benefit he is suffering in this way, it leads to their glory no less than, consequently, to God's Imprisonment is a small price to pay for such a prize. But now to return to the subject from which he has digressed.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Why does it appear that Paul has made a digression here from his (presumably) intended path? (Cf. 3:1 and 3:14.)

2. What does Paul see as his special role in God's great plan for the restoration of the world? If Paul had been born in 1955 in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, and had been educated in Fergus Falls, Minnesota, what do you think his role in God's kingdom might be, if it were parallel to what it actually was for him 2000 years ago?

3. What is the astonishing mystery of God's grace? How do you think it would be expressed for our own times and situation?

4. In light of questions 2 and 3 above, what ought to be the attitude of "good Christian people" (a) toward themselves and (b) toward those who are neither "good" nor Christian? What do you think God sees as the main difference between these two groups? Who is responsible for this difference?

5. Why is it suggested in the comment on 3:10 that God's wisdom is "unpredictable"?

F. EMPOWERMENT: REALIZING THE FUTURE (3:14-19)

[14] Paul resumes his prayer, interrupted in v. 2, addressing the heavenly Father [15] who supplies the underlying unity for the new humanity. He is the universal God of family. [16] Therefore petitioning him to promote the outworking on earth of the new reality described in the preceding section is entirely proper. Accordingly Paul asks God, who has at his disposal gloriously more than what would be adequate, to provide the readers an inner strength of soul by the power of the Holy Spirit. This is the same Spirit of the third blessing (1:13-14) and the same power which Paul connects with it later (1:19). [17] The Spirit-provided inner power is paralleled by (or perhaps has its purpose in) the indwelling of Christ himself in the human heart which has opened up to him in trusting dependent submission. If there is to be any outward expression at all of the inward, heaven-based reality of the new humanity, it will only be done through Christ's progressively assuming inward control of the individual Christians in their everyday attitudes, decisions and deeds, both private and communal.

Paul calls such a condition one of being "rooted and established in love"; the church's solid foundation and nourishment for life is nowhere else to be found than in the indwelling Christ. [18-19] The consequence and indeed the purpose of this inward work of grace is that the readers be empowered to know and experience what otherwise cannot be known or experienced, namely the love which Christ has for them. Paul wants these Gentile Christians, too, with all the other members of God's family, to grasp the full extent (in any conceivable "direction," in any conceivable need) of this incomprehensible love.

And here is the sum of the matter, here is the final purpose of all the foregoing purposes, the supreme goal of the family-minded God: *that the readers be filled with all the fullness of God*. Redemption, recreation and empowerment are all aimed at one and the same object to have again upon the earth a race of human creatures who truly love both each other and the rest of creation on the one hand, and their Creator on the other. And not only so in the future "new heaven and new earth," as the Book of Revelation calls them, but even now in this old and dying age. For in the coming of Christ and in the power of the Spirit of Christ the new age has arrived and overlaps with this age of death and sin.

It is on the basis of this profound change in the affairs of God and humanity that Paul can now in the second half of the epistle lay out a demanding ethic for the Church to live by. Yet it is not so much Paul that lays it out as God, and it is not so much the Church that lives by it as Christ who lives it out in the Church by the Spirit's power. It is in fact what God is doing on the basis of what God has done

G. DOXOLOGY (3:21-22)

Upon the message of this three-fold work of God in Christ on creation's behalf Paul now pronounces a benediction. [3:21] He glorifies the God who is able to do all this, who is in fact able to do far more than we would even think of asking him to do, so small is our vision of our need and so comprehensive and bountiful is his. Whatever he delights to do he does according to the same power which we know is already at work within us now. [22] God's glory is to be found forever - amazingly - in the context of humanity: both in the Church and in Jesus Christ, that Form in which God himself assumed human shape.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is the relation between 3:14-19 and 1:3-14?

2. What does the prayer expressed in this passage, when compared with James 4:2-3, teach us about the meaning of Jesus' assurances in John 14:14? What does Jesus mean there by the expression "in my name"?

3. According to Ephesians, what is the purpose of redemption, recreation, and empowerment by the Spirit?

4. How is the "fullness of God" seen in a person when his new car is demolished by an uninsured motorist?

5. According to this passage, what role does the Holy Spirit play in the life of the Christians?

6. Judging by the message of the entire first half of Ephesians, who or what should we understand the Christians to be? What about potential Christians? Who are the potential Christians?

I. RE-CREATING THE HUMAN FAMILY: WHAT GOD IS DOING (4:1 - 6:20)

A. CREATING UNITY: THE BODY FORGED (4:1-16)

[4:1] Upon the firm and unchanging ground of God's completed work in Christ, Paul now urges his readers to a life together worthy of their received calling. As a prisoner himself, he knows what it is to suffer the consequences of such a life and is not unaware of what he is asking his readers to risk. [2] The *worthy* life is to be characterized by (a) humility, that proper self-estimate - both positive and negative, (b) gentleness, that genuine concern for people in their need to be loved, accepted and treated with dignity, and (c) patience. Patience will show itself in a loving tolerance of people (including oneself) in their weaknesses and foibles, but not in an ignoring or encouragement of such shortcomings, since love seeks the *best* interests of others [3] Patience is also manifested in a strong desire to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace. This is not the same thing as keeping the peace, which too often implies unsatisfactory (as opposed to satisfactory) compromises. To foster true unity requires endless patience as sinful personalities are with care brought ever closer to Christ and therefore to each other.

[4] The foundation of the unity of the new family of God lies in eternally changeless facts, all emphasizing the oneness of God, the Church and the Faith. There is one Body, the Church is one Church no matter how many local manifestations of it (nor, today, how many traditions or denominations) there may be. There is one Spirit of God and not a separate one for every conflicting word of prophecy that may arise. All members of the Body are called to one and the same future, now already here in part. [5] There is only one Lord, the Lord Jesus Christ; no other "lord" takes precedence over him (cf. 1:20-22). One correct and approved message to be believed and one common rite of initiation belonging to the entire Church. [6] And it all comes back to and indeed issues from the fact that there is only one God in the universe, who has created it all and whose presence and power pervades it all. Only on this foundation of unity, ultimately to be found in the unity of God, can the unity of the family possibly come to reality.

[7] By the same token, the members of the Body, unified in theory but fragmented by nature, could never see themselves brought to union, as God wishes them to be, without the needed tools and enablement. God has therefore given grace to them all, to each one differently as Christ has seen fit liberally to measure it out (no sense of stinginess is to be associated here with the expression *measure out*). [8] Paul quotes Psalm 68:18 to make his point; yet not only does this particular passage (and its following interpretation) seem strange to the modern reader, but Paul even substitutes the verb *gave* for the original *received* found in both the Hebrew OT and its ancient Greek translation. (It has been suggested that he follows early Jewish commentators in this reading.) [9-10] Taking the term *ascended* as key, Paul applies the whole passage to the ascending and (at

Pentecost) descending, gift-bearing Christ (Jewish tradition applied it to Moses at Sinai), the Christ who fills the universe (1:23).

[11] The “gifts he has given to men” are those which promote the unity of the Church (v. 13) and include apostles and prophets, those specially gifted and authoritative communicators of God’s message to humanity. The category of apostle seems to have been temporary while that of prophet continues in the office of preacher, God’s spokesperson to particular times, cultures and situations. Evangelists traveled from place to place with the gospel, announcing like heralds the Good News of Jesus Christ. These would be followed by pastors and teachers, or perhaps pastor-teachers, who then nurtured the flocks converted through the evangelists’ message. It is not necessarily to be thought that only one of these gifts could be found in any one given person. Some evangelists, for example, could and presumably did do the work of pastoring and teaching (cf. II Timothy 4:5).

[12] The purpose of endowing the Church with these gifts of grace is that the individual members be equipped for the work of serving one another, the work which they - as “holy ones” - have been set apart to do. No doubt we are also to understand future, potential members as among the ones who benefit from such service. The goal (as opposed to the purpose) is that the Church might be built up in bodily unity through the mutual service of the Christians. [13] That is to say, the goal is that we all attain to the very unity of faith implied in v. 5, to a unity springing from an intimate knowledge of God’s Son which will make us truly mature, and mature by God’s standard of measure, not our own. That standard is the fullness of Christ (cf. 3:19). The goal in short is that we come to make the same choices, hold the same attitudes and values, and do the same things which Christ himself would have made and held and done in our places. [14] The corresponding immaturity to be grown out of is that of being susceptible to the cunning and appeal of human opinions, especially as to the relations between God and humanity. [15] Instead, being lovingly truthful - both critically and encouragingly, both to ourselves and to others - we are called in all things to grow into the likeness and person of Christ, who is the unifying Head of the Body.

[16] This section closes with a metaphorical model of unity. Like the human body, held together by design, the Church grows through the coordinated and cooperative work of its many members, who out of love for the whole contribute their individual efforts toward the good of the whole. But the plan and the energy are drawn from the Head who watches over and provides for his Body. Indeed he lives out his own life through it.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. How does Ephesians 4-6 relate to Ephesians 1-3? Why do you suppose what is taught in chapters 1-3 precedes the message of chapters 4-6? What is meant by saying "God is doing something on the basis of something He *has* done?"
2. Describe humility, gentleness, and patience as used in 4:2-3. Give some real-life examples.
3. Why might Paul's use of Psalm 68:18 (at 4:8-10) seem strange to the modern reader? Can you think of ways modern Christians use Scripture which perhaps are incorrect or misleading? What guarantees a proper use of Scripture?
4. For whose benefit are God's gifts to the church, and for what purpose are they? Talk about the difference between the concerns of the individual Christian and the concerns of the community of believers in Christ.
5. Think for a moment about the hymns of the faith. What differences do you notice between the message of hymns composed before, say, 1880 and those written in the decades preceding and following 1900? Are they individual-oriented or community-oriented, theology-oriented or experience-oriented? What of recent "praise songs"?
6. Does 4:1-16 relate to any one of the three blessings (1:3-14) more than to the others?

B. MIND CONTROL THE INWARD CHANGE (4:17-24)

In 1:15-23, Paul stressed the importance of the mind's understanding the message if it is to be properly appropriated by a person. Now again, the role of the mind is described for the successful (or unsuccessful) living of a life *worthy* of the calling inherent in that message (4:1).

[17] Backing his own words with the confidence that he is communicating the very counsel of the Lord (Jesus), Paul urges his Gentile readers no longer to conduct their lives as their fellow, but unconverted Gentiles do. This unacceptable style of living is described as a progression which begins in the mind's condition. Paul portrays the Gentile (Le, unconverted) mind as futile, vain, focused on concerns which in the end, before the throne of God, will come to nothing. [18] A mind in such a state is one which simply does not understand what the true values and standards are; it has no light from the mind of God. In other words, where matters of everlasting consequences are concerned such minds are full of ignorance, or worse, of hardness arising from stubborn refusal to acquiesce where the truth has been available. (There is no need to attempt a real distinction between "heart" and "mind" or "understanding" here as if they referred to separate compartments in a human being.) The natural result of such a state of mind is first of all alienation from the life of God participation in eternal life is out of the question for persons with this sort of mind.

[19] The downward progression continues. Out of a basic need for sensitivity and tenderness, the selfishly distorted human mind creates a desire for sensuality. Closely related as perversions of one another (if a virtue can be called a "perversion" of its corresponding vice), sensitivity and sensuality cannot coexist. A perverted mind casts over the one in favor of the other, callouses over sensitivity, and ultimately leads to outward behavior characterized by incredible inventiveness in impurity, with neither any end or satisfaction in view.

[20] This "pagan" sort of life does not reflect the Christ whom the readers have learned about. [21] But in saying this, Paul assumes that what they have heard and been taught about Jesus corresponds with what is actually the case. (This statement amounts to a rather strong indication that Ephesians, if written by Paul, was not written specifically to the church in Ephesus.) [22] The "truth that is in Jesus," as it touches this particular issue of inward change, is now summed up under a three-step progression. First, with respect to their previous habits of life (vv.17-19), they are to lay aside the "old man," the selfish, self-centered ego which is rotting away to corruption because of its entanglement in the deceitful (futile) values of this world. Any mind turned in upon itself eats itself alive and has no part in the life of God. The laying-off of the old, dying self is nothing less than the act of repentance, the death of the sinful nature, and must be repeated again and again throughout life whenever conviction of sin is worked by the power of the Spirit through the message.

[23] Second, immediately upon the "daily" death of the old nature, the mind is made new, furnished with the light of God's mind, enabled to see as God sees and to make decisions which Jesus would make. [24] To make such decisions and actually to behave like Christ would behave, is, finally, to put on the new self a

creature not of our own making, but one designed by God, according to his own taste for true righteousness and genuine dedication to the purposes of his eternal will.

Thus the ongoing change from a godless and selfish death-bound life to a Christ-like one, filled with the eternal life of God, originates in an inward change of mind wrought by God himself as part of his bringing the new creation to present reality.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What similarities are there between 4:17-24 and 1:15-23? What is their common denominator, their common assumption about human beings?

2. How is the message of 4:17-24 related to that of Matthew 15:1-20?

3. In what sense is the uncovered mind "futile"? What is meant by "futile" here? Can a Christian's mind be futile, too? If you think so, give some real examples from your own experiences of "futile thinking" by Christians.

4. Judging from what has been said already in the Book of Ephesians, what would you say are God's standards, values, and priorities? How do those of ourselves and our churches stack up? For example, how do our budgets reflect or not reflect God's values?

5. How does the old nature die and what is meant by saying it must die daily?

6. Who or what is the new nature? Where does human transformation begin?

G. BECOMING CHRISTIAN: THE "LITTLE" THINGS (4:25-5:5)

One must distinguish between becoming Christian and becoming a Christian, between what are commonly called sanctification and justification. The reason rests in the relation of the inward and outward changes just described (hence the *therefore* in v. 25) and will become even clearer at 5:5. It is enough to say now, however, that "sanctification" is a process made up of many "small" considerations.

The following instructions for being transformed outwardly into the family of God on earth seem to fall under three heads. First, believers are urged not to grieve the Holy Spirit (v. 30). [25] To avoid this Paul commands them (quoting Zechariah 8:16) to be truthful with each other, without taint of untruth. "Neighbor" is in no way restricted to a certain group, but simply means everybody. The startlingly practical reason which is given for this is that because of our situation as *fellow* human beings we would be hurting ourselves by lying to others and benefiting ourselves by telling the truth. [26-27] Psalm 4:4 is quoted now, from the Greek version (the Hebrew reads "tremble" instead of "be angry"). Anger, while useful and appropriate (indeed commanded), must be kept in its place and not permitted to brood and fester and so gain the upper hand over the angry person. In this it is an imitation of the anger of the God who loves the sinner while hating sin. To be otherwise (including presumably, to be inappropriately *unperturbed*) is to be diabolically selfish. [28] Any who have been accustomed to steal should, as new creatures, do so no longer, but should use their own labor to make themselves useful. The remarkable thing about this admonishment is the reason given for it. It is not a matter (for Paul) of earning one's own living (though that would be implied), much less of getting ahead in the world. The purpose of refraining from stealing and of working with one's own hands is to provide for the needs of *other* people, an entirely fitting purpose for members of the new family to adopt in their work. [29] Finally, Paul cautions the readers against worthless talk, and enjoins them instead to speak in ways which meet hurting people in their need, to speak words which ultimately encourage and strengthen the whole group. Genuine compliments and words of thanks must replace whining negativism and worthless criticism. Prudent silence should dislodge gossip, including that given in the form of deceptively pious prayer concerns.

[30] Attending to all these injunctions will prevent the "grieving" of God's Holy Spirit. This is not to be taken to mean that the Spirit becomes sad at our failings, like some overbearing parents threaten to do when a child will not do what is wished of it. It simply means that an offence against any human being is an offence against the very God who created that person, against the Spirit who has been given as a seal upon the newly united humanity (1:13). [31] Paul now sums up matters to this point suggesting that these interpersonal problems have their root in self-centered malice and that they, like the "old nature," must be laid aside (cf. v. 22).

[4:32-5:1] Secondly, the readers become Christian by imitating the Godhead as children imitate their parents. Just as God has forgiven them in Christ - freely, fully and unilaterally - they are to forgive each other (and themselves). This forgiveness is a result of God-like kindness and compassion for one another which enables each person to view life from the perspective of others and to understand that what may motivate another's

behavior may not be all that different from what motivates their own. [2] Imitating God in forgiveness parallels the imitation of the self-sacrificial love of Christ for us, in which we, like him, are secure enough in our position and future with God, that we may lay down our own interests as an offering to God on behalf of the interests of other people. It is uncomfortably threatening to forgive without guarantee of a favorable response or to give up personal anxieties without assurance of provision. But once a person realizes that his or her ultimate worth and final provision rest with a God who has been more than favorably disposed *all along*, the threat evaporates (cf. John 13:3-5).

[3] Under a third head, Paul gives instructions for becoming Christian which may be classified as "appropriate conversation," both in the sense of life-style and in the more common sense of speech. Sexually immoral behavior and any sort of impurity of life are absolutely prohibited. The same is true of greed which perhaps is partially what is to be understood under "impurity." At any rate, whereas greed may be far less frowned upon in most congregations than sexual misbehavior is, Paul rates them together. The notion of stingy and covetous parishioners (money - and power-hungry but otherwise morally upright) self-righteously wrinkling their noses at a thrice-divorced woman, would have been obnoxious to Paul (cf. I Corinthians 5:10). [4] Likewise incongruous with God's new human family is any ugly coarseness in the form of foulmouthed joking or leery-eyed, smirking and foolish talk. Let the Christian mouth instead be filled with the natural overflow of a thankful heart, something which can scarcely be avoided when Christians keep in their minds the facts of what God has done for them.

[5] All this instruction is justified - and in particular the warnings against the sins listed in v. 3 (the lists in vv. 3 and 5 correspond exactly) - in the knowledge that no one who values such sins above God's will has any part in the kingdom of Christ and God. God's kingdom is the rule of God over whatever is part of his kingdom, and hence anyone who worships as an idolater, by giving allegiance to anything but God, cannot be under God's rule.

But this of course includes all human beings according to our old natures. The deceitfulness of the old nature must be guarded against in another way, however. Paul has been somewhat elliptical in the statement of v. 5: the impression is given that persons who commit such idolatry have no part in the kingdom *because of their idolatry*. The old nature seizes this idea immediately and assumes the reverse, namely that participation in the kingdom can be had by avoiding idolatry and other sins, as well as by living a moral life. The situation is quite the contrary. Participation in the kingdom, in the new family of God, is a freely given gift of God's grace, bestowed upon *sinner*s, upon those who deserve it not at all. Such is the whole point of chapters 1-3. What is meant in 5:5, then, is not that idolatrous persons have no part in the family because of their idolatry, but that persons having no part in the family are also idolaters, and for the same reason: they have not capitulated to the grace of God in Christ, but insist on preserving the independent old nature from death in Christ. And that death of the old nature, the laying off of the old nature in repentance, is the only way in which the life of God can come to a person.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the difference between "becoming a Christian" and "becoming Christian." How might the distinction be reflected already in Ephesians 2:10? How in the structure of the book itself?
2. What is suggested as *not* a meaning of the phrase "grieving the Spirit"? What sorts of false notions (indeed, false doctrine) are encouraged by ignoring this warning?
3. What conclusions might you draw from the fact that the activities which "grieve the Spirit" are all ways people treat other people?
4. Talk about some practical, everyday ways in which we may be "imitators of God" in our own homes, jobs, churches, and neighborhoods. Discuss this in connection with John 13:3-5.
5. What is greed? Are only the wealthy to be considered greedy? Do Christians "go lighter" on greed than on sexual misbehavior? Why or why not? What does I Corinthians 5:9-10 suggest on the subject?
6. In the comments above on Ephesians 5:5, what is at issue? Why is it important?

D. LIGHT AND WISDOM: LIVING UNDECEIVED (5:6-21)

[6] In spite of the renewed nature of persons who are part of the new age, the already-but-not-yet-dead old nature clings to them still, and renders them susceptible to deception and foolishness. Because of the serious dangers, outlined immediately above, which face the disobedient, the readers are warned not to let themselves be led away by worthless talk into [7] participation in the deeds of such persons. [8] The values and behavior of the disobedient work against the unity of the new family and therefore against the will of God, and for that reason are characterized as darkness, the opposite of the light of the Lord. Paul's readers once belonged to that realm of darkness, but no longer. They are now, *without qualification*, stated to belong to the Lord's light instead. This, in spite of their abiding capacity to succumb to deception (v. 6). They need not (indeed can never) deserve their place in the light, but owing to their continued participation in this present dark age of disobedience, they must be urged to conduct themselves in accordance with their God-given standing in that new age of light. [9] This sort of conduct will be productive of everything which corresponds with the nature of God (contrast v. 3), and [10] instrumental in living this way is a knowledge of what pleases Christ a knowledge got by learning how he conducted himself during his earthly ministry.

[11-12] Enlightened living in addition to knowing one's status and knowing and doing what pleases the Lord, includes a strict refusal to have any share in what does not please him. This is not just a simplistic listing and avoidance of unacceptable behavior, but also a refusal to partake in any legalistic and self-righteous pharisaism. For holy though that may seem to the proud and to the intimidated, it is a work of darkness. The other side of avoiding participation in evil is exposing it, both by refusing to have a part in it and, positively, by doing the deeds which Christ would do: that is, by being a light in dark places. [13-14a] To do so has the effect of transforming darkness into light. Hidden dark deeds are exposed for what they are by the light of Christ shining out from his followers, and if the perpetrators of such deeds do not flee from the light in some way, but stand in it, they have no choice but to repent and be enlightened themselves.

[14b] Finally, living in the light means continuously receiving the light. Quoting perhaps from an early Christian baptismal hymn, Paul lets it be known that the dispersing of darkness is an ongoing process for the believer, analogous to the resurrection from the dead. The daily death of repentance is a necessary condition for and is automatically followed by Christ's daily enlightening of the Christian.

[15] The frame of reference shifts now from living in the light of Christ to living wisely, two life-styles which in effect amount to the same thing. Paul enjoins careful attention to maintaining such wisdom-guided behavior because [16] the readers, as members of God's new family in Christ, are already members and representatives of the new age to come. In the midst of the evil-saturated days of this old age, God's people are called to make use of every opportunity to act as Christ would do, to act as will be utterly natural at the consummation, though now it requires the painful, repeated death of the old nature. [17] Because of the urgency of the times, wise living dictates understanding how Christ would indeed act in any given situation, for his will is that his

people do as he would do. Not to be concerned about his will in this way is to be a fool. [18] It is the Spirit, moreover, who implements the Christ-behavior in the lives of the family members, and therefore, similarly, not to be filled with the Spirit is like being drunk and sunk in debauchery.

[19] This is a startling association of ideas when one becomes aware of what Paul includes under the rubric of being filled with the Spirit, the neglect of which is placed on a level with drunken dissipation. The Spirit-filled life is marked by (at least) four characteristics. For one, it brings mutual encouragement and edification through the believers' calling one another's attention to the promises of God and truths of the faith as they are couched in Scripture and poetic devotional pieces Secondly, it includes spontaneous, heart-generated musical praise to the Lord Jesus.

[20] A third mark of Spirit-filled living is continual thankfulness for everything to God the Father, through the relationship we have with him in Christ. One may wonder if such thankfulness is meant to extend to the tragic death of one's spouse or child, for death can scarcely be thought to please the God of life. However that may be, even in time of tragedy and sorrow, we may be thankful (eventually) that same God shares our sorrow, having himself suffered the death of his own Son, and nevertheless remains in final control of the universe.

[21] Another mark of the Spirit's presence in the life of the new family is mutual submission out of reverence for Christ. The personal security to be had in Christ frees us to prefer one another in the daily affairs of living. What this means in three sample situations is spelled out in the next section.

It may be pointed out that these marks of the Spirit-filled life are as much the cause as the result of fullness of the Spirit. An encouraging word from a brother or sister, a disciplined word of thanks when the heart does not feel particularly thankful, and even acquiescence (of the non-"compromising" kind) to the needs of others, can all lead to the heart's swelling with the joy of the Spirit just as much as the joy of the Spirit leads to these very same deeds.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. In what sense are Christians both “already” and “not yet” new creatures in Christ? What do you suppose might be the purpose of such an arrangement? That is, since God has already made us members of his kingdom, why has he not yet either removed us completely from this present evil kingdom or completely removed the evil of this world from us?

2. What is dangerous about having *lists* of sins to avoid? What attitudes do they encourage?

3. How is an intimate knowledge of Christ’s character and earthly life an antidote to lists of do’s and don’t’s? How does the distinction between law and gospel apply here? What about that between light and darkness? How might darkness reign even in good, Bible-believing church?

4. What are the marks of being Spirit-filled, as described in 5:19-21? Note how repeatedly the will of God, the grieving of and being filled with the Spirit, and the glory of God are all centered in human beings, and in the ways human beings treat each other (cf. 3:20-21, 4:25-32, and John 1:14).

E. THE CIRCLE OF RESPONSIBILITY: MUTUAL SUBMISSION (5:21-6:9)

Mutual submission as one of the marks of being Spirit-filled is illustrated by Paul in three common areas of human experience: marital, parental, and that of labor relationships.

1. WIVES AND HUSBANDS (5:22-33)

[22] Wives are called upon to submit to the authority of their (own) husbands as they would to that of Christ, the Lord. The chief threat in submitting to another person is the fear of being manipulated or mistreated by that person. There is no such cause for fear with Christ; his is tender trustworthiness and not mere raw authority. Yet while Paul certainly does not imply that all (or any) husbands measure up to Christ in this regard neither does he excuse wives from such submission because of the imperfection of their husbands. Whatever the hindrances, he is constantly aiming at the implementation of the sin-freed family of God. [23-24] The metaphor of marriage which illumines the relation of Christ and Church becomes a two-way road reflecting back upon that very relation of man and woman in marriage. As the Church follows the leadership of its Savior, so must the wife that of her husband *in everything*. The strident protests of modern feminism, so thoroughly justified in many ways, cannot change the naked bluntness of this instruction. Yet much of that protest would perhaps never have arisen if teachers of the Church had not stopped here, but had gone on to round out the circle of mutual responsibility by giving men their proper exhortation, which here follows immediately.

[25] Men must love their wives, regardless of any nonsubmission, in the same way as Christ loved the Church when he sacrificed himself for it. The way in which husbands submit to their wives (v. 21) is by dying to their own interests out of concern for the best interests of their mates. This is not a burdening of the wife with the decision-making responsibility implied in vv. 22-24 as belonging to the husband nor does it preclude husband and wife counseling together in leadership, but rather it means the making of decisions according to *her* needs and *her* welfare, even when it means a decision she may not like. It may take the form of a husband's disciplining himself to make the first move toward "making up" by admitting his guilt in a disagreement. Paul is implying that a husband's leadership in such matters is crucial.

[26-27] Christ's purpose in his self-sacrifice of love was to set the Church apart for himself, as the newly recreated family of God made as clean and pure and radiant as he is himself. Cleansing and purification are bestowed by the Word of promise ritually applied to the individual believer in the water of Christian baptism. Christ's purpose, in other words, is the welfare and the blossoming to full potential of the people in the new family. [28] Similarly, husbands sacrifice their own selfish interests for their wives' sakes, not if their wives will start to make some self-improvements, but in *order that* they may grow toward humanly and womanly perfection. To love one's wife in this way is to love oneself, no less than caring for one's own body is a result of loving oneself. [29] For, in yet another metaphor, the care we bestow upon our own bodies, grooming and feeding them, is quite the antithesis of hatred and is illustrative of Christ's care for the Church,

[30] the members of which are members of *his* own body. As Christians are extensions of Christ, so wives are extensions of their husbands, and surely vice versa We love and care for one another and submit to one another because, in a sense, we *are* one another.

[31] The argument for mutual submission in the sphere of matrimony is capped by a quotation from Genesis 2:24 reinforcing the essential unity of marriage which takes precedence even over the relation of parent and child (an important point to consider in in-law-related marital disagreements). [32] This mysterious unity Paul applies metaphorically to the relation between Christ and the Church [33] but like so many anthropomorphical figures of speech illuminating the divine, this one reflects the divine pattern prescriptively back upon the human relationship from which it is taken. This whole passage, so little understood and even less practiced, if taken seriously would virtually empty the divorce courts - and one day will.

2. CHILDREN AND PARENTS (6:1-4)

A second area of human experience where Spirit-filled mutual submission may express itself is that of parent-child relationships. [6:1] Children are enjoined to submit to their parents by obeying them as the Lord Jesus had obeyed his ("in the Lord" does not mean "Christian" here as if children may safely disobey heathen parents). The fact that such behavior is "in the Lord" makes it right; whatever the Lord does is right, for he is the standard of rightness [2-3] It is also "biblical" for children to obey their parents Paul quotes Deuteronomy 5:16/Exodus 20:12 to make his point, emphasizing at the same time the added promise of reward which is given along with the commandment. The promise of long and good life as the consequence of obedience is not gainsaid by the fact that many obedient children have suffered miserably and indeed die young. It means rather that disobedience to parents is certain to bring about a troubled future. Other elements in a sin-saturated world have their effect upon the obedient and the disobedient indiscriminately.

The promise to obedient children introduces the corresponding submission demanded of parents. Since children, and especially young children, can scarcely be expected to have the sophistication necessary for recognizing the long range benefits of present obedience, it is up to loving parents to ensure that their children learn obedience early on. There is nothing easy about this task, but to neglect it is a terrible disservice to a child and will reap misery upon him or her in future years. [4] More explicitly, parents ("fathers" is a synecdoche here) are to take the same care and effort in training up their children as the Lord himself would (and with his disciples, did) do. Negatively, this implies avoidance of capricious, dictatorial, inconsistent, and otherwise provoking treatment which so exasperates children, even when they themselves do not realize it. Positively, it means looking out for the best interests of the child, both long and short range, even when it means foregoing one's own comfort and convenience. In this, as in all situations, the question is "What would Christ do here?"

3. SLAVES AND MASTERS (6:5-9)

[5] Finally, mutual submission as a mark of the Spirit is applied to the sphere of labor relations. Slaves must obey their earthly masters with the same respect and unaffected openness which they owe to Christ, who is of course their "heavenly" master. In other words, a slave is to consider his or her master as if Christ himself were the person. [6-7] Obedience is not to be carried out in the presence of the master while the heart harbors disobedience, but is to proceed from the heart itself, so that it is exercised even in secret. This is the will of God, the God who "sees in secret" (cf. Matthew 6:6). Such heart-sprung service is enthusiastic and wholehearted, and is possible only under the influence of the Spirit. [8] Just as husbands who love their wives do themselves a favor and just as children who learn obedience to parents decrease their chances of self-inflicted misery, so here slaves are promised a divine reward (unspecified however) for whatever good they may do - slaves, says Paul, not just freemen. That is the sort of master the Lord Jesus is. It is not a sign of weakness to enjoy rewards for work well done, so long as we keep in mind that our work does not - ever - place God (or Christ) in our debt; his rewards are given freely out of the joy it brings him to give them.

[9] Correspondingly, masters are to submit to their slaves by treating them "in the same way," that is, they are to behave toward their slaves as if each slave were Christ himself. A menacing attitude toward them is inappropriate since the masters are themselves slaves of Christ, and Christ is not a menacing master. In fact, Christ is master of both master and slave alike and makes no distinction between them for purposes of judgment or for standards of service. Thus masters do well to remember their common lot with their slaves before God. They are members together, or at least (in the case of heathen slaves) potential members together, of the new family of God.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. How can submission be mutual?

2. Applying mutual submission to the husband-wife relationship, define a wife's submission to her husband and a husband's submission to his wife. Discuss these notions with respect to your own marriage, or to marriages you have known.

3. Why is submission so difficult? What are we afraid of and why are we afraid of it?

4. What submission is demanded of children toward parents? What is parental submission toward children? How is loving and submissive disciplining of children different from a strictly authoritarian approach? Where lies the balance? Why is it some parents are reluctant to teach their children to obey? Will the world have the same tolerance for them as their parents do?

5. Characterize the mutual submission of slaves and masters. How might such things as labor disputes and land ownership be different if management viewed workers as if they were all little Christs? What would be the result if employees knew that Jesus was their foreman?

F. MAKING THE RIGHT STAND IN THE RIGHT STRENGTH (6:10-20)

The groundwork has been laid for God's re-creation of the human family, Christ has wrought redemption. The new family has been re-established through God's gracious adoption of sinners - regardless of race - as his own children. And yet while this old age of sin and death continues, the new family must struggle in battle against the influential powers of this age in order to live out in the midst of it the others-centered ethic of the new age. To this purpose God has endowed his new family with the Spirit to seal them as his own and to enable and protect them in this war of the ages, which Paul now, summing up, describes.

[10] Believers, members of the new family of God, are to find their strength and leadership for this warfare in the Lord Jesus Christ. By implication, they are not to look for it in themselves, neither in their spirituality nor their maturity, not in education, influence, position, prestige, money, programs, personal rights, or other people. Their strength is solely to be found in Christ. [11] Having put on the right sort of armor as representative of the Lord's strength (to be described in w. 14-17), they are moreover to fight the right war it is the resistance against satanic plots, cunning and crafty, to overthrow the reestablishment of God's rule upon the earth. [12] Paul lists four varieties of nonhuman powers, all under the control of the Devil, against which believers, under the leadership of Christ, have their struggles. The startling thing to notice, which is seldom noticed, is that this struggle is *not* against "flesh and blood," that is, it is not against other human beings! The entire ethical orientation of the powers of darkness is the advancement of self: power, prestige, wealth, for self. Their aims are to embroil human beings and institutions in the struggle to ascend the ladder, to get ahead, to accumulate, and thereby to disrupt the originally intended unity of the human family under God, since one can seldom advance oneself without demoting someone else. Christians and churches do wrong to assume that such and such other person or persons are the proper target of righteous anger. People through whom Satan opposes and interferes with the work of God on earth are to be compassionately loved and prayed for (Matthew 5:43-48), for it is this very tactic which works toward the defeat of satanic schemes while avoiding the struggle against "flesh and blood." As a matter of fact, believers who fight other people (indeed other believers!) are themselves caught up in the fight to advance self. So cunning is the real enemy!

[13] All the more reason, then, to put on the full armor of God (Most of the metaphorical images used in this passage are drawn from Isaiah 11, 52, 59). Otherwise, one cannot stand firm against these deceptive onslaughts. The "day of evil" in this context does not seem likely to be a reference to the final day of the present evil age, but rather refers to any moment of temptation when it comes to a believer or church. [14] One will be able to stand firm in such a time if one is properly prepared. To be prepared is to be armed first of all with truth as the foundation of all else. A member of God's family need not fear the truth, even that about himself, since he or she has been already accepted by God without regard to merit or demerit. Hence, not only with God and self, but with other people as well, it is imperative and possible to be truthful. Likewise necessary is the breastplate of righteousness, which can be taken in two senses; as the verdict rendered upon the guilty sinner (one is reminded here of the idealized shape of the ancient breastplate with its bulging

pectorals and rippling abdominals), and as the Spirit-produced behavior appropriate to the new family. [15] It is not easy to know what exactly is meant by “readiness of the gospel of peace” (as it reads literally). Since it is associated with shoes here, it may refer to the readiness to carry the Gospel to the world, or perhaps to the solid firmness upon which the Christian may stand (since the good news of peace with God never changes).

[16] The phrase “in addition to all this” (NIV) seems to imply that the next piece of equipment is the last one, which is not the case. For that reason, a better rendering perhaps is “at all times” (TEV). Faith in the gracious forgiveness of God is a shield against the barbed jibes of the Evil One. The Word of God comes in the form of comforting reassurance to those who are filled with guilt, remorse and terror, and it speaks condemnation and law to those who are either careless of the will of God or proud of their own perfections. Demonic arrows, on the other hand, encourage the proud and disobedient while taunting the disheartened. Faith shields the faithful from such misplaced communications, permitting them to admit freely their failings, since because God’s favor was granted in spite of such failings, it will not be withdrawn on the basis of further failings.

[17] Finally, salvation (or possibly God’s victory; the word is a slightly different one from the usual word for salvation, although since it is the one used in the Greek version of Isaiah 59:17 from which Paul is quoting, that is perhaps a moot point) as a protective helmet and the Word (or message) of God, supplied by the Spirit, as an offensive weapon, are recommended to round out the believers’ equipment.

[18] Having enlisted his readers under the right leader to fight the right war with the right equipment, Paul now tells them what the right maneuvers are. They are to pray at all times in all sorts of ways under the direction of the Spirit (who knows what to pray for), and they are to keep themselves diligently alert in prayer and petition on behalf of other believers in the common struggle. These maneuvers are recommended rather than gossiping or Politicizing or other tactics against “flesh and blood.” [19] As an example of what he means, Paul asks their vigilant prayer on his own behalf. He wishes for appropriate words to be given him by the Spirit so that he might openly and clearly make known the meaning of the once hidden Gospel. [20] Moreover, since his work on behalf of the Gospel has landed him in jail for the time being Paul, ever human, requests prayer for boldness in the continuance of his ministry and its attendant dangers to his person.

Thus Paul has outlined the calling which God has given to his new family in Christ as they live their new life in the midst of the old sin-bound age. They find themselves in two ages at once, already members of the new age to come, but not yet in completeness, and still members of this old age of darkness, but no longer so in the sight of God, who has called them out of it.

CLOSING REMARKS (6:21-24)

[21-22] But for three minor variations, the text of these two verses is identical with that at Colossians 4:7-8, which fact, depending on the interpretation of other evidence, could point toward or away from Pauline authorship of Ephesians. As it stands however, Paul deputizes his fellow worker Tychicus to deliver both news of Paul's situation and these two letters on his behalf and so to encourage the readers. [23-24] He signs off with a blessing of peace, love, faith and grace, which as he is careful to point out, originate with God and Christ and are enjoyed only by those who love the Lord Jesus.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What in practical terms does it mean to depend upon Christ as the source of strength and leadership in the warfare to which Christians have been called, rather than to depend upon the sorts of strengths and advantages usually valued?

2. How do the strengths of Christ manifest themselves in outward behavior in conflict situations of various kinds? Give some concrete examples from your own life.

3. Why is it so easy to view human beings as our enemies? Why is it suggested that this is not to be the case? What impact could this truth have upon your own present situation?

4. How do the metaphorical pieces of equipment which Paul recommends indicate the way in which Christ fights his battles? How do these ways differ from the usual ways people "fight," even in churches?

5. Discuss the comments made in verse 16, regarding the "arrows" of Satan, from the perspective of law and gospel. What is an appropriate application of law and gospel? An inappropriate application?

6. Can preaching and teaching in evangelical churches get law and gospel confused? Any examples?



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