

# *EPHESIANS RESEARCH*

*\* all research done by The Docent Research Group*

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# *EPHESIANS OVERVIEW*

## **I. Commentaries and Bible Studies**

### Technical Commentaries

Peter O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (PNTC). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999. (536 pages).  
ISBN: 0802837360

D.A. Carson describes O'Brien's book as "the best English-language commentary on Ephesians."<sup>1</sup> O'Brien includes an abundance of technical information in the footnotes, yet his book is much more readable than Hoehner's tome.

Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002. (930 pages)  
ISBN: 0801026148

After decades of teaching the book of Ephesians, Hoehner's commentary is his *magnum opus* on this epistle. It is the most detailed English commentary on the Greek text of Ephesians. Hoehner does hundreds of word studies throughout his commentary. His introductory section (pp. 1-130) is particularly helpful.

Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians: Power and Magic – The Concept of Power in Ephesians In Light of Its Historical Setting*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989. (244 pages)  
ISBN: 0801002273

While this volume is not a commentary, it does provide some helpful analysis of the epistle, particularly its historical background. Arnold's book is one of the most influential dissertations written on Ephesians in recent Pauline studies. Arnold argues that the "power" language that fills the book of Ephesians is connected to the local fears of the demonic "powers" associated with pagan idols in Ephesus like the cult of Artemis. In Ephesians, Paul is pastorally highlighting how Christ has defeated these "powers."

### Non-technical Commentaries

Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians* (TNTC). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008. (187 pages)  
ISBN: 0830842403

Klyne Snodgrass, *Ephesians* (NIVAC). Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996. (384 pages)  
ISBN: 0310493404

F.F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* (NICNT). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984. (442 pages)  
ISBN: 0802825109

### Devotional Commentaries

R. C. Sproul, *The Purpose of God: Ephesians*. Christian Focus, 2006. (168 pages)  
ISBN: 1857926099

John R.W. Stott, *The Message of Ephesians* (BST). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1979. (291 pages)

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<sup>1</sup> D.A. Carson, *New Testament Commentary Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986/2007), 108.

## Simple Bible Study Guides

*Ephesians: A NavPress Bible Study*. The LifeChange Series (127 pages)  
ISBN: 0891090541

## II. Ephesians Preaching Order

John Calvin considered Ephesians his favorite letter and he preached a series of forty-eight sermons on the book from May 1558 to March 1559.<sup>2</sup> (Days before his death on November 24, 1572, the wife of Scottish Reformer John Knox read to him daily Calvin's sermons on Ephesians.<sup>3</sup>)

John MacArthur preached verse-by-verse through the book of Ephesians in a sixty-one-part series that lasted from January 1, 1978 until June 24, 1979.<sup>4</sup>

J. Ligon Duncan also preached a sixty-one-part series on Ephesians beginning June 26, 2005 and finishing November 12, 2006.<sup>5</sup>

Sinclair Ferguson preached through the entire book of Ephesians in only fourteen sermons during the mid-week services at Park Cities PCA in Dallas, TX, from January 7, 2004 until April 28, 2004.<sup>6</sup>

Neither Mark Dever nor John Piper has systematically taught through the entire book of Ephesians. Dever did preach an overview sermon on the book where he identified the message of Ephesians to be "grace."<sup>7</sup> John Piper has preached fifty-three sermons from Ephesians,<sup>8</sup> but he has not yet preached consecutively through the entire epistle.

Bible teacher John Stott divides up the book for preaching as follows:

“Introduction to the letter (1:1-2)

### I New Life

- 1 Every spiritual blessing (1:3-14)
- 2 A prayer for knowledge (1:15-23)
- 3 Resurrected with Christ (2:1-10)

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<sup>2</sup> John Calvin, *Sermons on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, trans. Arthur Golding in 1577 and re. in 1973 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1973), viii.

<sup>3</sup> David Laing, *The Works of John Knox*, vol. 6 (Edinburgh: Thomas George Stevenson, 1864; reprint, New York: AMS Press, 1966), 639, 643.

<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.gty.org/Resources/Sermons/scripture> (accessed November 14, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> See [http://www.fpcjackson.org/resources/sermons/Ephesians/index\\_to\\_ephesians.htm](http://www.fpcjackson.org/resources/sermons/Ephesians/index_to_ephesians.htm) (accessed November 14, 2009).

<sup>6</sup> See <http://www.pcpc.org/midweek/audio/ephesians/> (accessed November 14, 2009).

<sup>7</sup> See <http://www.capitolhillbaptist.org/audio/1999/11/14/grace-the-message-of-ephesians/> (accessed November 14, 2009).

<sup>8</sup> See <http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByScripture/3/?pageSize=25&pageNumber=1> (accessed November 14, 2009).

### II New Society

- 4 A single new humanity (2:11-22)
- 5 Paul's unique privilege (3:1-13)
- 6 Confidence in God's power (3:14-21)

### III New Standards

- 7 Unity and diversity in the church (4:1-16)
- 8 A new set of clothes (4:17-5:4)
- 9 More incentives to righteousness (5:5-21)

### IV New Relationships

- 10 Husbands and wives (5:21-33)
- 11 Parents, children, masters and servants (6:1-9)
- 12 Principalities and powers (6:10-20)
- 13 Conclusion (6:21-24)<sup>9</sup>

## III. Author

The Apostle Paul, the author of Ephesians, is one of the most towering figures in the history of the world. Martin Luther called him “the wisest man after Christ”<sup>10</sup> and thanked God for sending him as an apostle to the Gentiles: “We should rejoice and take comfort and also thank God, who has called such a glorious apostle, Paul, for us Gentiles and has sent him to us. Paul himself testifies to this mission in his letter to Timothy when he says (2 Tim. 1:11) that he is appointed a preacher and an apostle and a teacher of the Gentiles in the faith and the truth. Therefore the beloved Paul is our apostle, although all the other apostles are also ours; for all have together received one and the same doctrine from Christ and have taught it.”<sup>11</sup>

Biblical scholar Paul Barnett argues that no matter how we view Paul, we must reasonably regard him as one of history's truly remarkable figures. Barnett helpfully summarizes Paul's quest to establish churches and spread the gospel throughout the Greco-Roman world: “During his decade-long burst of energy he walked thousands of kilometers (almost thirty per day) across forbidding mountain ranges and through arid wastelands proclaiming the message of the crucified but risen Messiah. For preaching a message that was offensive to both Jews and Gentiles he was repeatedly and severely flogged, and on one occasion stoned. Virtually penniless, he labored throughout the night to earn money to preach by day. This ex-Pharisee brought the message about Jesus the Christ to the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire, and wanted to repeat this achievement in the western province, Spain. Apart from Paul's Herculean efforts, it is difficult to imagine how the gospel of Christ would have taken root so comprehensively in the Greco-Roman world. Paul's intrepid and energetic travels and tireless work, however, do not in themselves explain his achievements. Here we must understand that for Paul his relationship with Christ and his work for him were inseparable. He regarded all that he did as ‘the work of the Lord’ (1 Corinthians 15:58) that the risen Christ was doing ‘through’ his servant, Paul (Romans 15:18)...In short, to understand Paul's achievements we need to appreciate his driving passion, which was that Christ loved him and seized him,

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<sup>9</sup> John Stott, *The Message of Ephesians: God's New Society* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1979), 7.

<sup>10</sup> Martin Luther, *What Luther Says: An Anthology*, comp. Ewald M. Plass (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), entry no. 3258, p. 1026.

<sup>11</sup> Martin Luther, *What Luther Says: An Anthology*, comp. Ewald M. Plass (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), entry no. 3268, p. 1028.

and that he could never be separated from his love (Rom 8:35, 39), sinner though he was and persecutor though he had been.”<sup>12</sup>

Barnett also emphasizes the intelligence of the Apostle Paul: “Closely connected with his relationship with Christ and equally basic in explaining those achievements was Paul’s spiritual intelligence. His considerable native intelligence may be inferred by his precocity as a younger rabbi in the prestigious school of Gamaliel (cf. Gal 1:13-14) as well as by his multilingual abilities (Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, and Latin [?]). Through that rabbinic school Paul became a master of the Old Testament, from which he makes more than one hundred identifiable quotations, more than half being from the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Tanak (Hebrew Bible). Additionally, his writings contain innumerable echoes from and allusions to biblical texts. Frequently these quotations, echoes, and allusions do not reproduce the original text exactly, suggesting that Paul was in many cases relying on a well-stocked memory; carrying voluminous OT scrolls was likely not practical for a penniless itinerant preacher who *walked* everywhere! Through the Holy Spirit this man ‘in Christ,’ who was steeped in the OT, and who had likely been catechized at his baptism, became the first theologian in the early church, and arguably the greatest in the history of Christianity.”<sup>13</sup>

The early church father, John Chrysostom wrote of Paul: “Put the whole world on one side of the scale and you will see that the soul of Paul outweighs it.”<sup>14</sup>

Bible scholar Paul Barnett summarizes Paul’s life as follows: “Paul was many things. He was from an aristocratic Diaspora family and a Roman citizen by birth, yet conservatively Jewish in nurture (in Tarsus) and education (in Jerusalem); he was an eminent younger Pharisee, yet bilingual and an accomplished scholar of the Greek Bible. The risen Lord called him ‘my chosen instrument,’ and for good reason.”<sup>15</sup>

According to D.A. Carson, “Paul is so significant a figure in the New Testament and in the church’s history that he has been called the second founder of Christianity. This, of course, is not true, for it ignores the continuity between Jesus and Paul and diminishes unfairly the contributions of men such as Peter, John, and Luke. But there is no question that Paul played a vital role in the growth and establishment of the church and in the interpretation and application of God’s grace in Christ. And Paul continues to minister to us today through the thirteen epistles of his that have become part of the canon of the New Testament, putting Paul just behind Luke in the percentage of the New Testament written by a single individual. And if one adds the sixteen chapters of Acts (13-28) that are almost entirely devoted to Paul, Paul figures in almost a third of the New Testament.”<sup>16</sup>

### Douglas Moo on Paul

Biblical scholar and Pauline expert Douglas J. Moo provides a helpful overview of the life, ministry and theology of the Apostle Paul, the author of Ephesians:

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<sup>12</sup> Paul Barnett, *Paul: Missionary of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 5-6.

<sup>13</sup> Paul Barnett, *Paul: Missionary of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 7.

<sup>14</sup> John Chrysostom, as quoted in Paul Barnett, *Paul: Missionary of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 198.

<sup>15</sup> Paul Barnett, *Paul: Missionary of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 44.

<sup>16</sup> D.A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992/2005), 354.

“The contribution of Paul of Tarsus to biblical theology is immense. Called by God through the dramatic Damascus Road experience to be ‘apostle to the Gentiles’, Paul engaged in a missionary career celebrated in the latter part of the book of Acts. Thirteen of the letters Paul wrote during that missionary career have become books of the Bible. He therefore contributes more to the NT than any other writer except Luke, who is himself something of a disciple of Paul. But more important than the quantity of the material is its significance. Used by the Lord to open up the Gentile world to the gospel, Paul hammered out his teachings in the midst of change and controversy.

The first Christians make up a Jewish messianic sect. By the time the NT period comes to an end, Christianity is a worldwide, Gentile-dominated religion. Paul is in no small measure responsible for that transformation. Indeed, Paul has been called the ‘second founder’ of Christianity and even by some the true founder of Christianity. This, however, is a gross overestimate. For all his pioneering theological thinking, Paul himself insisted that he was dependent on a tradition of apostolic teaching that existed before his time (e.g. 1 Cor. 15:1–11). And his dependence on the teaching of Jesus is greater than many have been willing to recognize. Nevertheless, Paul remains a gigantic figure, whose impact on the history of theology is probably greater than that of any other biblical author.

In this brief introductory survey we will begin with some comments on the theological significance of Paul personally, and then move on to an examination of the theology of his letters.

### The Theological Significance of the Person of Paul

#### *Paul and eschatology*

Paul’s theological significance owes a great deal to the pivotal role God called him to play in the incorporation of Gentiles into the people of God. While Luke tells us that God initially called Paul to minister to both Jews and Gentiles (Acts 9:15), and Paul never abandoned his work among Jews (Acts 28:17–23), he soon focused his work on Gentiles (Gal. 2:1–10). He not only opened up several vital mission fields (southern Asia Minor, Macedonia, Achaia, the province of Asia), but he also developed, as need arose, theological categories that would explain and give guidance to the many Gentiles that he converted. Paul is justly remembered as *the* ‘apostle to the Gentiles’.

But several scholars, most notably Johannes Munck, think Paul’s view of his personal significance goes much farther. On their view, Paul saw himself as an eschatological figure, whose ministry to the Gentiles would actually usher in the final kingdom of God. Paul, so these scholars argue, found in the prophets predictions that God’s final restoration of Israel would cause Gentiles to flock to Jerusalem in worship of the true God (e.g. Is. 60:1–7). Paul, however, found matters to be working out differently: Jews were largely rejecting the gospel, while Gentiles were flocking into the church. So he revised the eschatological sequence: now, he believed, God was using him to bring Gentile converts as an ‘offering’ to Jerusalem so that Jews would be stimulated to repent, and thus the end would come. (Rom. 9–11 and 15:17–20 are cited in support of this view.)

We can agree that Paul is, indeed, an eschatological figure, remembering that ‘eschatology’ is rightly applied to the entire church age, the ‘last days’ when God is fulfilling his promises. But, despite repeated claims to the contrary, there is little good evidence that Paul thought the return of Christ and end of history would come as the immediate result of his own ministry. Moreover, the cautious optimism expressed in passages like Romans 11:14, where he expresses only the hope of saving ‘some’ of his people Israel, counters any idea that Paul thought he would bring about the mass conversion of Israel for which he hoped (Rom. 11:25–26).

#### *Paul’s conceptual background*

A ‘search for the historical Paul’ would turn up almost as many divergent views as does the ‘search for the historical Jesus’. Scholars have repeatedly tried to read between the lines of the limited information in the NT in the interests of constructing all kinds of more or less plausible pictures of the ‘real Paul’.

Particularly important for our purposes is the question of Paul’s conceptual background. As he developed his theology, what categories of thinking influenced him?

The categories of the Greco-Roman world, where he spent his first years in the cosmopolitan city of Tarsus? Or the categories of the OT and the Jewish world taught to him by his parents (Acts 26:4–5; Phil. 3:5) and by Gamaliel in the rabbinic school in Jerusalem (Acts 22:3)? Early in this century, under the influence of the ‘history of religions’ approach to the NT, scholars thought that Paul imported many Greek ideas into his theology. But reaction quickly set in, as it was demonstrated again and again that Paul’s basic categories are derived from his Jewish background. Paul certainly claims a Jewish background for himself repeatedly in the NT.

Moreover, as Paul’s almost ninety explicit quotations and countless allusions indicate, the OT was a determinative source for his theology. This does not mean we should dismiss influence from the wider Greek world entirely. God caused Paul to be born and raised in such an environment so that he could draw from both the Jewish and the Greek worlds for his theology. Ultimately, under the inspiration of the Spirit, Paul sought to bring all his thinking – whatever its origin – into captivity to Christ (2 Cor. 10:5).

### The Theological Significance of the Letters of Paul

#### *Methodological considerations*

Paul’s theology is not expressed in a systematic treatise but in thirteen letters, written over a period of at least fifteen years to at least seven different churches and two individuals. None of these letters is systematic, in the sense of a general and logical development of theological ideas – not even Romans. Each is written against a specific background and with a specific purpose. In a word, all the letters of Paul are ‘contingent’. How one can deduce from this welter of occasional pastoral advice a ‘coherent’ theology is an issue of great importance for the church. We may cite one much-debated example: is Paul’s prohibition of women teaching in 1 Timothy 2:12 ‘contingent’ only (advice only for the first-century Ephesian church), or part of the ‘coherent’ core of his thinking (mandatory for the church in all times and places)? The problem is more easily posed than solved, and scholars continue to struggle to arrive at a clear and agreed methodology. But several points are clear.

1. The contingent nature of every letter of Paul must be given due weight. We cannot, without looking carefully at the context, simply ‘read off’ systematic theological conclusions from the text of the letters. Always we must ask questions, such as why Paul wrote what he did, and what specific circumstances gave rise to the teaching. For instance, a reading of Galatians by itself would yield a very negative picture of the Mosaic law. But once we recognize that Paul in this letter is dealing with false teachers who are paying far too much attention to the law, we can understand why what he says about it is so uniformly negative. To use Galatians by itself to establish a Pauline – or Christian – theology of the law would be shortsighted.

2. On the other hand, one must not dismiss what Paul says because it is written in a polemical context or for a specific purpose. Some modern interpreters of Paul tend in this direction, accusing Paul of giving contradictory advice depending on the circumstances he is addressing. Such an approach means that no ‘theology’ of Paul could ever be written; all would be contingent and nothing coherent. A careful reading of Paul will show that so pessimistic an appraisal of the task is unnecessary. In the case already cited, while we should not use Galatians by itself to build a Pauline theology of law, we must take seriously what it says about the law and integrate it into a larger picture drawn from all the Pauline evidence.

3. Integration of what Paul says in his different letters will ultimately require conceptual categories capable of bringing together the variety of language and ideas that he expresses. Biblical theology generally seeks to use the actual categories supplied by the biblical authors themselves. But even in analyzing a single author, like Paul, it will sometimes be necessary to use a broader term than any the author uses. For instance, Paul usually uses the word ‘justify’ to denote God’s initial acceptance of the sinner. But he can also, on occasion, use it in typical Jewish fashion to refer to the final judgment (e.g. Rom. 2:13). Treating such passages together under the heading of ‘justification’ would result in a skewed and perhaps even contradictory understanding of Paul’s teaching.

### *The centre of Paul’s theology*

One potentially very helpful step in the search for coherence in Paul’s theology would be the identification of a ‘centre’ in his thought that could integrate all he teaches. Scholars have proposed many different ‘centers’ over the years, some of the most popular being justification by faith, eschatology, the church as the body of Christ, reconciliation, participation in Christ, salvation history, and Christ. Unfortunately, many of the proposals are reductionistic and have the ultimate effect of distorting Paul’s thinking by forcing all he says into too restrictive a mould. But two of the suggestions have merit.

Salvation history is not a ‘centre’ for Paul’s thought in the true sense of the word, for it denotes a framework of thinking rather than a dominating idea. But a correct interpretation of Paul’s theology demands recognition of the conceptual approach called ‘salvation history’. The term (German *Heilsgeschichte*) is used in a variety of ways in contemporary theology. Here we use it very simply to denote the historical and corporate dimension of Paul’s theology. Paul starts from the assumption that God has accomplished redemption as part of a historical process. The OT, and God’s dealings with Israel recorded in it, lead to Christ, the climax of history. The Christ event therefore divides history into two epochs, an old age and a new. Paul presents his theology from within this framework, explaining the significance of Christ frequently by contrast with the old age of sin, death and the Torah that came before him. The framework also makes Paul’s thinking more corporate than modern Western interpreters often recognize. The inclusive significance of Adam and Christ, for example (Rom. 5; 1 Cor. 15), is quite understandable from within a salvation-historical framework.

If we are forced to identify a ‘centre’ of Paul’s theology in the true sense of the word, then the only category broad enough to encompass the incredible range of Paul’s teaching is ‘God’s act in Christ’. Here, Paul clearly teaches, is the very heart of the world’s significance. All can be derived from it; all must be related to it. As many scholars have noted, Paul himself was confronted with precisely this point on the Damascus road, when the one whom he had scorned and rejected was revealed to him unmistakably as the Messiah of God and Lord of the universe. This Copernican revolution is the mainspring for Paul’s own faith and for his theology as well.

### Specific Theological Themes in the Letter’s of Paul

Paul’s rich theological contribution cannot even be surveyed in the space available here. We will single out some of his most distinctive contributions to biblical theology.

#### *Salvation history*

If salvation history is the determinative framework for Paul’s theology, it is also a central topic in its own right. Paul, more than any other biblical author, helps us to understand the unity of God’s plan as revealed in Scripture by integrating the various parts of the biblical revelation. Faced with Judaizers on the one hand who sought to impose the Mosaic law on Gentile Christians (cf. Galatians) and Gentile Christians on the other who downplayed their importance of the Israelite heritage (cf. Romans 9–11), Paul highlighted the ultimate significance of Christ and the new covenant without rejecting the old. As Paul explains in Galatians 3:15–29, salvation history is rooted in the promise of God to Abraham, a promise fulfilled in

Christ, the ‘seed’ to whom the promise was made. The Mosaic law, given centuries after the promise, could not modify this basic arrangement. Salvation has therefore always been, as it was for Abraham, based on faith. The law was only a temporary stage in salvation history, as God used it to preserve Israel until the promise should be fulfilled.

But salvation history also has a future. Messiah has come, but he is to come again. Christians live in the ‘overlap of the ages’, still in the flesh, subject to temptation and death, but also, by faith, participating in the new age of salvation. The Holy Spirit provides critical support for the believer in this period of tension and also stimulates in the believer a deep assurance of the deliverance to come (Rom. 8:14–30).

### *Christ*

Paul did not see Jesus in the flesh, but his many allusions to the teaching of Jesus reveal that he knows of and values Jesus’ earthly existence. Paul’s most often-used title for Jesus is ‘Christ’, which never completely loses its underlying meaning of the Messiah, the promised heir of David who fulfils God’s promises to Israel. Nevertheless, Jesus’ value for Paul is found particularly in his resurrected state as Lord (see Rom. 1:3–4). This title has far-reaching significance for Paul, for it comes from the OT, where it is applied to God. Paul therefore implies an extremely close relationship between Jesus and God. Note, for instance, the quotation of Joel 2:32 in Romans 10:13, where Paul applies a passage about God to Jesus. What this title implies, Romans 9:5 appears to state explicitly, for the probably correct punctuation of the verse has Paul calling Jesus ‘God’ (cf. Titus 2:13). As Lord, Jesus is ruler of the universe, with all things ‘put under his feet’ (1 Cor. 15:26–27, quoting Ps. 110:1; cf. also Col. 1:15–17). But the title ‘Lord’ is important more for its relational than its ontological significance. ‘Jesus is Lord’ (1 Cor. 12:3) is the basic Christian confession, in which believers acknowledge Jesus as the one to whom they owe worship and obedience.

### *The cross*

Jesus’ death on the cross is the most (though not the only) decisive point in the redemptive plan of God for humanity. Paul uses many images to convey to his readers the significance of Jesus’ death. Sacrificial imagery, drawn from the OT, is particularly prominent. God set forth Jesus as a ‘sacrifice of atonement’ (Rom. 3:25), and his shed blood (symbolizing sacrificial death) brings forgiveness (Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14), justification (Rom. 5:9) and reconciliation (Eph. 2:13). The language of ‘redemption’ suggests that Christ’s death is viewed by Paul as the costly price by which God purchased freedom for human beings enslaved to sin (Rom. 3:24; cf. 1 Cor. 6:20). Paul can also present the cross as a victory over evil spiritual powers (Col. 2:15).

### *The return of the Lord*

While Christ rules even now as Lord, Paul anticipates eagerly the day when his lordship will be extended over all the world (e.g. Phil. 2:11). Paul’s theology, while oriented decisively toward the cross and the resurrection, also looks forward to the return of Christ in glory, the Parousia (‘coming’ or ‘presence’). The Parousia will bring final deliverance for all believers: ‘we will all be changed’ (1 Cor. 15:51). Those who have died will be resurrected in transformed bodies (1 Thess. 4:16; 1 Cor. 15:21–23; Rom. 8:13). And those who are still alive at the Parousia will also be ‘changed’ as their ‘earthly dwelling’ is exchanged for a ‘heavenly’ one (2 Cor. 5:1–10; 1 Thess. 4:17).

### *The church as the body of Christ*

Paul never views Christians in isolation but always as members of a community: the church (*ecclesia*), those who have been ‘called out’ of the world to exist as God’s eschatological people. While Paul frequently addresses the church as it exists in a given location, he ultimately sees the church as a single, universal entity that embraces all who believe. This idea is particularly prominent in Ephesians and Colossians (Eph. 1:22–23; 4:4; Col. 1:18). Also prominent in these books, as well as in 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12, is the idea of the church as ‘the body of Christ’. The metaphor is rooted in Christ’s own body given on our behalf and is used by Paul especially to convey the diversity in unity that should

characterize the body. The body is one, Paul stresses, for Christ cannot be divided. But the body has many parts, and the Spirit has appointed men and women to serve very different roles within the unity of the body. Paul's grand conception of the single body with diverse parts should inform the church in our own age, warning us against unnecessary divisions and encouraging us to celebrate and learn from the diversity within our communities."<sup>17</sup>

According to Bible scholar Klyne Snodgrass, "The witness of the early church for the influence of Ephesians as a letter from Paul is extensive. It was referred to early and often, from Clement of Rome (A.D. 95) on. It is quoted by Ignatius and Polycarp and included both in Marcion's canon of Paul's letters (about 140) and in the Muratorian Fragment (usually dated about 180). Moreover, Ephesians claims to be by Paul and has Pauline language and theology. Not until the nineteenth century was its authenticity as a Pauline letter questioned."<sup>18</sup>

### Other Scholars on Pauline Authorship

Recent scholarly trends have moved increasingly toward non-Pauline authorship of Ephesians. Bible scholar Max Turner summarizes why this shift has occurred: "Increasingly interpreters propose that 'Ephesians' was written by an admiring disciple of Paul, late in the first century—one who wrote in a different style from the apostle. This author was far more heavily dependent on Colossians than Paul ever was on his own writings (about a third of the wordings of Colossians, and many of its main themes, appear in Ephesians) and was offering what he saw as the essential legacy of the apostle's theology for a new time and circumstances. It is argued that the (pseudonymous) writer no longer actively hopes for an imminent return of Christ and, indeed, has replaced the whole shape of Paul's largely future hope with a realized eschatology, in which believers are already raised from death and exalted with Christ into the heavenly places (2:1–10; 1:3–4; allegedly contra 1 Cor. 4:8; 15:1–54; and Rom. 6:1–11; but see Col. 2:11–13). It is held that the writer has left Paul's theology of the cross for a theology of glory instead, and that he has given ecclesiology a radical new direction and extravagant prominence as the 'universal church' (whereas, it is often asserted, Paul himself uses *ecclesia* only of local congregations; but per contra, see Gal. 1:13; 1 Cor. 10:32; 12:28; 15:9; Phil. 3:6). It is also said that he has moved toward a supersessionist view of Israel and the law, in which the church replaces Israel as the people of God (2:14–18; contra Rom. 9–11)."<sup>19</sup>

Nevertheless, Bible commentator Gordon D. Fee argues that Ephesians is "too Pauline" to have been written by anyone besides the Apostle himself: "The Pauline nature of the epistle, particularly the subtleties of vocabulary, language, and theology, are such it is difficult to imagine someone so thoroughly imbibing the thinking of another as to reproduce him in this way."<sup>20</sup>

Polycarp (c. 69—155), in chapter 12 of his *Epistle to the Philippians*, quotes from Ephesians 4:26: "For I am convinced that you are well trained in the sacred Scriptures and that nothing is hidden from you. Only, as it is said in these Scriptures, 'be angry but do not sin,' and 'do not let the sun set on your anger.' Blessed

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<sup>17</sup> Douglas J. Moo, "Paul," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, Eds. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 136-140.

<sup>18</sup> Klyne Snodgrass, *The NIV Application Commentary: Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 23.

<sup>19</sup> Max Turner, "Book of Ephesians," in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, Eds. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Craig G. Bartholomew, Daniel J. Treier and N. T. Wright (London; Grand Rapids, MI.: SPCK; Baker Academic, 2005), 186.

<sup>20</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 659.

is the one who remembers this, which I believe to be the case with you."<sup>21</sup> Scholar Paul Hartog highlights the significance of this quotation of Ephesians in Polycarp: "If one agrees that Polycarp's *Philippians* is a unified letter and that Ignatius was martyred under Trajan (the commonly held, traditional view), then all of Polycarp's *Philippians* must have been written before A.D. 117."<sup>22</sup> This demonstrates that Ephesians is considered "sacred Scripture" in the second decade of the second century. Polycarp also mentions "the armor of righteousness" indicating an acquaintance with Ephesians 6:11-17.<sup>23</sup>

Irenaeus (2nd century – c. 202), the bishop of Lyons, explicitly quotes Ephesians 5:30, "as blessed Paul declares in his epistle to the Ephesians, that 'we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.'"<sup>24</sup> Irenaeus also quotes from Ephesians 1:7, 13-14a; 2:2, 13, 15.<sup>25</sup>

Clement of Alexandria (c. 150—215) quotes Ephesians 5:21-29<sup>26</sup> and 4:13-15<sup>27</sup> as the words of the apostle. There is no reason to think this was someone other than Paul.

According to Clinton Arnold, "Pauline authorship of Ephesians was not challenged until the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century. It was the outspoken denial of authenticity by F. C. Baur and his followers, however, which had the greatest influence on the subsequent course of scholarship. Prior to that time Ephesians was universally recognized as Pauline. As early as Ignatius (early second century) the letter was quoted as being from the hand of the apostle. Until recently, British and American evangelical scholars unanimously affirmed Pauline authorship."<sup>28</sup>

The arguments against Pauline authorship have been threefold. Arnold explains:

*"(1) Language and Style*

The number of words in Ephesians which are not found in the other Pauline letters is proportionally insignificant. This fact is actually a point in favor of Pauline authorship. The criticism lies more in the observation that many of these unique terms are used in the apostolic fathers, thus giving the letter more of a post-apostolic atmosphere. Since most scholars, however, acknowledge that early church fathers such as Clement knew and used Ephesians, the possibility that the vocabulary of Ephesians influenced these writers needs to be considered more seriously.

The style of writing exhibited in Ephesians has been the greater stumbling block to authenticity. It is often characterized as 'pleonastic,' that is, a fullness of style seen in the repeated use of prepositional phrases, abundant participles, numerous relative clauses, genitive upon genitive and lengthy sentences. What is not

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<sup>21</sup> *Epistle to the Philippians* 12.1, as cited on <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf01.iv.ii.xii.html> (accessed November 10, 2009).

<sup>22</sup> Paul Hartog, "Polycarp, Ephesians, and 'Scripture'" *WTJ* 70 (2008): 255-75.

<sup>23</sup> *Epistle to the Philippians* 4.1, as cited on <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf01.iv.ii.iv.html> (accessed November 10, 2009).

<sup>24</sup> *Adversus Haereses* V.ii.3., as cited on <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf01.ix.vii.iii.html>, (accessed November 10, 2009).

<sup>25</sup> See *Adversus Haereses* V.xiv.3.; V.viii.1; V.xxiv.4.

<sup>26</sup> *Stromatum* IV.8., as cited on <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf02.vi.iv.iv.vii.html>, (accessed November 10, 2009).

<sup>27</sup> *Paedagogus* I.5., as cited on <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf02.vi.iii.i.v.html>, (accessed November 10, 2009).

<sup>28</sup> Clinton E. Arnold, "Ephesians" in Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin and Daniel G. Reid, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 238.

often observed, however, is that this unique style predominates in the first half of the letter. It is here where the author intentionally employs a lofty style of eulogy, praise, prayer and doxology. He also appears to be relying on the use of traditional material. This half of the letter does not consist of the straightforward prose, argument or admonition that usually characterizes the Pauline letters. Nevertheless, passages such as Romans 8:38–39 and 11:33–36 demonstrate that Paul was capable of writing in an elevated style similar to what we find in the Qumran hymns. One should not underestimate Paul's resourcefulness in expressing himself.

### *(2) Theology*

Many scholars have contended that there are significant theological divergences in Ephesians compared to the eight recognized letters. Discussion has normally focused on the cosmic Christology, the realized eschatology and the apparently advanced ecclesiology of the letter. Those denying Pauline authorship contend that there is not merely a development in Paul's thought, but an entirely changed perspective revealing a later stage of theological reflection.

There is no doubt about the development in Ephesians of the cosmic aspect of Christology and the heightened emphasis on a realized eschatology. But this emphasis may have been prompted by the writer's concern to build up the readers in light of their ongoing struggle with the principalities and powers. The teaching of the letter on both of these topics does not represent a break with the apostle's teaching, but the logical extension of his thought.

### *(3) Relationship to Colossians*

Most scholars who see Ephesians as pseudonymous contend that it depends heavily on Colossians as its primary literary source. The traditional view, however, still seems to have the most evidence in its favor. The best explanation to many seems to be that the same man wrote Colossians and Ephesians a little later, with many of the same thoughts running through his head and with a more general application of the ideas he had so recently expressed."<sup>29</sup>

D.A. Carson provides a helpful concluding summary concerning the canonicity of Ephesians: "We have no record of anyone in the early church raising a question about the canonicity of Ephesians. There were disputes about its destination, Marcion claiming that it was written to the Laodiceans, and Basil later saying that in ancient copies it was addressed, not to the Ephesians, but to the saints who are also faithful in Christ Jesus. Clement of Rome probably refers to it, though without mentioning the author. Ignatius quotes from it, as do Polycarp and others. It appears in Marcion's canon and in the Muratorian Canon. No serious doubt about its authenticity has come down to us from the Fathers."<sup>30</sup>

## IV. Date of writing

Bible scholar Paul Barnett provides a helpful sketch of the Apostle Paul's life and a chronology of his ministry below:

c. 5	Born in Tarsus of conservative Jewish parents
c. 17	Moves to Jerusalem for study under Gamaliel
c. 34	Leads persecution against disciples of Jesus Converted and 'called' at Damascus

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<sup>29</sup> Clinton E. Arnold, "Ephesians" in Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin and Daniel G. Reid, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 238.

<sup>30</sup> D.A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992/2005), 491-492.

c. 34-47	‘Unknown Years’—Syria, Arabia, Judea, Syria-Cilicia
c. 47-57	Missions in Galatia, Macedonia, Achaia, Asia <i>Writes nine (extant) letters</i>
c. 57-64	Years of imprisonment—Caesarea and Rome <i>Writes four (extant) letters</i>

Scholars quibble about the details of this chronology, but the broad narrative about Paul is historically secure. This reconstruction indicates that Paul was in Jerusalem during the period of Jesus’ public ministry (ca. 29-33).<sup>31</sup>

D.A. Carson and Douglas Moo write: “Ephesians speaks of Paul as in prison (3:1; 4:1). This is usually taken to refer to his imprisonment in Rome toward the end of his life, which would mean a date in the early 60s.”<sup>32</sup>

### V. Original Audience and Purpose

Bible scholar and commentator Clinton Arnold details the audience and purpose of Ephesians as follows:

“Of all the Pauline letters, Ephesians is the least situational. This does not mean that the letter fails to address real needs and problems faced by its readers; Ephesians simply does not have the same sense of urgency and response to crisis as do the apostle’s other letters. Scholars have summarized the life setting of the letter as follows: Gentile believers are strongly in view; there is no specific crisis or problem the letter addresses; the letter gives a positive presentation of the Pauline gospel; and there is a need for the readers to receive teaching and admonishment on unity and a distinctively Christian lifestyle.

The life setting and purpose of the letter could be described in the following way: In the period of time since Paul’s ministry in Ephesus, the churches of the area had engaged in extensive evangelism among the Gentiles. These new believers lacked a personal acquaintance with Paul but respected his role as apostle. Being converts from a Hellenistic religious environment—mystery religions, magic, astrology—these people needed a positive grounding in the Pauline gospel from the apostle himself. Their fear of evil spirits and cosmic powers was also a great concern, especially the question of where Christ stands in relation to these forces. Because of their pagan past, they also needed help and admonishment in cultivating a lifestyle consistent with their salvation in Christ, a lifestyle free from drunkenness, sexual immorality, stealing and bitterness. Although there were many Jewish Christians (and former God-fearers) in the churches of the region, the flood of new Gentile converts created some significant tensions. Their lack of appreciation for the Jewish heritage of their faith prompted some serious Jew-Gentile tensions in the churches.

Ephesians is therefore a genuine letter, without a specific crisis, but addressed in a pastoral way to a multiplicity of needs shared by the readership. It was written by the apostle Paul to a network of churches in Ephesus, but also intended for a broader readership among the churches of that region. It has traditionally been regarded as written during Paul’s first Roman imprisonment, but a strong case has also

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<sup>31</sup> Paul Barnett, *Paul: Missionary of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 5.

<sup>32</sup> D.A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992/2005), 486-487.

been made for his prior imprisonment in Caesarea. It is least likely to have been written during a possible Ephesian imprisonment. A date of A.D. 60–62 is probable.”<sup>33</sup>

According to Bible scholar Thorsten Moritz:

“The letter to the Ephesians was probably a circular letter to a number of churches in Western Asia Minor. Its theology needs to be interpreted against this background. The letter has a unique, almost synoptic, relationship with Colossians, which was probably written earlier. Quite possibly Ephesians is Colossians re-written (perhaps within days or weeks of its completion) for a similar, yet slightly different audience: similar, in the sense that both letters were intended for Christian recipients in danger of syncretism; different, in the sense that Ephesians appears to be addressed to a more Jewish-minded (or even Judaizing?) audience. It is Ephesians’ extensive use of OT material which sets it apart from Colossians. It is true that Colossians refers to some typically Jewish identity markers (Sabbath, festivals, circumcision and food laws), but these were so well known that any community tending towards syncretism could have appropriated them. Ephesians, however, makes assumptions which point to a greater interest in Jewish matters on the part of its recipients.

If so, Ephesians provides an insight into the re-contextualizing of the theology contained in Colossians. Paul’s determination to do this by employing OT traditions encourages the commentator to relate the theology of Ephesians to the text of the OT or to the history of the OT motifs appropriated in the letter. Apart from Colossians, the letter’s closest parallels in the NT are Romans and 1 Peter. There is evidence of traditional material in the eulogy (1:3–14), the intercessory prayers (1:15–23), the doxology (3:20–21), the so-called ‘hymnic’ remnants in 2:14–16 and 5:14, the catechesis in 4:22–5:20, the lists of vices and virtues (4:31–32; 5:3–4, 9), the household codes (5:21–6:9) and the confessional material in 1:20–23; 4:4–6 and 5:2, 25. This encourages the attempt to relate Ephesians to similar NT texts.”<sup>34</sup>

Arnold on Destination:

“The letter is traditionally understood to have been written to believers in Ephesus because the city is mentioned in the superscript ‘To the Ephesians,’ and the prescript ‘to the saints who are in Ephesus’ (Eph 1:1). The words ‘in Ephesus,’ however, are not present in certain manuscripts generally regarded as the most reliable, viz. Sinaiticus (N), Vaticanus (B) and a second-century papyrus (P46). Further doubt is cast on the authenticity of the words ‘in Ephesus’ because of the impersonal tone of the letter and the general nature of the contents. ‘Ephesians’ does not look like an occasional letter written to one church which Paul had come to know well through his three years of ministry in Ephesus. Thus most interpreters see Ephesians as some form of a circular letter.

The following arguments support this conclusion: (1) There is still strong manuscript support for the inclusion. The entire Western and Byzantine traditions stand behind it as well as important Alexandrian witnesses, including Alexandrinus. (2) An Ephesian destination was the unanimous tradition of the early church and is the only reading known in all the extant versions. (3) There is a reasonable explanation to account for the omission of ‘in Ephesus.’ At a very early date, churches in a different location (perhaps Egypt) universalized the address in the prescript by omitting the prescript in copies that were made for their own catechetical (or liturgical) purposes. The contents of Ephesians, as also the book of Romans, were especially well suited to a broad readership. For the same reason, several witnesses omit ‘in Rome’ (Rom 1:7) in the prescript to the book of Romans. The words were eliminated as a deliberate excision, made in order to show that the letter is of general, not local, application. (4) When Paul says in

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<sup>33</sup> Clinton E. Arnold, “Ephesians” in Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin and Daniel G. Reid, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 238.

<sup>34</sup> Thorsten Moritz, “Ephesians,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, Eds. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 315-319.

Ephesians 1:15 that he had ‘heard’ of their faith and love, it does not necessarily mean that he does not know them. It could just as easily refer to the progress they had made in the five or so years he had been absent from them. There is probably also a reference here to the many converts that had joined the church since he had been with them. (5) One cannot place too much emphasis on the fact that no greetings are attached since Paul sends no extended greetings to other churches he knew well (see 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians and Philippians).

Was the letter therefore written exclusively to the one church at Ephesus? Although many interpreters assume that there was one big church present in Ephesus when the letter was written, it is far more likely that there was a network of house churches scattered throughout the city and perhaps also in the nearby villages (e.g., Metropolis, Hypaipa, Diashieron, Neikaia, etc.). Many of these could have been started after Paul left Ephesus. One must not forget that population estimates for first-century Ephesus begin at one-quarter million. Furthermore, Paul may have envisioned and even encouraged the reading of the letter to a broader circle of churches throughout the west coast of Asia Minor (e.g., Pergamum, Laodicea, Colossae and Hierapolis). The letter was probably a circular letter in the sense that it was intended primarily to circulate among the house churches of Ephesus, its environs and perhaps even more broadly in western Asia Minor (e.g., to the Lycus valley).<sup>35</sup>

### The City of Ephesus

The city of Ephesus was situated on the west coast of Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey) at the mouth of the Cayster River. This thriving harbor city ranked with Rome, Alexandria and Syrian Antioch as one of the greatest cities of the Roman Empire. The apostle Paul spent nearly three years of his ministry in this center of Asian life. As many as six of his letters have been reputed to have a connection with Ephesus.

#### *Pre-Roman Times*

According to mythology the city of Ephesus was founded by the Amazons, a race of female warriors. Although little is known about the early history of Ephesus, it was probably inhabited by a combination of Carians, Leleges and indigenous peoples. The Greek city was founded by Ionian colonists led by Androclus, son of the Athenian king Codrus c. 1100 B.C. Half a millennium later (c. 550 B.C.) Croesus, king of the province of Lydia, captured Ephesus. Croesus endeared himself to the people by contributing to the construction of the great temple of Artemis. Ephesus and all of Anatolia soon came under Persian rule which lasted until the combined Greek armies defeated the Persians c. 480 B.C. Ephesus joined the Greek alliance (called the Delian League), but the city revolted in 412 B.C. and sided with Sparta in the Peloponnesian War.

In 334 B.C. Alexander the Great took control of the city, as well as the rest of Asia Minor, on his eastward imperialistic march. Alexander’s successor, Lysimachus, replanned Ephesus (c. 294 B.C.) and relocated the population from near the Artemis temple to a site next to the harbor. Here the city remained throughout the Roman and Byzantine periods. Ephesus then came under the control of the successive reigns of the Seleucids, the Ptolemies and finally the kingdom of Pergamum (c. 190 B.C.).

In 133 B.C. Attalus III, king of Pergamum, bequeathed the city to Rome. The city remained under Roman rule except for a brief interlude in which Mithridates VI, king of Pontus, took control of most of Asia Minor in a revolt against Rome. The people welcomed Mithridates as a deliverer because of harsh Roman exactions. He was eventually defeated by the Roman general Pompey in the Third Mithridatic War (c. 69 B.C.).

#### *The Roman City*

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<sup>35</sup> Clinton E. Arnold, “Ephesians” in Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin and Daniel G. Reid, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 238.

Beginning in the reign of Caesar Augustus and lasting for 200 years, Ephesus experienced a more stable political history which enabled the city to prosper and thrive. Population estimates for the city during this time begin at around 250,000 people.

### *The Leading City of Asia*

Ephesus may accurately be called the leading city of the richest region of the Roman Empire. Politically, the city functioned as the Roman provincial capital of Asia Minor (from 133 B.C.). Economically, Strabo (14.1.24) called Ephesus ‘the greatest commercial center in Asia this side of the Taurus river.’ Similarly, Aelius Aristides (Orat. 23.24) spoke of Ephesus as the most prosperous commercial center of the time, controlling the financial affairs of western Asia Minor. A recent study of Roman milestone markers demonstrates that mileages to other cities in Asia Minor were measured from Ephesus. Referred to in the inscriptions as ‘the metropolis of Asia,’ Ephesus served as the administrative and commercial hub of Asia Minor.

### *Institutions and Buildings*

Since 1895, archeologists from the Austrian Archeological Institute in Vienna have worked at excavating various parts of the city. The work still continues. Many of the reconstructed edifices which one sees today were erected in the second century and later. Listed below are a few of the important buildings that were present during Paul’s ministry.

### *Theater*

One of the most impressive structures in Ephesus was the theater which had a seating capacity of 24,000 people. Situated on the side of a hill, the theater looked upon the beautiful colonnaded street that led directly to the harbor. The theater was the scene of the tumultuous mob assembly provoked by the guild of silver shrine makers for the Artemis cult (Acts 19:30–41).

### *Prytaneion*

Directly across from the State Agora was the prytaneion, or town hall (built in the first century B.C. or first century A.D.). Much of the city’s political business was conducted in this center. The building was also used for various ceremonies, banquets and receptions for official guests of the city. Discoveries stemming from the excavation of the building in 1955 have demonstrated that the prytaneion served a strong religious function during Paul’s time. Although the goddess Hestia Boulaia was the principal deity worshiped in the prytaneion, there is inscriptional evidence pointing to the worship of Artemis, Demeter, Kore and other deities in this important building.

### *Commercial Market (Agora)*

The commercial market was located in the center of the city near the theater. It measured 110 meters square and was surrounded on all four sides with stoas. Most of the everyday buying and selling of produce and goods took place here. Another market, called the State Agora, was situated at the southeast part of the city across from the prytaneion. Many municipal activities, including the meetings of the law courts, took place in the basilica of this agora.

### *Baths and Gymnasiums*

During the Roman period the city had a number of baths and gymnasiums. The largest complex was located near the harbor. The structure contained two palaestrae (athletic training areas), a bath and a gymnasium, complete with lecture halls and meeting rooms. Another gymnasium was located next to the theater and still another, the East Gymnasium, at the southeastern corner of the city.

### *“Stadium*

The stadium was situated in the north part of the city. It measured 229 meters long and 30 meters wide. Various kinds of ceremonies, including athletic contests, chariot races and gladiatorial fights, took place there. Inscriptional evidence suggests that the stadium was erected during Nero’s reign (A.D. 54–68).

### *Medical School*

Literary sources point to the existence of a medical academy in Ephesus which trained doctors. Two of the most important doctors in antiquity, Rufus and Soranus, came from Ephesus. Both worked during Trajan's reign.

### *Festivals and Athletic Contests*

Two important festivals were held each year in the city, honoring the patroness deity, Artemis Ephesia. The first, called the 'Artemisia,' was held in the early spring. In addition to sacrifices to the goddess, there were many musical, theatrical and athletic events. A second festival took place at the end of spring in celebration of the nativity of Artemis. One of the highlights of this festival was a religious procession through the city.

Another festival of regional importance was the quadrennial 'Ephesia.' This festival was especially noted for its athletic games. Ephesus also hosted the 'Common Games of Asia' which had all the usual athletic events.

### *Artemis Ephesia and Other Deities*

The most prominent and significant cult in Ephesus during the first three centuries of the Roman Empire was incontestably Artemis Ephesia. The people of Ephesus regarded the city's relationship to her in terms of a divinely directed covenant relationship.

Her temple, called the Artemision, was originally constructed in the sixth century B.C. This Ionic temple (c. 550 B.C.) was the largest building in the Greek world and was made entirely of marble. It was destroyed c. 350 B.C. The temple was rebuilt with the same dimensions during the first half of the third century B.C. According to Pliny (Nat. Hist. 36.96), the temple measured 220 x 425 feet (55.10 m. x 115 m.) and contained 127 columns, with some rising to a height of 60 feet (17.65 m.). The grandeur and beauty of the temple led Antipater (Anth. Pal. 9.58) to classify it as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. The Greek historian Pausanias (Descr. 4.31.8) declared that the size of the temple surpassed all known buildings. The ancient site of the Artemision and its meager remains were discovered by J. T. Wood in 1869. In recent years Austrian archeologists have undertaken extensive excavations which have provided much information about the archaic temple and its predecessor.

Inscriptions give evidence that mystery rites were celebrated in the Artemis cult. The celebration of her birth marked one of the major occasions for the performance of the mysteries. We know little about the meaning attached to the mystery rites performed by her devotees. The cult of the Ephesian Artemis also had a close connection with the practice of magic in the city and region. The Atticist lexicographer Pausanias (as cited by Eustathius on Homer Od. 19.247) reports that the six magical 'Ephesian Letters' (Ephesia Grammata) were inscribed on the cultic image of the Ephesian Artemis. This is part of the reason why Ephesus gained a reputation as being something of a center for magical practices in antiquity.

In spite of the city's special relationship with Artemis, numerous other gods and goddesses were also worshiped there. Egyptian colonists and traders introduced the worship of Sarapis and Isis to Ephesus. Beautiful temples were erected for these deities. Material evidence also points to the veneration of the following deities in Ephesus: Agathe Tyche, Aphrodite, Apollo, Asclepius, Athena, the Cabiri, Concord, Cybele (the Mother Goddess), Demeter, Dionysus, Enedra, Hecate, Hephaestus, Heracles, Hestia Boulaia, Kore, Nemesis, Pan, Pion (a mountain god), Pluto, Poseidon, Theos Hypsistos, Tyche Soteira, Zeus and several river deities.

### *Judaism in Ephesus*

Luke records that Paul spent three months preaching in a Jewish synagogue in Ephesus (Acts 19:8). Although archeologists have not yet discovered the synagogue, there is substantial literary evidence and some material evidence of the Jewish presence. According to Josephus there had been a Jewish

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community in Ephesus since Seleucid times, and this community possessed citizenship (Josephus Ant. 13.3.2 §125). These Jews were exempted from military service and were permitted to send money to the Jerusalem Temple. Most importantly, they were granted the freedom to practice their religion according to their traditions (Josephus Ant. 14.10.11–12 §§223–27; 14.10.25 §§262–64). A few Jewish inscriptions have been found, including one which mentions the officials of the local synagogue.”<sup>36</sup>

Bible scholar C.J. Hemer provides another helpful overview of Ephesus:

“The most important city in the Roman province of Asia, on the West coast of what is now Asiatic Turkey. It was situated at the mouth of the Caÿster River between the mountain range of Coressus and the sea. A magnificent road 11 miles wide and lined with columns ran down through the city to the fine harbor, which served both as a great export centre at the end of the Asiatic caravan-route and also as a natural landing-point from Rome. The city, now uninhabited, has been undergoing excavation for many years, and is probably the most extensive and impressive ruined site of Asia Minor. The sea is now some 10 km away, owing to the silting process which has been at work for centuries. The harbor had to undergo extensive clearing operations at various times from the 2nd century BC; is that, perhaps, why Paul had to stop at Miletus (Acts 20:15-16)? The main part of the city, with its theatre, baths, library, agora and paved streets, lay between the Coressus ridge and the Caÿster, but the temple for which it was famed lay over 2 km to the NE. This site was originally sacred to the worship of the Anatolian fertility goddess, later identified with Greek Artemis and Latin Diana. Justinian built a church to St John on the hill nearby, which was itself succeeded by a Seljuk mosque. The neighboring settlement is now called Selçuk.

The original Anatolian settlement was augmented before the 10th century BC by Ionian colonists, and a joint city was set up. The goddess of Ephesus took a Greek name, but clearly retained her earlier characteristics, for she was repeatedly represented at later periods as a many-breasted figure. Ephesus was conquered by Croesus shortly after his accession in c. 560 BC, and owed some of its artistic glories to his munificence. After his fall in 546 it came under Persian rule. Croesus shifted the site of the archaic city to focus upon the temple of Artemis: Lysimachus, one of the successors of Alexander, forcibly replanted it about the harbor early in the 3rd century BC. Ephesus later formed part of the kingdom of Pergamum, which Attalus III bequeathed to Rome in 133 BC. It became the greatest commercial city of the Roman province of Asia. It then occupied a vast area, and its population may have numbered a third of a million. It is estimated that the great theatre built into Mt Pion in the centre of the city had a capacity of about 25,000.

Ephesus also maintained its religious importance under Roman rule. It became a centre of the emperor cult, and eventually possessed three official temples, thus qualifying thrice over for the proud title ‘temple-warden’ of the emperors, as well as being the home of Artemis (Acts 19:35). It is remarkable that Paul had friends among the asiarchs (Acts 19:31), who were officers of the ‘commune’ of Asia, whose primary function was actually to foster the imperial cult.

The temple of Artemis itself had been rebuilt after a great fire in 356 BC, and ranked as one of the seven wonders of the world until its destruction by the Goths in AD 263. After years of patient search J. T. Wood in 1870 uncovered its remains in the marsh at the foot of Mt Ayasoluk. It had been the largest building in the Greek world. It contained an image of the goddess which, it was claimed, had fallen from heaven (cf. Acts 19:35). Indeed, it may well have been a meteorite originally. Silver coins from many places show the validity of the claim that the goddess of Ephesus was revered all over the world (Acts 19:27). They bear the inscription Diana Ephesia (cf. Acts 19:34).

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<sup>36</sup> Clinton E. Arnold, “Ephesians” in Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin and Daniel G. Reid, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 249.

There was a large colony of Jews at Ephesus, and they had long enjoyed a privileged position under Roman rule. The earliest reference to the coming of Christianity there is in c. AD 52, when Paul made a short visit and left Aquila and Priscilla there (Acts 18:18-21). Paul's third missionary journey had Ephesus as its goal, and he stayed there for over 2 years (Acts 19:8, 10), attracted, no doubt, by its strategic importance as a commercial, political and religious centre. His work was at first based on the synagogue: later he debated in the lecture-hall of Tyrannus, making of Ephesus a base for the evangelization of the whole province of Asia. The spread of Christianity, which refused syncretism, began to incur the hostility of vested religious interests.

It affected not only the magic cults which flourished there (Acts 19:13ff.—one kind of magic formula was actually called Ephesia grammata) but also the worship of Artemis (Acts 19:27), causing damage to the trade in cult objects which was one source of the prosperity of Ephesus. There followed the celebrated riot described in Acts 19. Inscriptions show that the grammateus ('town clerk') who gained control of the assembly on this occasion was the leading civic official, directly responsible to the Romans for such breaches of the peace as illicit assembly (Acts 19:40). It has been suggested that his assertion 'there are proconsuls' (19:38), if it is not a generalizing plural, may fix the date with some precision. On Nero's accession in AD 54, M. Junius Silvanus, the proconsul of Asia, was poisoned by his subordinates Helius and Celer, who acted as proconsuls until the arrival of a regular successor.

Christianity evidently spread to Colossae and the other cities of the Lycus valley at the period of Paul's stay in Ephesus (cf. Col. 1:6-7; 2:1). It was Paul's headquarters for most of the time of the Corinthian controversy and correspondence (1 Cor. 16:8), and the experience which he describes as 'fighting with wild beasts' happened there (1 Cor. 15:32). This seems to be a metaphorical allusion to something already known to the Corinthians, perhaps mob violence. (There was no amphitheatre at Ephesus, though the stadium was later adapted to accommodate beast-fighting.)

The city was later the headquarters of the John who had jurisdiction over the seven leading churches of Asia addressed in the Apocalypse. The church in Ephesus is addressed first of the seven (Rev. 2:1-7), as being the most important church in the de facto capital, and as being the landing-place for a messenger from Patmos and standing at the head of a circular road joining the seven cities in order. This church is flourishing, but is troubled by false teachers, and has lost its 'first love'. The false apostles (2:2) are most probably like the Nicolaitans, who seem to have advocated compromise with the power of paganism for the Christian under pressure. The Ephesians were steadfast, but deficient in love. Ephesus has been characterized as the 'city of change'. Its problems were the problems of a successful church coping with changing circumstances: the city too had had a long history of shifting sites (cf. 2:5b). The promise of eating of the tree of life is here probably set against the background of the sacred date-palm of Artemis, which figures on Ephesian coins.

According to Irenaeus and Eusebius, Ephesus became the home of John the apostle. A generation after his time Ignatius wrote of the continuing fame and faithfulness of the Ephesian church. The third General Council took place here in AD 431 to condemn Nestorian Christology, and sat in the double church of St Mary, the ruins of which are still to be seen. The city declined, and the progressive silting of its gulf finally severed it wholly from the sea."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> C.J. Hemer, "Ephesus" in *New Bible Dictionary*, 3rd ed., Eds. D. R. W. Wood and I. Howard Marshall, (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 326.

### VI. Content Parallels and Unique Passages in Ephesians

#### The Lukan Account of Paul's Ephesian Ministry

Since nearly half the book of Acts is devoted to the life and ministry of Paul, it is helpful to analyze what is to be learned about what Luke records concerning the Apostle's ministry to the Ephesians.

Paul Barnett points out how helpful it is to have the book of Acts when studying the Epistles of Paul: "When Paul's letters and relevant sections of Acts are considered side by side, we are able to reconstruct a chronology of Paul's life and establish when he wrote his letters. These reconstructions are not complete in every detail, but, compared to other influential figures of that era, we are relatively well informed about Paul. There is not comparable parallel in antiquity to the nexus between an external narrator (Luke) and a letter writer (Paul) that yields such extensive information."<sup>38</sup>

Clinton Arnold writes:

"Luke gives us only a very abbreviated record of Paul's work in Ephesus. He narrates a few episodes that serve to further his own theological agenda, but that also provide us with a fascinating picture of the beginning of the church in this city.

#### *The Beginnings*

Paul first visited Ephesus only briefly on his way to Jerusalem from Corinth (Acts 18:18–22). He had attempted to preach in Ephesus earlier, but discerned clearly that the Holy Spirit was directing otherwise (Acts 16:6). Paul's preaching was well received by the Jews in the synagogue, and he promised to return. In order to continue the work he had started, he left Priscilla and Aquila, a Jewish-Christian couple.

#### *Apollos and the Disciples of John*

In Paul's absence an Alexandrian Jew familiar with the Jesus tradition came and began speaking in the synagogue (Acts 18:24–28). This man, Apollos, said to have been fervent in spirit, had not received Christian baptism, only a baptism associated with John the Baptist's teaching. Priscilla and Aquila took him into their home and provided him with a full account of early Christian tradition. Apollos apparently received their instruction favorably and continued his powerful preaching in Corinth.

Shortly after Paul arrived he encountered twelve men also inadequately instructed in Christian teaching (Acts 19:1–7) and who had not received the Holy Spirit. Priscilla and Aquila apparently had no contact with these men. The men claimed only to be familiar with the teaching of John the Baptist and had received his baptism. Paul baptized them, presumably after instructing them more fully about Jesus. After Paul laid his hands on them, they received the Holy Spirit, prophesied and spoke in tongues.

#### *In the Synagogue and the School of Tyrannus*

As Paul promised, he returned to the synagogue and taught for three months. The originally warm reception he received turned to hostility toward his preaching, and he was forced to leave the synagogue (Acts 19:8–9).

By this time, a few of the Jews (and probably Gentile God-fearers) had received Christ. Paul took these new believers with him and spoke daily in a lecture hall in the city (Acts 19:9). The western text adds the historical note that Paul taught between 11:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. With regard to the hall itself, no archeological or inscriptional evidence has yet been discovered to illustrate this point of the narrative. Many of the people in Ephesus and its environs now had the opportunity to hear the gospel. In fact, Luke

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<sup>38</sup> Paul Barnett, *Paul: Missionary of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 4

says, “all the inhabitants of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks” (Acts 19:10). Paul made use of this hall for two years.

### *Miracles, Jewish Exorcists and Magic*

Luke mentions that God accomplished many supernatural works through Paul, although he does not provide us with any specific accounts. People were healed of various illnesses, and demons were exorcised (Acts 19:11–12).

At the same time, Luke records that there was a group of itinerant Jewish exorcists performing their exorcistic rites in the city (Acts 19:13). Probably because they saw Paul’s success, they had added the name of Jesus to their exorcistic formulas. We know nothing of their relationship to the local synagogue, viz., whether they were attached to the synagogue or came from outside and acted independently. Luke tells us of one incident involving the sons of a Jewish chief priest, Sceva, who unsuccessfully applied their method to a demonized man and experienced tragic results. They were physically assaulted and hurt by the man with whom they were working (Acts 19:14–16).

Word of this incident spread quickly through the city. Believers who had failed to renounce their occult practices when they were converted now confessed (Acts 19:17–20). They brought their magical books together and burned them. Luke was clearly impressed by the amount and monetary value of their books, estimating the value as equivalent to 50,000 days’ wages.

### *Hostility from the Artemis Adherents*

The rest of Luke’s account is taken up with one major incident of hostility against Paul and, indeed, nascent Christianity. An outspoken leader of a local trade union named Demetrius fomented a dramatic mob scene at the theater to protest Paul’s preaching (Acts 19:23–41). As a maker of cultic paraphernalia for the local Artemis cult, he foresaw a significant loss of income to his business. He rallied his fellow union workers and soon people from all over the city gathered at the theater to affirm their support of their patroness deity, chanting, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians.” The frenzy in the theater lasted for two hours and was finally quelled by the intervention of the city clerk. Luke reports that Paul left Ephesus shortly after this incident.

### *Churches Begin*

One could wish that Luke had disclosed more about the founding of local churches in Asia Minor, but this was beyond the scope of his work. Presumably during this time in which “all Asia heard the word of the Lord” (Acts 19:10), churches were established not only in Ephesus but also by Paul’s colleagues in Colossae (Col 1:7) and throughout Asia Minor (e.g., the churches mentioned in Rev 2–3). Given the size of Ephesus and the early tendency toward house churches, it is likely that more than one church was planted in Ephesus. Perhaps a network of house churches came into existence throughout the city and in the local villages (e.g., Hypaipa, Diashieron, Neikaia and Koloe).<sup>39</sup>

## The Ephesian Ministry in the Letters of Paul

We are also able to gain some insight into Paul’s Ephesian ministry through scattered references in his New Testament correspondence. Biblical scholar Clinton Arnold writes:

### *“Ephesian Imprisonment?”*

While there is no explicit mention of Paul being imprisoned in Ephesus either by Luke or in the Pauline epistles, the majority of recent scholars postulate that Paul was imprisoned one or more times while he was in Ephesus. Shortly after leaving Ephesus, Paul tells the Corinthians that he had been in prison

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<sup>39</sup> Clinton Arnold, “Ephesians,” in Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin and Daniel G. Reid, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 252.

frequently (2 Cor 11:23; cf. 1 Clem 5:6). Many have also thought imprisonment was one of the things entailed in his fighting with ‘wild beasts’ at Ephesus (1 Cor 15:32) and part of the hardship he experienced in Asia (2 Cor 1:8). It is therefore quite possible that Paul was imprisoned during his Ephesian ministry.

### *Correspondence with Corinth*

Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthians from Ephesus. He also appears to have written two other letters to the Corinthians, both of which are now lost (cf. 1 Cor 5:9; 2 Cor 2:4), and taken one trip to Corinth from Ephesus. We also know that a delegation from Corinth visited the apostle with a report about the Corinthian church and a list of questions during Paul’s Ephesian ministry (1 Cor 16:17). Paul’s explicit reference to ‘fighting with wild beasts’ at Ephesus (1 Cor 15:32) should not be taken literally since his Roman citizenship would have prevented such an occurrence. Rather, this is a metaphorical way of referring to the difficulty with his opponents and possible physical injury they may have inflicted on him.

### *Philemon and Philippians*

If Paul was imprisoned in Ephesus, it is possible that he wrote his letters to Philemon and to the Philippians from there. Neither of these letters states where they were written, only that they were written during an imprisonment. Many scholars now accept this view, but there is still no consensus.

### *Timothy in Ephesus*

Traditionally, 1 Timothy has been taken to be an authentic Pauline letter written to Timothy whom Paul had left as his representative in Ephesus. This view still has much in its favor, although many scholars are inclined to deny the authenticity of the letter based on linguistic and theological grounds. At a minimum, the letter does appear to have a genuine connection with Asia Minor (and probably Ephesus) and gives us a glimpse of the incursions of false teaching during the latter third of the first century A.D.<sup>40</sup>

## VII. Overarching Themes

The overarching themes of Ephesians are summarized nicely by Bible scholar Peter T. O’Brien: “Whether it is because of its magnificent sweep of God’s saving purposes from election before the foundation of the world to his summing up of all things in Christ, the place of the exalted Christ within those purposes and believers’ relationship to him, God’s victory in Christ over the powers, the grand presentation of the church, its language of worship and prayer, or the scope and depth of its ethical teaching, Ephesians has a profound influence on the lives of many.”<sup>41</sup>

### *The Greatness of God*

The greatness of God is an overarching theme in Ephesians. According to D.A. Carson, “In this letter of Ephesians we cannot miss the supreme place of God, who brings salvation despite the unworthiness of sinners. Nor can we overlook the greatness of Christ or the fact that the church, his body, occupies an important place in God’s working out of his great purpose.”<sup>42</sup>

### *Union with Christ*

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<sup>40</sup> Clinton Arnold, “Ephesians,” in Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin and Daniel G. Reid, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 252.

<sup>41</sup> Peter O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 1-2.

<sup>42</sup> D.A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992/2005), 496.

Union with Christ is an overarching theme in Ephesians. Bible commentator Klyne Snodgrass writes: “The letter is consistently theocentric and Trinitarian. Its message about God’s grace and love is encouraging and rewarding. God is not some remote being; he is the prime actor throughout the letter. From the beginning the letter shows we were always meant to belong to God and that God has been and is at work to make the reality of our relationship with him happen. In Christ and by the Spirit God brings us to himself and gives us what we need for life. All the privileges of life are found in union with Christ and conveyed by the Spirit. Ephesians presents a gospel of union with Christ more powerfully than any other New Testament letter. Nothing short of attachment to him will rescue us from the human plight, and nothing can define us as human beings more than attachment to him. From living with him we learn how to live for him.”<sup>43</sup>

### *Prayer*

Prayer is an overarching theme in Ephesians. J. Ligon Duncan points out that nearly half the book of Ephesians is composed of prayer: “Ephesians is a book of prayer. Literally, it is a book of prayer. Do you realize that about half of the Book of Ephesians is prayer? Prayer reports, prayer requests, and invitations to prayer...even outlines of prayers that Paul has prayed for the Ephesian Christians and for you and me.”<sup>44</sup>

## **VIII. Major Characters**

### *God the Father*

“Written from a Jewish-Christian perspective, from the very outset (1:3–14) Ephesians patently blesses Israel’s God. He is the almighty author of creation and the promised new creation (1:4; cf. 2:15; 3:11 [cf. 4:6]; 4:24), working out his sovereign pretemporal will to the eschatological praise of his glorious grace (1:6, 11–14). That grace focuses on fulfillment in Christ of the promises made to Israel of corporate ‘sonship’ (now, yes, but primarily eschatological: 1:5–6, as in Rom. 8:23); new-exodus ‘redemption’ from slavery/sin (1:7); ‘sealing’ (with the Spirit: 1:13), and final ‘inheritance,’ in which God takes full possession of his people (1:14; cf. 1:18). At that point he will bring all things into the open cosmic unity and harmony of reconciliation with himself, which has already begun in the church in and through Christ (1:9–10; cf. 1:22–23; 3:19).”<sup>45</sup>

### *God the Son*

“In most ways Ephesians recapitulates the teaching of Paul’s other letters, including emphasis on Jesus as (1) the Christ; (2) the unique Lord (exalted to God’s right hand, and thence as ‘head of all things,’ sharing his cosmic rule: see esp. 1:20–23; cf. 4:6); and (3) the Son of God. As elsewhere, he is also an Adamic figure who is the beginning (1:4), the paradigm (4:20–24; 5:1–2, 25–32), and the end of God’s purposes with humankind (1:10; 4:13, 15–16). As in other Paulines, the Lord is invoked as the co-source, with the Father, of ‘grace and peace’ (1:2; cf. 6:23), but uniquely also of ‘love and faith/faithfulness’ (6:23–24). Paul usually refers to God as providing the ‘grace’ of his apostolate and other ministries, through the Spirit, and Ephesians maintains the same (e.g., 3:2, 7), but much more explicitly than at (e.g.) 1 Cor. 12:5, describes the ascended Christ as the (co-)giver of the varied ministry gifts (4:10–12). Similarly, in

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<sup>43</sup> Klyne Snodgrass, *The NIV Application Commentary: Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 18.

<sup>44</sup> J. Ligon Duncan III, as cited on [http://www.fpcjackson.org/resources/sermons/Ephesians/01a\\_ephesians\\_1.1to2.htm](http://www.fpcjackson.org/resources/sermons/Ephesians/01a_ephesians_1.1to2.htm) (accessed November 10, 2009).

<sup>45</sup> Max Turner, “Book of Ephesians,” in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, Eds. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Craig G. Bartholomew, Daniel J. Treier and N. T. Wright (London; Grand Rapids, MI.: SPCK; Baker Academic, 2005), 186.

Ephesians the risen Christ, like God, uniquely ‘fill[s] all things’ (4:10), especially the church (1:22–23). Grasping the infinite love of Christ means to be filled with all the fullness of God (3:17).”<sup>46</sup>

### *God the Holy Spirit*

Bible commentator Gordon D. Fee summarizes three major concerns in Ephesians and then connects them to the Holy Spirit: “Three concerns dominate the letter, and the Spirit plays a central role in each. The *first* is the passion of Paul’s life—the Gentile mission, especially in terms of God’s reconciling both Jew and Gentile to himself and thereby making of the two a new humanity as the ultimate expression of his redeeming work in Christ. This theme first emerges at the end of the opening ‘blessing of God’ (1:11-14); it is developed in a thoroughgoing way in 2:11-22, and is picked up again in 3:1-13, with the Spirit playing a leading role in each case. It is also this ‘unity of the Spirit’ (between Jew and Gentile) that chs. 4-6 are all about by way of exhortation. Thus the whole letter is held together by this theme, admittedly more predominantly so in chs. 1-3 than in 4-6.

The *second* concern, which emerges in a variety of ways throughout the letter, has to do with Christ’s victory over the powers for the sake of the church, with the Spirit playing a key role in his readers participation in that victory. Crucial to the letter is the way that Paul brings these first two concerns together, especially in ch. 3, where the reality of Jew and Gentile together as one people of God is on display before the ‘powers’ so that they become aware of their present—and ultimate—defeat in Christ.

This in turn lies behind the *third* concern, which finds expression in the second major part of the letter (chs. 4-6): that they maintain the ‘unity of the Spirit’ (4:1-16) by the way they ‘walk’ (see 2:2, 10; 4:1, 17 [2X]; 5:2, 8, 15), that is, by the way they live out the life of Christ in their corporate relationships, including their worship (4:1-5:20), and in their Christian households (5:21-6:9). All of this is brought into final focus in 6:10-20, where through the weapons and armor provided by Christ and the Spirit they are urged to stand as one people in their ongoing conflict with the powers.”<sup>47</sup>

“The teaching on the Spirit in Ephesians is far more extensive than in its companion letter, Colossians, but also much closer to that of Paul’s other letters. The Spirit is the self-manifesting, transforming, and empowering presence of God—and of Christ—most probably the personal executive power by which both the Father and the Son indwell and ‘fill’ the church (cf. 2:18, 22; 3:16–19), and direct (3:5; 4:30; 6:18), shape (1:17–19; 4:3), inspire (5:18), and empower it (1:17–19; 6:17; cf. 4:10–16).”<sup>48</sup>

## IX. Structure and Style

The structure of the letter to the Ephesians is clearly explained as follows by bible commentator Harold Hoehner: “Ephesians, similar to other Pauline letters, is divided into two main parts: doctrine or theology (chaps. 1-3) and duties or ethics (chaps. 4-6). After the prologue (1:1-2) the first portion offers extended praise directed to God for all the spiritual benefits given to those who are in Christ (1:3-14), which is followed immediately by a commendation to the readers for their faith and love and a petition for wisdom and revelation (1:15-23). The readers are reminded of their relationship to God before and after their

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<sup>46</sup> Max Turner, “Book of Ephesians,” in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, Eds. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Craig G. Bartholomew, Daniel J. Treier and N. T. Wright (London; Grand Rapids, MI.: SPCK; Baker Academic, 2005), 186.

<sup>47</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 661.

<sup>48</sup> Max Turner, “Book of Ephesians,” in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, Eds. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Craig G. Bartholomew, Daniel J. Treier and N. T. Wright (London; Grand Rapids, MI.: SPCK; Baker Academic, 2005), 186.

conversion (2:1-10) and the new union of Jewish and Gentile believers who are now considered one new person, the church (2:11-22). Consequently, there is not only reconciliation of human beings to God but also between Jewish and Gentile believers. Having explained this, Paul, in a parenthetical section, describes the mystery which is the union of Jew and Gentile believers in Christ and his ministry dispensing this mystery to the Gentiles (3:1-13). He concludes the first portion of the letter by praying that the Ephesian believers might be strengthened in love so that the union of Jewish and Gentile believers might be carried out in God's power (3:14-21).

The second portion is the application, or paraenesis, showing how the doctrine translates into the conduct of the believers. This portion is subdivided into six sections, five governed by the imperative 'walk' which is used five times in conjunction with the inferential conjunction 'therefore.' They are: (1) to walk in unity (4:1-16); (2) to walk in holiness and not as the Gentiles (4:17-32); (3) to walk in love by imitating God and abstaining from evil practices (5:1-6); (4) to walk in light by not becoming involved with the evildoers and their works (5:7-14); and (5) to walk in wisdom by being controlled by the Holy Spirit in their domestic and public life (5:15-6:9). The sixth section begins with Paul enjoining the Ephesians to be strengthened in the Lord in order to be able to stand against evil powers (6:10-20). A short conclusion closes the epistle (6:21-24)."<sup>49</sup>

Clinton Arnold provides a helpful summary of both the structure and style of Ephesians: "The first half of Ephesians is well known for its lofty and exalted style. Here Paul makes use of the language of worship, prayer and doxology. The letter begins with an elegantly composed eulogy (berakah) praising God for the election and redemption of his people (Eph 1:3-14). Consisting of one long sentence, the section abounds with participles, prepositional phrases and relative clauses and is punctuated with the refrain-like phrase 'to the praise of his glory.' In true poetic form, the passage also uses a variety of synonyms to repeat the key thoughts, such as the knowledge, power and will of God. Because of these poetic traits, some scholars have regarded this section as an early-Christian hymn.

The letter also contains two prayers (Eph 1:15-23; 3:14-21). The first actually consists of an introductory thanksgiving, an intercessory prayer report and a digression extolling the power of God which raised Jesus from the dead. The poetic language used in this praise of God's resurrection power (Eph 1:20-23) has led some interpreters to regard it as a hymnic quotation, but it more likely reflects the author's own poetic style with possible dependence on early creedal formulations. The second prayer properly begins in Ephesians 3:1 but is interrupted by an excursus on Paul's apostleship to the Gentiles (Eph 3:2-13), a topic extremely relevant to the predominantly Gentile readership.

The prayer report consists of one long sentence but is structured around two requests and a summarizing request. The prayer reiterates and develops some of the themes of the first prayer (e.g., power, spirit). The exalted language of the prayer leads immediately into a doxology (Eph 3:20-21) praising God for his power effective in the lives of believers.

The first half of the letter is far from a dispassionate theological treatise. It exudes emotion in the praise and worship of the almighty God who loves and responds to his people. Paul writes with intense feeling and wants to elicit the same response—praise, worship and prayer—in the lives of his readers.

Although the OT quotations in Ephesians are not numerous (there are only four explicit quotations), there are many allusions evidenced by the author's dependence on OT phraseology, terminology and concepts. References to such items as temple, redemption, God's choosing, hope, mercy, promise, wisdom, the

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<sup>49</sup> Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: And Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 61-62.

Father, sons of men, helmet of salvation and many more show how deeply steeped the author was in the OT and how the language of the OT influenced his own composition.”<sup>50</sup>

Turner writes: “Ephesians is breathtaking in its theological grasp of the scope of God’s purposes in Christ for the church. It is a pastorally warm letter and spiritually sensitive in its advice, peaceable in tone and readily overflowing into joyful worship.”<sup>51</sup>

### *Ephesians Outline*<sup>52</sup>

1:1–2	Address and salutation
1:3–3:21	Paul’s thanksgiving and prayer
1:3–14	Celebration of God’s eternal plan
1:15–2:10	Paul’s report of his thanksgiving and prayer for his readers begins
2:11–22A	digression: the church, cosmic reconciliation and unity: the new temple
3:1	The prayer-report continued
3:2–13	A digression: elaborating Paul’s apostolic ministry
3:14–21	Paul’s prayer report completed and a doxology
4:1–6:20	Encouragement to live out the gospel of cosmic reconciliation and unity in Christ
4:1–6	Opening appeal to a life that exposes new-creation harmony
4:7–16	Christ’s victory gifts and growth towards Christ
4:17–6:9	Appeals to abandon the life of the old and live according to the new
6:10–20	Final appeal: fight the spiritual battle together!
6:21–24	Postscript

### *Ephesians Outline*<sup>53</sup>

- a. God’s eternal purposes for man in Christ, 1:1-3:21
  - 1:1-2. Greeting.
  - 1:3-14. Praise for all the spiritual blessings that come to men in Christ.
  - 1:15-23. Thanksgiving for the readers’ faith, and prayer for their experience of the wisdom and power of God.
  - 2:1-10. God’s purpose to raise men from the death of sin to new life in Christ.
  - 2:11-22. His purpose to reconcile men not only to himself, but to one another—in particular to bring Jews and Gentiles together into the one people of God.
  - 3:1-13. The privilege of the apostle’s calling to preach the gospel to the Gentiles.
  - 3:14-21. A second prayer, for the knowledge of the love of Christ, and his indwelling fullness; and a doxology.
- b. Practical consequences, 4:1-6:24
  - 4:1-16. Exhortation to walk worthily, and to work to build up the one body of Christ.
  - 4:17-32. The old life of ignorance, lust and unrighteousness must be put off, and the new life of holiness put on.
  - 5:1-21. A further call to live in love and purity, as children of light, full of praise and usefulness.

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<sup>50</sup> Clinton E. Arnold, “Ephesians” in Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin and Daniel G. Reid, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 238.

<sup>51</sup> Max Turner, “Ephesians,” in D. A. Carson, *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, electronic ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994).

<sup>52</sup> Max Turner, “Ephesians,” in D. A. Carson, *New Bible Commentary : 21st Century Edition*, electronic ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994).

<sup>53</sup> Francis Foulkes, “Ephesians,” in *New Bible Dictionary*, 3rd ed., Eds. D. R. W. Wood and I. Howard Marshall (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 326.

- 5:22-33. Instructions to wives and husbands, based on the analogy of the relationship between Christ and his church.
- 6:1-9. Instructions to children and parents, servants and masters.
- 6:10-20. Summons to Christian conflict in the armour of God and in his strength.
- 6:21-24. Concluding personal message.”

Snodgrass outlines Ephesians as follows:<sup>54</sup>

- I. Salutation: Identification of Author, Recipients, and a Greeting (1:1-2)
- II. The Body of the Letter (1:3-6:20)
  - a. A Meditation on God’s Gift of Salvation (1:3-3:21)
    - i. Doxology (1:3-14)
    - ii. Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession (1:13-23)
    - iii. Salvation Viewed Comprehensively in Terms of Plight, Event, and Result (2:1-10)
    - iv. Salvation Viewed from the Perspective of the Recipients
    - v. Salvation Viewed Personally (3:1-13)
    - vi. Prayer for Strength and Comprehension of God’s Love (3:14-19)
    - vii. Doxology (3:20-21)
  - b. B Instructions to Live Worthy of God’s Call (4:1-6:20)
    - i. The Church’s Task of Unity (4:1-16)
    - ii. Descriptions of the Old Life and the New Life in Christ (4:17-24)
    - iii. The Practical Consequences of New Life (4:25-6:9)
    - iv. An Emotional Appeal to be Strong and to Live for God (6:10-20)
- III. The Closing of the Letter (6:21-24)

### X. Church Fathers on Ephesians

John Chrysostom, (c. 347—407): “The Epistle itself is full of sublime thoughts and doctrines... It abounds with sentiments of overwhelming loftiness and grandeur. Thoughts which he scarcely so much as utters anywhere else, he here plainly declares.”<sup>55</sup>

Chrysostom goes on to say in one of his homilies on Ephesians: “The wonder is not only that He gave His Son but that He did so in this way, by sacrificing the one He loved. It is astonishing that He gave the Beloved for those who hated Him. See how highly He honors us. If even when we hated Him and were enemies He gave the Beloved, what will He not do for us now?”<sup>56</sup>

### XI. Other Major Theologians and Pastors on Ephesians

Bible scholar Peter T. O’Brien writes that “The Letter to the Ephesians is one of the most significant documents ever written.”<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Klyne Snodgrass, *The NIV Application Commentary: Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 30-31.

<sup>55</sup> *Homilies on Ephesians*, as cited on <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf113.iii.iv.i.html> (accessed November 10, 2009).

<sup>56</sup> John Chrysostom, “Homily on Ephesians I.I.8.” in *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, Vol. 8, Ed. Mark J. Edwards (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 114.

<sup>57</sup> Peter O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians PNTC* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 1-2.

Puritan Bible commentator Matthew Henry writes that in Ephesians “we have here an epitome of the whole of Christian doctrine, and of almost all the chief heads of divinity.”<sup>58</sup> C. H. Dodd called Ephesians “the crown of Paulinism.”<sup>59</sup> John A. MacKay described Ephesians as “doctrine set to music.”<sup>60</sup> Bible scholar J. Armitage Robinson considered Ephesians “the crown of St. Paul’s writings.”<sup>61</sup> Poet and literary critic, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, once referred to Ephesians as “the divinest composition of man.”<sup>62</sup>

Charles H. Spurgeon wrote in his 1890 sermon entitled “Blessing for Blessing”: “The Epistle to the Ephesians is a complete Body of Divinity. In the first chapter you have the doctrines of the gospel; in the next, you have the experience of the Christians; and before the Epistle is finished, you have the precepts of the Christian faith. Whosoever would see Christianity in a treatise, let him read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest the Epistle to the Ephesians.”<sup>63</sup>

Theologian Martin Dibelius once characterized Ephesians as “a heaping up of abstractions, exalted and difficult words, heaped up expressions and complicated sentences, which after all are only meant to describe the simplest Christianity.”<sup>64</sup>

Bible scholar William O. Carver described Ephesians as “the greatest piece of writing in all history. Here the divine human encounter that is the abiding history of the human race is outlined in amazing completeness.”<sup>65</sup>

Bible scholar Max Turner notes: “No New Testament writing more joyfully celebrates God’s grace in the gospel than does Ephesians, nor does any contain so rich and concentrated a vein of theological gold. This short letter’s profound and extensive influence on the church’s thought, liturgy, and piety ranks with that of the much longer Psalms, John, and Romans.”<sup>66</sup>

## XII. Ephesians in Church History

Theologian Max Turner summarizes the impact of Ephesians on church history: “No NT writing more joyfully celebrates God’s grace in the gospel than does Ephesians, nor does any contain so rich and

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<sup>58</sup> Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 2307.

<sup>59</sup> C. H. Dodd, “Ephesians,” *The Abingdon Bible Commentary*, eds. Frederick C. Eiselen, Edwin Lewis, and David G. Downey (New York: Abingdon Press, 1929), 1224.

<sup>60</sup> John A. MacKay, *God’s Order: The Ephesian Letter and This Present Time* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1959), 17.

<sup>61</sup> J. Armitage Robinson, *St. Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians* (London: Macmillan, 1903), vii.

<sup>62</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Specimens of the Table Talk* (London: John Murray, 1858), 82.

<sup>63</sup> See <http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/2266.htm#expo>.

<sup>64</sup> Martin Dibelius, *A Fresh Approach To The New Testament and The Early Christian Literature* (London: Ivor Nicholson Watson, 1936), 170, 186.

<sup>65</sup> William Owen Carver, *The Glory of God in The Christian Calling* (Nashville: Broadman, 1949), 3.

<sup>66</sup> Max Turner, “Ephesians,” in *Theological Interpretation of the New Testament*, Ed. Kevin J/ Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 124.

concentrated a vein of theological gold. This short letter's profound and extensive influence on the church's thought, liturgy, and piety ranks with that of the much longer Psalms, John, and Romans."<sup>67</sup>

According to Turner, "Ephesians has been a central text throughout the history of the church, the subject of many commentaries from Origen, Chrysostom, and Jerome onward, and continually thereafter ransacked for its spiritual and theological treasures."<sup>68</sup> Turner argues that you cannot overestimate the importance of Ephesians in Christian theology: "There is hardly a sentence of Ephesians that has not been deeply influential on Christian theology."<sup>69</sup>

Commentator Klyne Snodgrass writes: "Pound for pound Ephesians may well be the most influential document ever written. Within the history of Christianity, only the Psalms, the Gospel of John, and Romans have been so instrumental in shaping the life and thought of Christians, but all three of these works are much longer than the few pages of this letter. Ephesians has justly been described as 'the Switzerland of the New Testament,' 'the crown and climax of Pauline theology,' and 'one of the divinest compositions of man.' The explanation of the gospel and life with Christ provided here is powerful and direct. If read receptively, Ephesians is a bombshell."<sup>70</sup>

According to Clinton Arnold, Ephesians is for today's world: "The Letter to the Ephesians is unique among the letters attributed to Paul. Its language of worship and prayer, the depth and scope of its theology, and the many practical admonitions have led many Christians to cherish it as their favorite NT book. The letter's emphasis on the nature of the church and the present dynamic relationship of the exalted Christ to the church makes it an important and practical book for the church today."<sup>71</sup>

According to theologian Max Turner, the main challenge of Ephesians today is as follows: "Ephesians challenges the pietistic individualism and corresponding weak doctrine of the church that we so often find in evangelicalism. 'Don't look at the church,' we say, 'Look at Christ!'. Paul, however, expects the outsider to see Christ and God's unifying purpose for the world precisely in the church. The challenge for a fragmented and ever-dividing Protestantism today could barely be sharper: Ephesians calls us to build bridges not minefields. It is also a challenge for those who promote separate white and black churches, segregated rich, middle-class, and 'worker' churches etc. Such homogeneous groups may naturally get on better together, but how do they reflect the gospel of reconciliation? Ephesians challenges all of us to find better ways of making our local churches real communities of people whose lives and worship together as a church witness to the cosmic unity begun in Christ, and are deeply imbued with his presence."<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Max Turner, "Book of Ephesians," in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, Eds. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Craig G. Bartholomew, Daniel J. Treier and N. T. Wright (London; Grand Rapids, MI.: SPCK; Baker Academic, 2005), 186.

<sup>68</sup> Max Turner, "Book of Ephesians," in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, Eds. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Craig G. Bartholomew, Daniel J. Treier and N. T. Wright (London; Grand Rapids, MI.: SPCK; Baker Academic, 2005), 186.

<sup>69</sup> Max Turner, "Book of Ephesians," in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, Eds. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Craig G. Bartholomew, Daniel J. Treier and N. T. Wright (London; Grand Rapids, MI.: SPCK; Baker Academic, 2005), 186.

<sup>70</sup> Klyne Snodgrass, *The NIV Application Commentary: Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 17.

<sup>71</sup> Clinton E. Arnold, "Ephesians" in Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin and Daniel G. Reid, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 238.

<sup>72</sup> Max Turner, "Ephesians," in D. A. Carson, *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, electronic ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994).

### XIII. Theological Overview of Ephesians

#### *The Style of Theologizing in Ephesians*

Bible scholar Max Turner writes: “Unlike other Pauline letters, Ephesians does not directly tackle some particular local or immediately strategic concerns. Yet it was probably intended primarily to be read alongside Colossians in the Lycus valley churches (possibly as the ‘letter from [nearby] Laodicea,’ Col. 4:16), and as a partial prophylactic against the danger there of syncretistic veneration of angelic powers. Instead, Ephesians is dominated by (1) blessing of God for the cosmic reconciliation he has begun in Christ (1:3–14 [esp. 1:9–10]; 3:20–21); (2) prayer that the readers might spiritually comprehend this gospel and be fully grasped by it (1:15–2:10; 3:1, 14–21); and (3) an integrally corresponding ethical exhortation to live out that good news together in a unity that exemplifies it to the cosmos (4:1–6:17).”<sup>73</sup>

#### *Salvation/Reconciliation/Cosmic Unity*

“At the theological heart of Ephesians glows the multifaceted jewel of the ineffable ‘mystery’ revealed in the gospel (cf. 1:9–10; 3:3–4, 6–9; 5:32; 6:19). This, while planned in eternity, was ‘set forth’ paradigmatically in the Christ event (1:9 ESV, NRSV) as God’s eschatological intention to (re-)unite ‘all things’ in cosmic harmony with himself in Christ (1:10; cf. Col. 1:18–20). Many fathers from Irenaeus onward took the key verb *anakephalaiōsasthai* to mean ‘recapitulate’ (i.e., to restore in the new head, Christ, all that was lost in the old, Adam). Others preferred to see a simpler allusion to 1:23, and took the verb to mean ‘to bring under (the) one head, Christ’ (cf. NJB). The majority, however, recognize the verb means ‘to sum up/gather up’ as under one *kephalaion* (= heading). The background assumption (as at Col. 1:18–20) is that creation has been plunged by sin into a chaos of alienations. Correspondingly, the hoped-for ‘summing up’ takes the specific form of the reuniting of all things (or ‘reconciling’ thereof: so Col. 1:20) in cosmic peace and harmony. This is the vision that fundamentally stamps all else in the letter. It is a vision the author believes has been decisively inaugurated through Christ’s redemptive (1:7), and especially in his reconciling, death (2:14–18). In a horizontal dimension the cross tears down (in principle) the wall of alienation dividing the two ancient divisions of humankind (Jew and Gentile), previously generated by the law, and allows the former two to be re-created as one new humanity in Christ (2:14–15). But in a vertical dimension the cross also reconciles both these groups to God (2:16–17), creating a church that thereby already exemplifies (to the world and to the heavenly hosts: cf. 3:10!) the beginnings of the cosmic reunification and messianic peace (2:18) in 1:9–10. That salvation has at least fully dawned in the transforming faith-union that joins Jew and Gentile with the exalted Lord (2:6, 8); even though it has yet to be consummated.

#### *Eschatology*

Contrary to the assertion of some interpreters, the author does not believe the vision of 1:9–10 is already fully accomplished. He looks out onto a still largely benighted unbelieving ‘old’ humanity, alienated from God, from the church, and from each other; dead in sin, and under the malign influence of the evil one (cf. 2:1–5; 4:17–20; 5:11–14). Even for the church itself, the days are evil (5:15; 6:13) and beset by encircling hosts of opposing powers (6:10–17; 4:27). Its day of redemption and inheritance (1:11–14, 18; 4:30) still essentially lies in the temporal future, which readers will naturally identify (from Col. 3:4, or from the Pauline tradition more generally) with the parousia. Ephesians does, however, take up the Pauline apocalyptic belief that the eschatological blessings already exist in the heavenly places, and that believers already share in these by virtue of their union with Christ. Ephesians gives distinct emphasis to this (esp. 1:3–14) and in 2:6 can even assert that believers are raised up and enthroned with Christ there (themes closely paralleled in Col. 2:12–13; 3:1–4). But this does not mean a shift to an overrealized eschatology, as is so often asserted. It is partly the regular bold assurance of eschatological benediction. More specifically, though, it is joyful affirmation of faith’s close, partly reciprocal, indwelling between the

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<sup>73</sup> Max Turner, “Book of Ephesians,” in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, Eds. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Craig G. Bartholomew, Daniel J. Treier and N. T. Wright (London; Grand Rapids, MI.: SPCK; Baker Academic, 2005), 186.

believer and the heavenly Lord. Just as experience of the Spirit as ‘down payment’ (1:14) of our inheritance is a foretaste of the eschatological fullness of Christ (1:23; 3:18–19; 4:10), so by the same Spirit we are now present to Christ, and so ‘with him,’ and share in his exaltation. And this sharing ‘with him in the heavenlies is no triumphalism: it does not lift the believer out of earthly existence, with all its individual, household, and community responsibilities to live the cruciform life of openness, meekness, love, and service.

### *People of God/Church/New Humanity/Ministry*

In no Pauline letter is the church so remarkably prominent. Ephesians develops many ecclesiological themes present in other Pauline letters, especially Colossians. Thus, the church is the holy ‘people of God’ (= the saints), fulfilling the destiny of Israel. It is the body over which Christ is the head (Eph. 1:22// Col. 1:18; 2:10; Eph. 4:15//Col. 2:19). It is God’s *ecclesia* (assembly), probably meaning the multiple and distinct earthly representation of the one heavenly and eschatological assembly, the temple he indwells (Eph. 2:20–22; cf. 1 Cor. 3:16–17; 2 Cor. 6:16–18). But Ephesians brings distinctive emphases to bear. The temple is being built on the foundation of the fundamental apostolic/prophetic revelation of its essentially concorporate nature (fusing Jew and Gentile; 2:20–22; 3:5–6).

The church is also portrayed as a single developing body, one growing harmoniously from childhood toward Christlike (eschatological?) maturity, the ‘complete man.’ In this growth it is shaped, and held together, by the ministries that the Lord gives (4:10–16). Or to vary the metaphor again (sharply so in gender!), it is a body that is Christ’s bride, and he is head over it as a husband to his wife (5:22–32; cf. 2 Cor. 11:2, but there the bride is a single congregation, and Paul its ‘best man’). The church is also the one new-creation humanity (2:15; 4:20–24), which, while not effacing the Jew/Gentile distinction (readers can still be addressed as ‘You Gentiles,’ 2:11; 3:1), embraces both in a unity that transcends such distinction (and any other racial division). It has a fundamentally ‘Israel’ bias and shape and fulfills its hopes and destiny (2:11–18, esp. 12–13), but takes its singular most-defining identity from the ultimate reconciling self-giving of the (Jewish) Christ (4:20–21, 32; 5:1–2). In a context of Jewish mysticism, where the veneration of the heavenly beings was a potentially divisive threat, the soteriology, eschatology, and ecclesiology of the letter could hardly be more sharply relevant.

### *Ethics*

Not surprisingly, the one main and urgent task of the church (as the writer composes his three chapters of ethical exhortation) is to maintain, and visibly live out, the cosmic unity/harmony begun in Christ (4:1–3). This means much more than merely ensuring that Gentile converts are treated on fully equal terms with Jewish believers (2:11–20; 3:5–6): it also means that all must renounce the old-creation patterns of alienated and alienating behavior (4:17–31; 5:3–15). Instead, they must adopt the cruciform virtues that recognize the authentic self, in God’s likeness, as belonging to and for the other. Thus they embrace ways of being/living that build the community’s varied relationships and thereby give them previously unimaginable and joyful depth (esp. 4:25, 29; 4:32–5:2; 5:15–20). No better paradigm can Paul provide than that of authentic marriage, which models the Christ-church relationship (5:22–32), and none has been more influential. But we would miss the apostle’s point entirely if we took it just to be his later, more-considered teaching on marriage than that in 1 Cor. 7: he intends this portrayal of marriage to illumine all Christian relationships.

### *Powers and Spiritual Warfare*

No Pauline letter—other than the sister letter, Colossians—gives such attention to principalities and powers. It has been argued that this is evoked by Ephesian fears of demonic magical powers associated with the Artemis cult. Perhaps more probable is that Paul fears the influence of Jewish-Christian teaching (primarily in the Lycus valley) about mystical heavenly ascent, and concomitant undue reverence for angelic beings. In terms of the history of interpretation, pride of place has certainly been given to Eph. 6:10–20. But while this passage has regularly been taken as a kind of specialist appendix on how to deal

with the evil powers, it is much more convincingly understood as a fitting summary and conclusion to the themes of the whole letter.”<sup>74</sup>

### *The Greatness of God*

“The letter begins with an exclamation of praise to God. He is eulogized as the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ and is magnified for all that he has done for his people in and through Christ (Eph 1:3). Most notably, he has chosen for himself a people and has provided them with redemption from bondage and forgiveness of sin. With a rich variety of terminology, Paul stresses that God is fulfilling a grand plan—his ‘will’—that encompasses the entire sweep of human history. One of the most awe-inspiring characteristics about God is his great love which prompts him to act on behalf of his people (Eph 1:4; 2:4). His divine power is also brought into bold relief by his act of raising Jesus from the dead (Eph 1:19–20).

### *The Exalted Christ*

Ephesians is often described as presenting a ‘cosmic Christology.’ This stems from Paul’s stress on the exaltation of Christ over all his enemies, especially the principalities and powers (Eph 1:21–22) and Christ’s role in bringing all of history to completion (Eph 1:10). Nevertheless, the letter speaks of the suffering of Christ; it was through his blood that redemption was secured (Eph 1:7) and by the cross that reconciliation was achieved (Eph 2:16). This letter builds on Paul’s previous thought about the relationship of Christ to his church by depicting him as the ‘head’ of his body (Eph 1:23; 4:15–16) and a bridegroom that nourishes and cares for his bride (Eph 5:29).

### *Salvation in its Present Dimension*

Ephesians is also often characterized as having a strongly ‘realized’ eschatology. Although the future aspect of eschatology is not totally absent (see Eph 1:10, 14; 4:30; 5:6, 27), there is a significant stress on salvation as present. This is clearly expressed in Ephesians 2:5, 8 by the perfect tense of *sōzō* with the emphasis of the perfect on the present state of affairs: ‘you have been saved and are saved.’ It is also accented by the declaration that believers have been raised and exalted with Christ (Eph 2:6). This represents a distinctive Pauline development on ideas already present in Romans 6:1–13 (cf. Col 3:1). Although justification terminology does not appear in Ephesians (perhaps because there is no Judaizing controversy in the background), the Pauline emphasis on faith alone apart from works for salvation is clearly expressed (Eph 2:8–9). Christ’s work of reconciliation is stressed (Eph 2:16) with the implication that believers now have access to God, their Father (Eph 2:18; 3:12).

### *The Status of Believers in Union with Christ*

Through use of the expression ‘in Christ’—which occurs thirty-four times in Ephesians—Paul describes the corporate solidarity of believers with their resurrected and exalted Lord. The *syn-* (“with”) compounds also help express this notion, especially in Ephesians 2:5: he made us alive with Christ, he raised us with him, and he seated us with him. As people who are united with Christ, believers have redemption, forgiveness of sins, a heavenly existence, access to the Father, knowledge of the truth and the gift of the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:13–14). They possess a new existence created by God and characterized by righteousness (Eph 4:24).

### *The Unity of Jew and Gentile*

One of the central messages of the letter is that Christ has effected a reconciliation of Jew and Gentile by incorporating them into one body through his work on the cross (Eph 2:16; 3:6). Christ has removed all of the obstacles that separated the two groups and resulted in their hostility to one another (Eph 2:12–18).

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<sup>74</sup> Max Turner, “Book of Ephesians,” in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, Eds. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Craig G. Bartholomew, Daniel J. Treier and N. T. Wright (London; Grand Rapids, MI.: SPCK; Baker Academic, 2005), 186.

What matters now is the unity of the body of Christ, the church, composed of Jews and Gentiles who have equal access to the Father.

### *The Struggle with the Powers*

Believers within the young Christian communities in and around Ephesus lived in a culture where magical practices flourished. These practices were reinforced by the renowned Artemis cult. Artemis was worshiped as a goddess of the underworld with cosmic supremacy; she bore the six magical Ephesia Grammata on her cultic image. The people of the region had an extraordinary fear of the hostile spiritual ‘powers.’ Through magical practices and cultic rituals, people sought relief and deliverance from the dreaded realm of the powers. This fear was not immediately allayed, however, when people became Christians. Demonstrating his sincere pastoral concern, Paul addressed their fear of this realm. More than any other Pauline letter, Ephesians stresses the hostile role of the principalities and powers against the church. In contrast to the power of the hostile supernatural realm, Paul emphasizes the superiority of the power of God and the supremacy of Christ (Eph 1:19–23; 4:8–10). He demonstrates that believers have access to this power by virtue of their union with Christ, thereby enabling them to resist the vicious attacks of the hostile powers (Eph 6:10–20). He regards all these spiritual powers as evil and under the leadership of a being he calls ‘the devil.’

### *The Ethical Obligation of Believers*

The latter half of the letter is replete with specific ethical guidance for these believers. Paul wants them to rid their lives of vices that characterized their pre-Christian conduct and appropriate the virtues of Christ. He admonishes them to desist from such practices as lying, stealing, sexual immorality, dirty talk, excessive anger, bitterness, greed and many more. He instructs them on appropriate relationships within the Christian household. He affirms that behavioral change is not only possible, it is part of their divine calling and God’s purpose for them (Eph 1:4; 2:10; 4:1). They have access to God’s power which will enable them to resist temptation (Eph 6:10–18). They are enabled by the risen Christ himself who has endowed the church with gifted people who depend on him for leadership and provision (Eph 4:11–16). Finally, they have an example in Christ himself who modeled self-sacrificial love and service (Eph 5:2).

### *Apostle to the Gentiles*

In a lengthy digression Paul speaks about his apostolic ministry (Eph 3:1–13). He stresses that he has been given the special responsibility of administering God’s grace (his saving favor) to the Gentiles (Eph 3:2, 7, 8). God revealed to Paul, as he did to all the apostles, his formerly secret plan to extend his favor to the Gentiles through the work of Jesus, the Messiah. On this basis, Paul claims special insight into the mystery, the saving plan of God disclosed in Christ. He does not want his readers to be discouraged by his recent imprisonment or see it as the result of some crime; he wants them to know that it was for his service to Christ and his ministry to them as Gentiles (cf. Acts 21:17–36; Rom 15:14–32).

### *The Church*

Ephesians has a strong ecclesiological focus. Paul’s teaching in this letter conceptualizes the many churches as a collective whole. In fact, the term ecclesia is never used of one local church, but in a universal sense (Eph 1:22; 3:10, 21; 5:23–25, 27, 29, 32). This may be due in part to the fact that a network of churches was addressed (if Ephesians was a circular letter), but more likely Paul is reflecting on the church as a universal, unified organism. Some have argued that the ecclesiology of Ephesians reflects early catholicism, but this is to misconstrue the teaching of the letter. The church is still viewed as an organism (thus, the head/body imagery and the teaching on the Spirit) and not as an institution. There is no interchurch organization and no established priesthood to mediate the means of grace. All members are involved in the work of the ministry (Eph 4:12, 16). In this letter Paul depicts the church as a building, the ‘household of God’ (Eph 2:19–22), a growing body in connection to its head which gives leadership and provision (Eph 1:23; 4:16; 5:23), and a bride in relationship to her loving and caring bridegroom (Eph

5:25–32). Each of these images shows continuity with but also advancement on Paul’s prior teaching on the church.”<sup>75</sup>

### *The “Mystery” in Ephesians*

Bible scholar Peter T. O’Brien summarizes the important “mystery” theme in Ephesians: “Ephesians has been called the ‘epistle of the mystery.’ Paul uses the term six times in the letter (Ephesians 1:9; 3:3, 4, 9; 5:32; 6:19) and in Ephesians 3:2–11, in the context of his stewardship, he presents the fullest NT expression of this concept. Many key theological terms in Ephesians are associated with ‘the mystery.’ In Ephesians 1:9 *mystērion* refers to God’s plan to unite in Christ all things in heaven and earth (Eph 1:22–23), and this refers to subduing everything, especially hostile ‘powers,’ under his lordship. Christ is the one who will consummate all things by providing ultimate redemption for believers and pacifying the opposing forces. The focus of the mystery which was made known to Paul on the Damascus road is Christ (Eph 3:4), for in him the unseen God is fully revealed. As a steward of the mystery Paul knows that the Gentiles were destined to be fellow heirs, members of the same body and partakers of the same promises as Israel (Eph 3:6). In the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles in one body the manifold wisdom of God is unfolded (Eph 3:10). The very existence of the church bears witness to the ‘administration of the mystery,’ which further implies the defeat and ultimate overthrow of the powers. In Ephesians 5:32 the ‘mystery’ points to the union of Christ and the church, the meaning of which (perhaps like Gen 2:24) is hidden.

The situation of perceived demonic hostility in western Asia Minor may have provided a partial motivation for Paul’s emphasis on the cosmic aspect of the mystery in Ephesians. It could have stood in deliberate contrast to the Lydian-Phrygian ‘mysteries,’ which were so popular, so as to be a polemic against the possible influence of these mysteries in the churches. According to PGM I.128–32 a pagan mystery initiation involved receiving “the lord of the air” (cf. Eph 2:2) as the indwelling deity!

The mystery revealed in Ephesians, however, was the opposite of the pagan mysteries. Christ bringing ‘all things’ under his head implied the impending doom of the so-called deities invoked in magic and the mystery religions. It is inadequate to claim that the content of the mystery in Ephesians is defined solely in terms of God’s acceptance of the Gentiles and their union with Jews on an equal footing in Christ (Eph 3:3–4). Christ is the starting point for a true understanding of the notion of ‘mystery’ in this letter, as elsewhere in Paul. There are not a number of ‘mysteries’ with limited applications, but one supreme ‘mystery’ with a number of applications.”<sup>76</sup>

Leland Ryken describes some of the most important imagery and themes in Ephesians: “Ephesians employs a wealth of imagery, and much of it belonging to either the cosmic, heavenly dimension or the horizontal, earthly dimension. But overarching the entire letter is a prevailing theme of unity, the reconciliation of all things in Christ. Ephesians takes the big view of God’s redeeming action in Jesus Christ. The letter enlists imagery that reaches for the broadest categories of time and space. The humble, struggling Christian communities of Asia Minor are revealed as engaged in a redemptive drama that is both staggering in its cosmic dimensions and compelling in its call for participation.

### *The Majesty of Christ*

The majesty of Christ is chiefly portrayed in imagery of heavenly kingship. God has raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenlies (Eph 1:20). The image of Christ’s being seated at the right hand, the place of kingly power and privilege, echoes Psalm 110:1, which speaks of a royal

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<sup>75</sup> Clinton E. Arnold, “Ephesians” in Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin and Daniel G. Reid, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 238.

<sup>76</sup> Peter T. O’Brien, “Mystery,” in Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin and Daniel G. Reid, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 622.

figure who will be seated at God's right hand and whose enemies God will make into the king's royal footstool. It is an image of royal exaltation that assumes a sovereign's triumph over hostile powers. Ephesians carries forward this kingly and militaristic image by speaking of God's placing all things under his feet (Eph 1:22), and though the image of a footstool and things under his feet are nearly synonymous, a different OT text is now being employed. It is Psalm 8:6, where humankind is regaled as crowned with 'glory and honor,' its dominion over God's creation symbolized by all things placed 'under their feet.' Christ is the fulfillment of Israel's national kingship and Adam's creational rule, he is the sovereign over a new creation that has been secured by God's mighty redemptive power. But the 'things' placed in submission under Christ's feet are not earthly animals but wayward spiritual beings enumerated as 'rule and authority and power and dominion and every name named' (Eph 1:21). Christ is imaged as the triumphant, cosmic warrior-king and heavenly Adam. As the climax of the biblical drama in which Israel has failed in its role of a new Adam amidst the errant nations, with Israel's king bearing the crown of the Adamic ideal, Christ now fulfills Israel's redemptive role and is given universal reign. He is the one Lord over all things, the cosmic reconciler.

The stature of Christ as Lord of the cosmos is staggering in its immensity. 'All things' in heaven and earth are 'headed up,' or 'summed up' in him (Eph 1:10). More pointedly, God has given Christ as 'head over all things for the church' (Eph 1:22), God's new redemptive society—a bold claim for the Christian communities precariously planted in a few urban seedbeds of the northeastern Mediterranean world. The Greek grammar of Ephesians 1:22 is ambiguous in itself, but probably complements the preceding image of headship: The church is the fullness of Christ, the concentrated expression of Christ's sovereign rule, who in turn is the one 'who fills all in all,' or, to paraphrase, he fills the cosmos with his sovereign rule. These images of heavenly enthronement and cosmic 'filling' strike a fine balance between Christ's immanence and transcendence. The cosmic Lord and reconciler of all things is also Lord over the church.

The picture of the enthroned Christ in the heavenlies is a clue that we have stepped into a drama in which the height of conflict and triumph are in the past. The vanquished opponents, the cosmic powers and dominions, are now under his feet. The events of Christ's cross, death (Eph 1:20; 2:16) and resurrection (Eph 1:20; 2:6) have faded into the background, and the focus has shifted to the drama of exaltation and enthronement. Ephesians 4:8–10 pans the preceding scenes of the drama through imagery borrowed from Psalm 68:18: Christ is depicted as a mighty warrior who 'ascended on high,' took 'captivity captive' and gave gifts to people (with the image of 'receiving gifts from people' in Ps 68:18 now turned on its head). In Psalm 68 the warrior is God, who drives his armed chariotry from Sinai and gallantly ascends the temple mount of Zion, his royal palace. That picture is now tipped on end, transposed onto a vertical plane of earth and heaven, with Christ triumphantly ascending to the heavenly temple 'mount.' The picture is further interpreted: 'When it says, 'He ascended,' what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things' (Eph 4:9–10 NRSV). Here the 'lower parts of the earth' is not an allusion to 'hell' (as in 1 Pet 3:19); the phrase "of the earth" simply unpacks what is meant by "lower parts" ('lower parts, that is, the earth'). A two-storied universe is envisioned, with Christ descending to earth in his incarnation and then ascending 'far above the heavens' to take his heavenly throne. The point of this brief sketch is that the ascended Christ has given gifts to outfit and enable the church, 'the body of Christ' (Eph 4:12), to be built up and prosper. He has distributed his booty; in his triumph he divides 'the spoil with the strong' (Is 53:12).

### *Heavenlies*

The 'heavenly realms,' or 'heavenlies,' is a distinctive image of Ephesians, though it is consistent with Jewish cosmology of the period. It represents both the upper reaches of the cosmos as well as the realm of spiritual beings and divine transcendence. As part of the cosmos the 'heavenlies' share in both the present evil age and in the age to come. Thus we read of 'principalities and powers' in the heavenlies (Eph 3:10; 6:12) controlled by 'the ruler of the power of the air' (Eph 2:2), as well as believers who were once 'dead' and followers of the ruler of this world (Eph 2:1–2) but are now 'seated in the heavenlies' with

Christ (Eph 2:6). The throne of God and Christ should probably be envisioned as situated in the highest reaches of heaven. The Ephesian believers, though their feet are firmly planted on the soil of western Asia Minor, are already ‘raised up’ and occupying a transcendent position with Christ who is ‘over’ all things and ‘far above the heavens’ (Eph 4:10). It is a powerful image, perhaps shaped on the anvil of liturgical vision and imagination, in which worshipers share in the heavenly voices of praise and partake of the heavenly blessings (Eph 1:3). It is a parallel and spiritual world. We are invited to imagine a heavenly realm that is hierarchical and bears its own mysteries, including ‘families’ of created beings (probably angels both good and evil) somehow analogous to those on earth (Eph 3:15). But it is also a fearsome realm, still inhabited by malignant pockets of the defeated forces of evil, cosmic powers ‘of this present darkness,’ ‘spiritual forces of evil’ who assail the church (Eph 6:12).

### *Mystery*

Ephesians lets its readers in on a cosmic secret, a ‘mystery’ (Eph 1:9; 3:3, 4, 9; 5:32; 6:19), a chapter of God’s eschatological plan that was laid ‘before the foundation of the world’ (Eph 1:4), that was formerly concealed and now has been revealed in Christ. This mystery has been made known to Paul by a revelation (Eph 3:3)—though it has also been revealed to other apostles and prophets by the Spirit (Eph 3:5)—and the opening two chapters of Ephesians have unfolded Paul’s understanding of the mystery (Eph 3:4). The essential outline of the mystery is that Gentiles are now fellow heirs, members of the same body, sharers in the promise with believing Israelites who have followed Jesus Christ (Eph 3:6). But the mystery includes a ‘vertical’ dimension, the union of Christ with his church, a ‘great mystery’ (Eph 5:32). The mystery has not been revealed to the cosmic powers (cf. 1 Cor 2:6–8), but the curtain is now being lifted and the mystery disclosed to them. The ‘rulers and authorities’ are spectators as the wisdom of the Creator God’s cosmic drama is now being acted out in the story of the church (Eph 3:9–10).

### *Power*

Imagery of power is abundant in Ephesians, perhaps as an explicit response to the religious environment of Ephesus and other cities of Asia Minor where sorcery and evil spirits were a common and ominous feature of popular religion. This spiritual climate may have elicited the multiple names of the dark forces enumerated in Ephesians: ‘powers’ (Eph 1:21), ‘rulers’ (Eph 1:21; 6:12), ‘authorities’ (Eph 1:21; 3:10; 6:12), ‘dominions’ (Eph 1:21), ‘cosmic powers’ (Eph 6:12) and the ‘ruler of the power of the air’ (Eph 2:2). These names evoke a cosmos inhabited by a multitiered and malignant hierarchy of evil power. Formerly these names would have struck terror in the hearts of many recipients of this letter. But Ephesians begins with a joyous affirmation of the power of God in Christ to perform his will, work redemption and secure his blessings for his people in the face of any and every opposition that can be named. In Ephesians 1:19 the theme of power is explicitly emphasized: ‘the immeasurable greatness of his power ... the working of his great power.’

The greatest display of God’s power was when he raised Christ from the dead and exalted him to his right hand in the heavenly realms, leading captivity captive (Eph 4:8), subjecting all powers to his sovereign control (Eph 1:20–22). Later we read that God’s power is displayed in God’s grace working in Paul (Eph 3:7), and that God’s power can strengthen believers by the Spirit (Eph 3:16) and accomplish ‘far more than all we can ask or imagine’ (Eph 3:20 NRSV). Finally, in facing their spiritual enemies, believers are to ‘be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power’ (Eph 6:10). The same divine power that enabled Christ to triumph over his enemies is active within the church, and that power will allow it to ‘stand’ firm in the face of spiritual assault. Images of divine power emerge in God’s ‘raising up’ those who were ‘dead’ in their sins and seating them in the heavenlies with Christ (Eph 2:5–6), in Christ’s breaking down the dividing wall, abolishing the law, putting to death the hostility between Jew and Gentile (Eph 2:14–16) and in his building a new temple (Eph 2:20–21). And it is the ‘armor of God,’ the weaponry of the

powerful divine warrior, that is employed by the church in its battle against the spiritual powers (Eph 6:10–17).”<sup>77</sup>

### *The central message of the letter*

“Ephesians makes dominant a theme which was already important in Colossians, namely cosmic reconciliation in Christ (cf. Eph. 1:9–10, 20–23; 2:10–22, and 3:6 with Col. 1:19–20)... Ephesians teaches that this purpose has been begun in Christ and will be consummated in him. In him alienation has been destroyed and reunification begun: the old division of humanity into Jew and Gentile has been overcome (2:10–16); and the older alienation of humankind from God surmounted too (2:17–18). Christ has begun to ‘fill’ and unite the universe (4:10), bringing peace. But to say these things have begun in him is also to say they are experienced by those united with him, namely by believers. This leads to an awesome, majestic vision of the church. The universal church of Jews and Gentiles is the place Jesus fills (1:23); it is the place where the world and the powers are to see the cosmic reconciliation already under way (3:6–10). By union with Christ, the church is already the one heavenly temple (2:19–21), and it must above all strive to maintain that unity which witnesses to God’s purpose (4:1–6). Paul’s appeal in chs. 4–6 draws out how to live in a way that reflects God’s new creation of unity, harmony and peace.

This note of cosmic unity in Christ has sometimes been confused with universalism (i.e. that God will ultimately save all his creatures, including the hostile powers). That is not indicated: 5:6 still anticipates the wrath of God on the persistently disobedient, and 5:5 warns of sins that exclude from the kingdom of God. What is being affirmed is that all of the new creation will be united in Christ, but parts of the old creation will not participate in the new one.

Later writers like Ignatius and Irenaeus stressed the institutional unity of the catholic church on earth, under bishops, elders and deacons. By contrast the emphases here are the regular Pauline ones on a single universal church of Jews and Gentiles as the historical manifestation of the heavenly temple, and world-wide reunification. Paul was in prison precisely for trying to strengthen the unity between the Jewish and Gentile churches (3:13).”<sup>78</sup>

## APPENDIX: CCEF Articles on Ephesians

David Powlison, “**Counsel Ephesians,**” *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*, Vol. 17, No. 2, 1999, pp. 2-11.

**ABSTRACT:** Introduction to special issue of JBC on Ephesians and counseling. Lays out three key orienting truths. First, Ephesians is "practical theology." It is truth in action, lived, prayed, self-revealing, challenging, pleading. Though it is fair game for the activities of exegetical, systematic, biblical, and historical theology, it is none of those genres: it is ministry and life happening. Second, Ephesians is an open door into using the rest of Scripture. Paul cites or alludes to many other parts of the Word of God, and models a hermeneutical principle that guides fresh applications. Third, Ephesians is hard to understand sometimes, as Peter stated in 2 Peter 3:15f. The very subject matter, the many false views that gain currency, and our own hearts, all hinder understanding.

David Powlison, “**Who is God?,**” *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*, Vol. 17, No. 2, 1999, pp. 12-23.

**ABSTRACT:** Who is God in Ephesians? The book ought to produce a personal encounter with the Lord. He is the Person on whom we rely, who teaches us to speak directly into other people's lives, always

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<sup>77</sup> “Letter to the Ephesians” in Leland Ryken, Jim Wilhoit, Tremper Longman et al., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000, c1998), 237-241.

<sup>78</sup> Max Turner, “Ephesians,” in D. A. Carson, *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, electronic ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994).

connecting change to what God Himself is doing. Lays out 8 things God reveals: He makes Himself known to us in Christ; He accomplishes His purposes; He lavishes grace; His power works in us; Christ invades history; He will bring wrath on those outside Christ; He indwells us through the Holy Spirit; God and His children will inherit each other.

Edward T. Welch, **“The Bondage of Sin,”** *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*, Vol. 17, No. 2, 1999, pp. 24-31.

**ABSTRACT:** Your deepest problem is sin. "Dead sinners live, both judicially and dynamically, because Christ deals with the past, present, and future of sin." Studies 3 perspectives on sin prominent in Ephesians: cravings, alienation, and the concert of world, flesh, and devil. Sin involves insatiable appetites, addictive false worship. Sin separates people from each other and from God. World and devil work with flesh, cooperating in the production of false worship. Sin is what we were, and so it is still our deepest problem, even though we are called, beloved, children of light.

Paul David Tripp, **“The Present Glories of Redemption,”** *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*, Vol. 17, No. 2, 1999, pp. 32-37.

**ABSTRACT:** How can we, as counselors, help our counselees connect that glorious grace to their everyday lives? There is often a gap between a person's "functional theology," that out of which they live daily, and the truth of grace in Christ. Explores two glories. First, you have a new identity in Christ: part of a plan, with a certain inheritance, a recipient of incomparable power, raised to reign with Christ. Second, you are part of a new community in Christ, included not isolated, part of a process of community growth.

John F. Bettler, **“Make Every Effort: Ephesians 4:1-5:2,”** *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*, Vol. 17, No. 2, 1999, pp. 38-41.

**ABSTRACT:** In Ephesians, Paul emphasizes the word 'one.' He repeatedly refers to being united in Christ: one with Christ, one with each other. Preventive aid against discord is found in 4:3: "Make every effort to guard the unity." We guard the unity with Christian virtues (4:2), by appreciating our oneness in Christ (4:4-6), by using our gifts (4:7-16), by new-man change (4:17-4:24), and by new-man ministry (4:25-5:2). "Each of the four graces of 4:2 is the opposite of my pushy self-absorption. Christ makes me see myself, and makes me catch myself, and then makes me different."

Edward T. Welch, **“Live as Children of Light: Ephesians 5:3-20,”** *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*, Vol. 17, No. 2, 1999, pp. 42-48.

**ABSTRACT:** The church always moves between two extremes in its relationship to the world: either tempted to withdraw into a "gated community" to protect purity, or tempted to blend in with the world's cultural forms in order to gain relevance. Ephesians 5:3-20 teaches how to be in the world but not of it. First, don't partner with the world, but keep yourself pure (5:3-7). Second, get involved with a purpose, invading the world with light (5:8-14). Third, be very careful and very thankful in how you live (5:15-20). "We have the difficult, twofold task of guarding our hearts from the influence of the world while yet shining as light into the world."

Paul David Tripp, **“The Fear of Christ is the Beginning of Wisdom: Ephesians 5:21-6:9,”** *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*, Vol. 17, No. 2, 1999, pp. 49-57.

**ABSTRACT:** Ephesians challenges both "traditional" and "egalitarian" understandings of our primary role relationships: marriage, family, workplace. First, everyone of us participates in a common calling in all relationships to walk as a wife, child, and slave of the Lord (all that is described in 1:1-5:20 and 6:10-24). Second, the calling to walk worthy takes on a particular focus within each primary relationship of marriage, family, and workplace, emphasizing either submission or love. "Neither the common call nor the particular focus cancel out or override each other. They work in symphony." Third, because you inhabit multiple roles, most of us hear ourselves addressed multiple times in 5:20-6:9, from different angles, and often with changes over time.

Paul David Tripp, “**Take Up Your Weapons: Ephesians 6:10-20,**” *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*, Vol. 17, No. 2, 1999, pp. 58-60.

**ABSTRACT:** The kind of warfare Paul has in mind is very different from what Stephen Spielberg or Stephen King portray in movies filled with special effects and books packed with eerie details. Paul's focus is the everyday, mundane battle. Unpacks each of the pieces of armor. The war is for the heart. The enemy is Satan, not each other. When we are prepared for battle, we are able to stand on the day of evil.

## *PREACHING OVERVIEW*

### Historical Theologians on Ephesians

- A. Origen (c. 185-254) and St. Jerome (347-420)
- B. John Chrysostom (c. 347-407)
- C. St. Augustine (354-430 A.D.)
- D. St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274)
- E. Martin Luther (1483-1546)
- F. John Calvin (1509-1564)
- G. John Owen (1616-1683)
- H. Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758)
- I. John Wesley (1703-1791)
- J. Charles Hodge (1797-1878)
- K. Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892)
- L. Karl Barth (1886-1968)

### Prominent Evangelical Preachers on Ephesians

- A. Begg, Alistair
- B. Carson, D. A.
- C. Chandler, Matt
- D. Chapell, Bryan
- E. Covenant Life Church Teaching Team
- F. Dever, Mark
- G. Duncan, Ligon
- H. Evans, Tony
- I. Ferguson, Sinclair
- J. Hayford, Jack
- K. Keller, Timothy
- L. Lawson, Steve
- M. MacArthur, John
- N. MacDonald, James
- O. Piper, John
- P. Smith, Chuck
- Q. Stott, John
- R. Surratt, Greg
- S. Swindoll, Chuck

## **1. Historical Theologians On Ephesians**

[\(top\)](#)

### **A. Origen (c. 185-254) and St. Jerome (347-420)**

[\(top\)](#)

Origen and Jerome's commentaries on the book of Ephesians can be found in the book *The Commentaries of Origen and Jerome on St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians* (OUP, 2003) by Ronald E. Heine in the Oxford Early Christian Studies series. It is available at the following URL:

[http://www.amazon.com/Commentaries-Epistle-Ephesians-Christian-Studies/dp/0199245517/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1282075035&sr=1-1](http://www.amazon.com/Commentaries-Epistle-Ephesians-Christian-Studies/dp/0199245517/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1282075035&sr=1-1)

### **B. John Chrysostom (c. 347-407)**

[\(top\)](#)

*John Chrysostom was one of the early church's most famous preachers. He gave twenty-four surviving homilies on the book of Ephesians.*

#### Homily 1

Ephesians 1:1-10

#### Homily 2

Ephesians 1:11-14

#### Homily 3

Ephesians 1:15-23

#### Homily 4

Ephesians 2:1-10

#### Homily 5

Ephesians 2:11-15

#### Homily 6

Ephesians 2:17-3:7

#### Homily 7

Ephesians 3:8-21

#### Homily 8

Ephesians 4:1-2

#### Homily 9

Ephesians 4:1-3

#### Homily 10

Ephesians 4:4-5

#### Homily 11

Ephesians 4:4-16

#### Homily 12

Ephesians 4:17

[Homily 13](#)

Ephesians 4:17-24

[Homily 14](#)

Ephesians 4:25-30

[Homily 15](#)

Ephesians 4:31

[Homily 16](#)

Ephesians 4:31-32

[Homily 17](#)

Ephesians 4:32-5:4

[Homily 18](#)

Ephesians 5:5-14

[Homily 19](#)

Ephesians 5:15-21

[Homily 20](#)

Ephesians 5:22-33

[Homily 21](#)

Ephesians 6:1-4

[Homily 22](#)

Ephesians 6:5-13

[Homily 23](#)

Ephesians 6:14

[Homily 24](#)

Ephesians 6:14-24

**C. St. Augustine (354-430 A.D.)** ([top](#))

*St. Augustine of Hippo preached many sermons in his lifetime, many of which survive to this day in some form or another. The following five sermons represent his remaining sermons on Ephesians and are compiled in a book available for purchase at the following URL:*

[http://www.amazon.com/Sermons-151-183-Works-Saint-Augustine/dp/1565480074/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1282071088&sr=1-1](http://www.amazon.com/Sermons-151-183-Works-Saint-Augustine/dp/1565480074/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1282071088&sr=1-1)

[Sermon 165](#)

Ephesians 3:13-18

[Sermon 166](#)

Ephesians 4:25

[Sermon 167](#)

Ephesians 5:15-16

[Sermon 167A](#)

Ephesians 6:12

[Sermon 168](#)

Ephesians 6:23

### **D. St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274)**

[\(top\)](#)

*Sometime during the 1260s Aquinas lectured through the book of Ephesians during his first teaching assignment in Italy. The following forty-four lectures comprise this course.*

#### *Chapter 1*

[Ephesians 1:1-6a](#)

[Ephesians 1:6b-7](#)

[Ephesians 1:8-10](#)

[Ephesians 1:11-12](#)

[Ephesians 1:13-14](#)

[Ephesians 1:15-19a](#)

[Ephesians 1:19b-21](#)

[Ephesians 1:22-23](#)

#### *Chapter 2*

[Ephesians 2:1-3](#)

[Ephesians 2:4-7](#)

[Ephesians 2:8-10](#)

[Ephesians 2:11-13](#)

[Ephesians 2:14-18](#)

[Ephesians 2:19-22](#)

#### *Chapter 3*

[Ephesians 3:1-6](#)

[Ephesians 3:7-9](#)

[Ephesians 3:10-12](#)

[Ephesians 3:13-17](#)

[Ephesians 3:18-21](#)

*Chapter 4*

[Ephesians 4:1-4](#)

[Ephesians 4:5-6](#)

[Ephesians 4:7-10](#)

[Ephesians 4:11-13](#)

[Ephesians 4:14-16](#)

[Ephesians 4:17-19](#)

[Ephesians 4:20-24](#)

[Ephesians 4:25-27](#)

[Ephesians 4:28-29](#)

[Ephesians 4:30-32](#)

*Chapter 5*

[Ephesians 5:1-2](#)

[Ephesians 5:3-4](#)

[Ephesians 5:5-7](#)

[Ephesians 5:8-11](#)

[Ephesians 5:12-14](#)

[Ephesians 5:15-17](#)

[Ephesians 5:18-21](#)

[Ephesians 5:22-28a](#)

[Ephesians 5:28b-30](#)

[Ephesians 5:31-33](#)

### *Chapter 6*

[Ephesians 6:1-4](#)

[Ephesians 6:5-9](#)

[Ephesians 6:10-12](#)

[Ephesians 6:13-17](#)

[Ephesians 6:18-24](#)

### **E. Martin Luther (1483-1546)** [\(top\)](#)

*Perhaps the most famous figure of the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther has surprisingly few sermons available. Indeed, he only has one sermon from the book of Ephesians currently available.*

#### Sermon for the Third Sunday in Lent

“Exhortation to be Imitators of God”

Ephesians 5:1-9

### **F. John Calvin (1509-1564)** [\(top\)](#)

*John Calvin, the famous Genevan reformed is known best for his Institutes of the Christian Religion as well as his commentaries. However, it is not often known that Calvin was a brilliant expositor.*

#### *Sermons*

[Ephesians 1:1-3](#)

[Ephesians 1:3-4](#)

[Ephesians 1:4-6](#)

[Ephesians 1:7-10](#)

[Ephesians 1:13-14](#)

[Ephesians 1:15-18](#)

[Ephesians 1:17-18](#)

[Ephesians 1:19-23](#)

#### *Commentaries*

#### Introduction

### *Chapter 1*

[Ephesians 1:1-6](#)

[Ephesians 1:7-12](#)

[Ephesians 1:13-14](#)

[Ephesians 1:15-19](#)

[Ephesians 1:20-23](#)

*Chapter 2*

[Ephesians 2:1-3](#)

[Ephesians 2:4-7](#)

[Ephesians 2:8-10](#)

[Ephesians 2:11-13](#)

[Ephesians 2:14-16](#)

[Ephesians 2:17-22](#)

*Chapter 3*

[Ephesians 3:1-6](#)

[Ephesians 3:7-13](#)

[Ephesians 3:14-19](#)

[Ephesians 3:20-21](#)

*Chapter 4*

[Ephesians 4:1-6](#)

[Ephesians 4:7-10](#)

[Ephesians 4:11-14](#)

[Ephesians 4:15-16](#)

[Ephesians 4:17-19](#)

[Ephesians 4:20-24](#)

[Ephesians 4:25-28](#)

[Ephesians 4:29-31](#)

[Ephesians 4:32](#)

### *Chapter 5*

[Ephesians 5:1-2](#)

[Ephesians 5:3-7](#)

[Ephesians 5:8-14](#)

[Ephesians 5:15-20](#)

[Ephesians 5:21-27](#)

[Ephesians 5:28-33](#)

### *Chapter 6*

[Ephesians 6:1-4](#)

[Ephesians 6:5-9](#)

[Ephesians 6:10-13](#)

[Ephesians 6:14-20](#)

[Ephesians 6:21-24](#)

## **G. John Owen (1616-1683)** [\(top\)](#)

*John Owen, a leading figure in the Church of England, was a prolific writer and preacher. Below are his surviving sermons on Ephesians.*

[The Nature and Beauty of Gospel Worship \(Part 1\)](#)

Ephesians 2:18

[The Nature and Beauty of Gospel Worship \(Part 2\)](#)

Ephesians 2:18

[The Ministry the Gift of Christ](#)

Ephesians 4:8

[The Mutual Care of Believers Over One Another](#)

Ephesians 4:15-16

## **H. Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758)** [\(top\)](#)

*Theologians Jonathan Edwards, America's most influential philosophical theologian, is most famous for his sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." However, Edwards also preached numerous sermons on Ephesians, which are linked to and listed below.*

### *Chapter 1*

#### Sermon #505a

Ephesians 1:10(b)  
Feb. 1739

### *Chapter 2*

#### Sermon #693o

Ephesians 2:4  
N.d. [c. 1740-41]. MS defective at end.

#### Sermon #348

Ephesians 2:5-7  
Dec. 1734

#### Sermon #280

Ephesians 2:13  
Apr. 1733

#### Sermon #1029

Ephesians 2:13  
Feb. 1752

### *Chapter 3*

#### Sermon #276

Ephesians 3:10  
Mar. 1733

Six sermons. Published as *The Wisdom of God, as Displayed in Salvation by Jesus Christ, Far Superior to the Wisdom of the Angels*, in Hopkins, *Life and Character*, 165-252; Dwight ed., 7, 66-114.

### *Chapter 4*

#### Sermon #703

Ephesians 4:15-16  
May 1743

#### Sermon #293

Ephesians 4:19  
Aug. 1733

#### Sermon #334

Ephesians 4:22  
July 1734

#### Sermon #1044

Ephesians 4:22-24  
June 1752

### Sermon #560

Ephesians 4:29

July 1740.

Published as The Danger of Corrupt Communication Among Young People, in WJE, 22, 158-66.

### *Chapter 5*

### Sermon #130

Ephesians 5:1

N/A

### Sermon #838

Ephesians 5:5-7

Aug. 1746

### Sermon #349

Ephesians 5:16

Dec. 1734. Repreached Jan. 1752; Mar. 1753 to Stockbridge Indians; May 1753 at Windsor; July 1753 at Pautoosuck.

Published as The Preciousness of Time in Practical Sermons, 282-96; WJE, 19, 243-60.

### Sermon #358

Ephesians 5:25-27

May 1735. Repreached May 1752.

### Sermon #665

Ephesians 5:30-32

Apr. 1742

### *Chapter 6*

### Sermon #891

Ephesians 6:4

Feb. 1748

### Sermon #750

Ephesians 6:11-13

July 1744. Repreached Nov. 1755.

## **I. John Wesley (1703-1791)**

[\(top\)](#)

*John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, was a preacher who preached a staunch Arminian theology in contrast to the Calvinism of others at his time (namely, George Whitefield). Wesley preached eight sermons on Ephesians and wrote book notes on each chapter of the letter.*

### *Sermons*

### Salvation by Faith

Ephesians 2:8

### Scripture Way of Salvation, The

Ephesians 2:8

On Living Without God

Ephesians 2:12

Of the Church

Ephesians 4:1-6

On Grieving the Holy Spirit

Ephesians 4:30

Awake, Thou That Sleepest

Ephesians 5:14

On Redeeming the Time

Ephesians 5:16

Of Evil Angels

Ephesians 6:12

*Textual Notes*

[Ephesians 1](#)

[Ephesians 2](#)

[Ephesians 3](#)

[Ephesians 4](#)

[Ephesians 5](#)

[Ephesians 6](#)

**J. Charles Hodge (1797-1878)** ([top](#))

*Charles Spurgeon said that the work of Charles Hodge, the famous Princetonian theologian, was “Most valuable. With no other writer do we more fully agree. He wrote a commentary on the book of Ephesians, which is linked to below.*

[Introduction](#)

[Ephesians 1](#)

[Ephesians 2](#)

[Ephesians 3](#)

[Ephesians 4](#)

[Ephesians 5](#)

[Ephesians 6](#)

### **K. Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892)**

[\(top\)](#)

*Charles Spurgeon, the famous Baptist preacher, is considered by many to be one of the most prolific preachers in the history of Christianity. Many of his numerous sermons on Ephesians are linked to below.*

*Sermons*

*Chapter 1*

#### Blessing for Blessing

Ephesians 1:3-4

Oct. 26, 1890

#### Glory Be Unto the Father

Ephesians 1:3-4

Sept. 9, 1883

#### Adoption

Ephesians 1:5

Feb. 10, 1861

#### Accepted in the Beloved

Ephesians 1:6

Sept. 21, 1862

#### Accepted in the Beloved

Ephesians 1:6

Nov. 19, 1868

#### Accepted on the Great Father

Ephesians 1:6

July 15, 1883

#### Dei Gratia

Ephesians 1:6

Oct. 30, 1870

#### The Treasure of Grace

Ephesians 1:7

Jan. 22, 1860

#### The Glories of Forgiving Grace

Ephesians 1:7

Aug. 29, 1880

#### Redemption Through Blood, the Gracious Forgiveness of Sins

Ephesians 1:7

June 7, 1891

#### Great Forgiveness For Great Sin

Ephesians 1:7

Dec. 31, 1876

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### Trust

Ephesians 1:12-13  
Aug. 21, 1887

### The True Position of Assurance

Ephesians 1:13  
Oct. 2, 1864

### The Earnest of Heaven

Ephesians 1:13-14  
Feb. 3, 1861

### The Sealing of the Spirit

Ephesians 1:12-13  
Mar. 19, 1876

### The Three Whats

Ephesians 1:18-20  
Mar. 27, 1879

### The Mighty Power Which Creates and Sustains Faith

Ephesians 1:19-23  
Oct. 11, 1863

### *Chapter 2*

### Life from the Dead

Ephesians 2:1  
Mar. 13, 1890

### Once Dead, Now Alive

Ephesians 2:1  
Sept. 30, 1888

### Spiritual Resurrection

Ephesians 2:1  
Apr. 12, 1857

### Redemption Through Blood

Ephesians 2:1  
June 7, 1891

### What Christians Were and Are

Ephesians 2:3  
Oct. 23, 1873

### Resurrection With Christ

Ephesians 2:4-5  
Apr. 12, 1868

## MARS HILL CHURCH

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The Exceeding Riches of Grace

Ephesians 2:4-5

June 18, 1882

His Great Love

Ephesians 2:4-5

Aug. 15, 1875

Salvation By Grace

Ephesians 2:5

Summer, 1859

The Exceeding Riches of Grace

Ephesians 2:7

June 18, 1882

Salvation All of Grace

Ephesians 2:8

N/A

All of Grace

Ephesians 2:8

N/A

Faith: What Is It? How Can It Be Obtained?

Ephesians 2:8

July 17, 1881

Agreement of Salvation by Grace with Walking in Good Works

Ephesians 2:9-10

June 28, 1891

Not Boasting, But Trusting

Ephesians 2:9

N/A

The Singular Origin of a Christian

Ephesians 2:10

N/A

A Solemn Deprival

Ephesians 2:12

N/A

Nearness to God

Ephesians 2:13

Jan. 17, 1869

Our Glorious Transforming

Ephesians 2:13

Sept. 3, 1871

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The Jesus Christ Himself

Ephesians 2:20

Dec. 9, 1877

The Tabernacle of the Most High

Ephesians 2:22

Aug. 14, 1859

*Chapter 3*

A Grateful Summary of Twenty Volumes

Ephesians 3:8

Dec. 27, 1874

The Unsearchable Riches of Christ

Ephesians 3:8

Apr. 14, 1867

Angelic Studies

Ephesians 3:10

May 1, 1870

Another and a Nobler Exhibition

Ephesians 3:10

May 4, 1862

Saints in Heaven and Earth in One Family

Ephesians 3:15

Aug. 8, 1875

The Royal Family

Ephesians 3:15

N/A

Measuring the Immeasurable

Ephesians 3:16-19

N/A

Heavenly Geometry

Ephesians 3:16-19

Aug. 19, 1866

The Love of Jesus, What it is None but His Loved Ones Know

Ephesians 3:19

June 18, 1862

The Top of the Ladder

Ephesians 3:19

Oct. 25, 1883

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Paul's Doxology  
Ephesians 3:20-21  
Nov. 1, 1875

### *Chapter 4*

True Unity Promoted  
Ephesians 4:3  
Jan. 1, 1865

The Ascension of Christ  
Ephesians 4:7-12  
Mar. 26, 1871

The Head and the Body  
Ephesians 4:15-16  
Aug. 6, 1882

True Learning  
Ephesians 4:20-21  
May 20, 1880

Grieve Not the Holy Spirit  
Ephesians 4:30  
Mar. 3, 1867

For Christ's Sake  
Ephesians 4:32  
Feb. 12, 1865

Forgiveness Made Easy  
Ephesians 4:32  
N/A

### *Chapter 5*

Imitators of God  
Ephesians 5:1  
June 10, 1883

The Child of Light and the Works of Darkness  
Ephesians 5:11  
Feb. 24, 1887

The Church Aroused  
Ephesians 5:14  
Oct. 7, 1866

Filling With the Spirit and Drunkenness With Wine  
Ephesians 5:18  
May 26, 1889

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### Always and For All Things

Ephesians 5:20

Feb. 2, 1873

### Christ's Love to His Spouse

Ephesians 5:25

Sept. 5, 1886

### The Pattern of Love

Ephesians 5:25

N/A

### A Glorious Church

Ephesians 5:25-27

N/A

### Members of Christ

Ephesians 5:30

Oct. 23, 1890

### The Matchless Mystery

Ephesians 5:30

N/A

### Living, Loving, Lasting Union

Ephesians 5:30

Oct. 22, 1890

### *Chapter 6*

### Our Motto

Ephesians 6:7

July 20, 1879

### Shoes For Pilgrims and Warriors

Ephesians 6:15

N/A

### Heavenly Shoes

Ephesians 6:15

N/A

### The Shield of Faith

Ephesians 6:17

Oct. 27, 1861

### The Sword of the Spirit

Ephesians 6:17

Apr. 19, 1891

## *Devotional Commentaries*

### *Chapter 1*

[Ephesians 1:3](#)

[Ephesians 1:6](#)

[Ephesians 1:7](#)

[Ephesians 1:11](#)

[Ephesians 1:11](#)

[Ephesians 1:19](#)

### *Chapter 2*

[Ephesians 2:19](#)

### *Chapter 3*

[Ephesians 3:8](#)

[Ephesians 3:8](#)

[Ephesians 3:17](#)

[Ephesians 3:19](#)

### *Chapter 4*

[Ephesians 4:15](#)

[Ephesians 4:30](#)

### *Chapter 5*

[Ephesians 5:25](#)

### *Chapter 6*

[Ephesians 6:18](#)

## **L. Karl Barth (1886-1968)**

[\(top\)](#)

*In the winter of 1921-1922, Reformed theologian Karl Barth gave a series of 13 academic lectures at Göttingen. An original translation as well as an analysis of his lectures can be found at the following URL:*

<http://research-repository.st-andrews.ac.uk/bitstream/10023/399/1/academic%20lectures%20on%20ephesians%2010-26-07.pdf>

## **2. Prominent Evangelical Preachers on Ephesians**

[\(top\)](#)

### **A. Alistair Begg**

[\(top\)](#)

*Alistair Begg has preached fourteen messages on Ephesians. These are available for free audio download.*

Hyperlink: [http://www.truthforlife.org/resources/scripture/ephesians/?sort=&per\\_page=40](http://www.truthforlife.org/resources/scripture/ephesians/?sort=&per_page=40)

#### We Stand in Grace

Ephesians 2:1

January 21, 1996

#### What Does it Mean to be a Christian

Ephesians 2:1

May 20, 2001

#### Genuine Christian Experience

Ephesians 2:1

February 26, 1992

#### Riches Worth Talking About

Ephesians 2:1

April 22, 1992

#### How Can I be Saved?

Ephesians 2:1, Isaiah 55:6

June 10, 1992

#### Who or What is the Church?

Ephesians 2:19

October 15, 2000

#### The Role of the Congregation, Part 1

Ephesians 4:1

November 17, 1985

#### The Role of the Congregation, Part 2

Ephesians 4:1

November 24, 1985

#### Planting Hedges in Marriage, Part 2

Ephesians 5:22

November 17, 1996

#### Spiritual Warfare

Ephesians 6:10

January 28, 1996

### The Full Armor of God

Ephesians 6:13  
February 11, 1996

### The Soldier's Weapons

Ephesians 6:17  
February 18, 1996

### Focus on the Fathers Part 1

Ephesians 6:4  
June 19, 1988

### Focus on the Fathers Part 2

Ephesians 6:4  
June 19, 1988

## **B. D. A. Carson**

[\(top\)](#)

*D. A. Carson has preached eight sermons on the book of Ephesians. The audio links are included below.*

Hyperlink: <http://thegospelcoalition.org/resources/scripture-index/a/ephesians/&author=D.A.+Carson#chapter-1>

### Mystery

Ephesians 1:1-23  
May 26, 1990

### Marked with a Seal

Ephesians 1:3-14  
Jun. 2, 2002

### Community and the Cross

Ephesians 2:11-22  
Jun. 19, 2002

### Pray in Line with the Mind of God

Ephesians 3:14-21  
Jun. 26, 2009

### Praying for Power

Ephesians 3:14-21  
Jan. 01, 1985

### A Family Man

Ephesians 5:15-6:4  
Jan. 01, 2008

### The Christian in Complete Armor

Ephesians 6:10-20  
Jan. 10, 1999

### An Equipped Man

Ephesians 6:10-20

Jan. 01, 2008

### **C. Matt Chandler**

[\(top\)](#)

*Matt Chandler has preached all but two of the twenty-nine part verse-by-verse Ephesians series at The Village Church. These are available for free audio download, and a few have sermon notes.*

Hyperlink: <http://fm.thevillagechurch.net/sermons?kw=Ephesians&type=sermons&match=any>

### Destiny

Ephesians (Part 1)

January 5, 2003

### In Him

Ephesians (Part 2)

January 12, 2003

### The Hope to Which We

Ephesians (Part 3)

January 26, 2003

### Made Alive in Christ

Ephesians (Part 4)

March 2, 2003

### Remember the Tie That Binds

Ephesians (Part 5)

March 9, 2003

### Remember the Promises

Ephesians (Part 6)

March 16, 2003

### Spirit and Truth

Ephesians (Part 7)

April 6, 2003

### Stewardship of Grace

Ephesians (Part 8)

April 13, 2003

### Rooted and Grounded

Ephesians (Part 9)

May 5, 2003

### Mother's Day

Ephesians (Part 10)

May 11, 2003

## MARS HILL CHURCH

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Everyone Plays a Part

Ephesians (Part 11)

May 18, 2003

Escaping Catastrophe

Ephesians (Part 12)

May 25, 2003

Grieving the Holy Spirit

Ephesians (Part 13)

June 1, 2003

Imitation

Ephesians (Part 14)

June 8, 2003

Redeem the Time

Ephesians (Part 15)

June 15, 2003

The Essence of Song

Ephesians (Part 16)

June 22, 2003

The Divine Mystery Part 1

Ephesians (Part 17)

June 29, 2003

The Divine Mystery Part 2

Ephesians (Part 18)

July 6, 2003

The Rewards of Service

Ephesians (Part 20)

July 20, 2003

Recap of Ephesians

Ephesians (Part 21)

July 27, 2003

The Great Debate Part 1

Ephesians (Part 22)

August 3, 2003

The Great Debate Part 2

Ephesians (Part 23)

August 10, 2003

Righteous

Ephesians (Part 24)

August 17, 2003

Ready to Move  
Ephesians (Part 25)  
August 24, 2003

The Helmet of Salvation  
Ephesians (Part 27)  
September 7, 2003

The Sword of the Spirit  
Ephesians (Part 28)  
September 14, 2003

With Life and Lips  
Ephesians (Part 29)  
September 21, 2003

### **D. Bryan Chappell** [\(top\)](#)

*Bryan Chappell has preached 34 undated messages on Ephesians most of which are an exposition of the entire book. They are available for free audio download.*

Hyperlink: [http://www.monergism.com/directory/link\\_category/Sanctification/Audio-and-Multimedia/Impassioned-Grace--Bryan-Chapell/](http://www.monergism.com/directory/link_category/Sanctification/Audio-and-Multimedia/Impassioned-Grace--Bryan-Chapell/)

When the Job Is Too Big  
Ephesians 1:1-2

Loved by the Father (Part 1)  
Ephesians 1:1-6

Loved by the Father (Part 2)  
Ephesians 1:1-6

Why Predestination? How Our Union With Christ Gives Us Assurance  
Ephesians 1:3-6

Loved Through the Son  
Ephesians 1:3-14

Loved in the Spirit (Part 1)  
Ephesians 1:11-14

Loved in the Spirit (Part 2)  
Ephesians 1:11-14

Better Than Heroes: The Majesty of God in the Mission of the Church  
Ephesians 1:18-23

The Gift of God (Part 1)  
Ephesians 2:1-10

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The Gift of God (Part 2)

Ephesians 2:1-10

Going Home Again

Ephesians 2:11-22

Breaking Down Barriers (Part 1)

Ephesians 2:14-18

Breaking Down Barriers (Part 2)

Ephesians 2:14-18

Counterfeit Callings Exposed: The Marks of a Genuine Calling (Part 1)

Ephesians 3:1-13

Counterfeit Callings Exposed: The Marks of a Genuine Calling (Part 2)

Ephesians 3:1-13

Fighting Sin With God's Power

Ephesians 3:14-19

He is Able and Willing

Ephesians 3:20-21

How the Church Can Have Unity Among Differences - Ephesians 4:1-16 (MP3)

Ephesians 4:1-16

Of Lizards and Horses (Part 1)

Ephesians 4:17-24

Of Lizards and Horses (Part 2)

Ephesians 4:17-24

Witness of Grace (Part 1)

Ephesians 4:25-32

Witness of Grace (Part 2)

Ephesians 4:25-32

The Smell of Jesus

Ephesians 5:1-17

The Lightbearers (Part 1)

Ephesians 5:8-21

The Lightbearers (Part 2)

Ephesians 5:8-21

The Godly Husband (Part 1)

Ephesians 5:21-33

[The Godly Husband \(Part 2\)](#)  
Ephesians 5:21-33

[The Glorious Wife \(Part 1\)](#)  
Ephesians 5:21-33

[The Glorious Wife \(Part 2\)](#)  
Ephesians 5:21-33

[The Graceful Parent \(Part 1\)](#)  
Ephesians 6:1-4

[The Graceful Parent \(Part 2\)](#)  
Ephesians 6:1-4

[Fighting by Grace \(Part 1\)](#)  
Ephesians 6:10-18

[Fighting by Grace \(Part 2\)](#)  
Ephesians 6:10-18

[Christ Our Cornerstone](#)  
Ephesians 2:19-22

### **E. Covenant Life Church (Gaithersburg, MD: SGM) Teaching Team** [\(top\)](#)

*Has preached verse by verse through Ephesians in 26 sermons in a series called "Ephesians: Planned in Eternity, Displayed in Community". These are available for free audio download.*

Hyperlink: <http://www.covlife.org/resources/series/Ephesians:+Planned+in+Eternity,+Displayed+in+Community>

[Introduction to Ephesians](#)  
Ephesians 1:1-2  
September 7, 2008  
(Joshua Harris)

[Sovereign Grace](#)  
Ephesians 1:3-6  
September 14, 2008  
(Mark Mullery)

[God's Blessing in Salvation](#)  
Ephesians 1:3-14  
September 21, 2008  
(Joshua Harris)

[Prayer for Understanding of God's Mysterious Blessings](#)  
Ephesians 1:15-23  
September 28, 2008  
(Jeff Purswell)

## MARS HILL CHURCH

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### Our Salvation: Changed from Death to Life

Ephesians 2:1-10

October 5, 2008

(Robin Boisvert)

### The Walls Come Tumbling Down

Ephesians 2:11-22

October 12, 2008

(John Loftness)

### The Privileged Status of God's People

Ephesians 2:19-22

October 19, 2008

(Don Devries)

### The Divine Mystery Displayed and Proclaimed

Ephesians 3:1-13

November 2, 2008

(Eric Simmons)

### Prayer for Spiritual Strength

Ephesians 3:14-21

November 9, 2008

(Joshua Harris)

### The Priority of Unity

Ephesians 4:1-6

November 16, 2008

(Jon Smith)

### Gifts of Grace to Build the Church

Ephesians 4:7-13

November 23, 2008

(Jerry Bridges)

### Growing Up Into Christ

Ephesians 4:14-16

November 30, 2008

(Isaac Hydoski)

### The New Walk of the New Self

Ephesians 4:17-24

January 18, 2009

(Joshua Harris)

### How Can I Change?

Ephesians 4:22-24

January 25, 2009

(Robin Boisvert)

## MARS HILL CHURCH

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### The New Birth Makes New Actions Possible

Ephesians 4:25-32  
February 1, 2009  
(Braden Greer)

### The Gospel and Our Words

Ephesians 4:29  
February 8, 2009  
(Mike Bradshaw)

### What the Gospel Says To Our Bitterness

Ephesians 4:30-32  
February 15, 2009  
(Robin Boisvert)

### Sexuality and the Beloved Child of God

Ephesians 5:1-14  
March 1, 2009  
(Matt Marka)

### Wisdom and the Spirit-filled Christian

Ephesians 5:15-21  
March 8, 2009  
(Bob Kauflin)

### The Glory of Christ in Marriage

Ephesians 5:22-33  
March 15, 2009  
(Brian Chesemore)

### Children, Obey Your Parents in the Lord

Ephesians 6:1-3  
April 19, 2009  
(Greg Somerville)

### Biblical Parenting

Ephesians 6:4  
April 26, 2009  
(Kenneth Maresco)

### Characteristics of Christ-Centered Workers

Ephesians 6:5-9  
May 3, 2009  
(Mark Mitchell)

### Our Battle

Ephesians 6:10-12  
May 10, 2009  
(Eric Simmons)

### God's Armor for the Battle

Ephesians 6:13-17

May 17, 2009

(Braden Geer)

### Prayer and the Mission

Ephesians 6:18-24

May 24, 2009

(Robin Boisvert)

## **F. Mark Dever** [\(top\)](#)

*Has preached eight times on Ephesians, seven of which were part of an expositional sermon series. These are available for free audio download.*

Hyperlink: <http://thegospelcoalition.org/resources/scripture-index/a/ephesians/&author=Mark+Dever>

### Grace: the Message of Ephesians

Overview of Ephesians

November 14, 1999

### Predestination

Ephesians 1

July 1, 2001

### Regeneration

Ephesians 2:1-10

July 8, 2001

### Reconciliation

Ephesians 2:11-22

July 15, 2001

### God's Glory

Ephesians 3

July 29, 2001

### The Church

Ephesians 4:1-16

August 5, 2001

### Sanctification

Ephesians 4:17-5:20

August 12, 2001

### Submission

Ephesians 5:21-6:24

August 19, 2001

### **G. Ligon Duncan** [\(top\)](#)

*Ligon Duncan preached 61 sermons through the book of Ephesians. They are available for download at the following URL as mp3s or as text downloads (linked in sermon titles).*

Hyperlink: [http://www.fpcjackson.org/resources/sermons/Ephesians/index\\_to\\_ephesians.htm](http://www.fpcjackson.org/resources/sermons/Ephesians/index_to_ephesians.htm)

#### *Chapter 1*

#### Revelation and Benediction

Ephesians 1:1-2

6/26/2005

#### Every Spiritual Blessing (Part 1)

Ephesians 1:3-14

7/3/2005

#### Every Spiritual Blessing (Part 2)

Ephesians 1:3-14

7/10/2005

#### Predestined in Love

Ephesians 1:4-6

7/17/2005

#### Abundant Grace

Ephesians 1:7-8

7/24/2005

#### Summing Up All Things in Christ

Ephesians 1:8-10

7/31/2005

#### Living to the Praise of His Glory

Ephesians 1:10-12

8/7/2005

#### Assured by the Spirit of Promise

Ephesians 1:13-14

8/14/2005

#### Praying with Paul

Ephesians 1:3-14

8/21/2005

#### Giving Thanks for Faith and Love

Ephesians 1:15-17

9/11/2005

#### Hope, Inheritance, Power

Ephesians 1:18-19

9/18/2005

The Surpassing Greatness of His Power...to the Church

Ephesians 1:19-23

9/25/2005

*Chapter 2*

Dead in Sin

Ephesians 2:1-3

10/2/2005

But God

Ephesians 2:4-7

10/9/2005

Saved From, By, For What?

Ephesians 2:8-10

10/16/2005

Formerly Far Off, Now Brought Near

Ephesians 2:11-13

10/23/2005

He is Our Peace

Ephesians 2:14-18

11/13/2005

No Longer Strangers and Aliens

Ephesians 2:19-22

11/20/2005

*Chapter 3*

What is the Mystery of Christ?

Ephesians 3:1-6

11/27/2005

My Tribulations on Your Behalf are for Your Glory

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**H. Tony Evans**

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*Has preached verse by verse through Ephesians in thirty-eight sermons. These are available for purchase as single audio cassettes and were not dated.*

Hyperlink: [http://www.tonyevans.org/site/c.feIKLOOpGIF/b.2483361/k.C34E/Catalog\\_\\_Tapes\\_Pg\\_5.htm](http://www.tonyevans.org/site/c.feIKLOOpGIF/b.2483361/k.C34E/Catalog__Tapes_Pg_5.htm)

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## **I. Sinclair Ferguson**

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*Has preached verse by verse through Ephesians in fourteen sermons. These are available for free audio download.*

Hyperlink: <http://www.pcpc.org/midweek/audio/ephesians/>

### Ephesians 101

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[A Radical Transformation: Living As a New Person in Christ](#)

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[Christians in Marriage: Respecting Each Other As Husbands and Wives](#)

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[Christians in Spiritual Battle: Engaging in Spiritual Warfare and Wearing God's Armor](#)

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April 28, 2004

### **J. Jack Hayford**

[\(top\)](#)

*Has preached 87 sermons on the book of Ephesians. They are available for purchase as audio cd or cassette.*

Hyperlink: [http://www.jackhayford.org/productoverviewlist19-1/40/title/0/4017/-](http://www.jackhayford.org/productoverviewlist19-1/40/title/0/4017/)

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### **K. Timothy Keller** [\(top\)](#)

*Has preached verse by verse through Ephesians, and has preached a total of 112 sermons in the book. These are available for purchase as audio downloads or cd's.*

Hyperlink: [http://sermons.redeemer.com/store/index.cfm?fuseaction=product.display&product\\_ID=17574&ParentCat=6](http://sermons.redeemer.com/store/index.cfm?fuseaction=product.display&product_ID=17574&ParentCat=6)

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**L. Steve Lawson**

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*Has preached ten individual sermons on Ephesians. These are available for free audio download.*

Hyperlink: <http://newreformationministries.org/audio/sermons/ephesians/>

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Ephesians 3:20-21

December 17, 2006

[Ten Reasons Why the Bible Teaches Definite Atonement: The Singularity of Christ's Love](#)

[Ephesians 5:25-27](#)

November 5, 2006

Amazing Love

Ephesians 3:18-19  
October 5, 2003

Our Invincible Weapons for the Invisible War

Ephesians 6:17  
June 29, 2003

The Victorious Christian

Ephesians 6:14-17  
June 22, 2003

Armed and Ready

Ephesians 6:13-14  
June 1, 2003

This Means War II

Ephesians 6:12  
May 18, 2003

**M. John MacArthur**

[\(top\)](#)

*Has preached 80 sermons on Ephesians most of which are verse-by-verse expositions. They are available for free in audio, cd, and manuscript form.*

Introduction to Ephesians

Ephesians 1:1-2  
January 1, 1978

The Body Formed in Eternity Past, Part 1

Ephesians 1:3-4  
January 8, 1978

A Church for the New Millennium

Ephesians 1:3-14  
January 2, 2000

The Calling of the Church

Ephesians 1:4-14  
November 15, 1981

The Body Formed in Eternity Past, Part 2

Ephesians 1:4-6  
January 15, 1978

Redemption Through His Blood

Ephesians 1:6-10  
January 29, 1978

Divine Promises Guaranteed

Ephesians 1:6-10  
February 5, 1978

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### The Sovereignty of God in Salvation

Ephesians 1:13-14

June 22, 1980

### Our Resources in Christ Part 1

Ephesians 1:15-23

February 12, 1978

### Christ is Everything

Ephesians 1:15-23

August 29, 1993

### Our Resources in Christ, Part 2: Is there Something More?

Ephesians 1:18-23

February 19, 1978

### Coming Alive in Christ

Ephesians 2:1-10

February 26, 1978

### Exchanging Living Death for Dying Life

Ephesians 2:1-10

April 12, 1998

### The Unity of the Body Part 1

Ephesians 2:11-12

March 5, 1978

### The Unity of the Body Part 2

Ephesians 2:13-15

March 12, 1978

### The Unity of the Body Part 3

Ephesians 2:16-22

March 19, 1978

### The Mystery Revealed Part 1

Ephesians 3:1-4

April 2, 1978

### The Mystery Revealed Part 2

Ephesians 3:5-6

April 9, 1978

### The Mystery Revealed Part 3

Ephesians 3:7-13

May 7, 1978

### The Christian Turn-On

November 9, 1975

Ephesians 3:14-21

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### The Fullness of God Part 1

Ephesians 3:14-16

May 14, 1978

### Experiencing the Power of Christ

Ephesians 3:14-21

September 5, 1993

### The Fullness of God Part 2

Ephesians 3:16

May 21, 1978

### The Fullness of God Part 3

Ephesians 3:16-17

May 28, 1978

### The Fullness of God Part 4

Ephesians 3:18-21

June 4, 1978

### The Lowly Walk Part 1

Ephesians 4:1

June 11, 1978

### The Lowly Walk Part 2

Ephesians 4:1

June 18, 1978

### The Lowly Walk Part 3

Ephesians 4:2

June 25, 1978

### The Lowly Walk Part 4

Ephesians 4:2

July 2, 1978

### The Lowly Walk Part 5

Ephesians 4:2

July 9, 1978

### The Lowly Walk Part 6

Ephesians 4:2-6

July 16, 1978

### The Gifts of Christ to His Church

Ephesians 4:7-11

August 20, 1978

### Building the Body of Christ Part 1

Ephesians 4:11

August 27, 1978

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### Building the Body of Christ Part 2

Ephesians 4:11-16  
September 3, 1978

### Off with the Old, On with the New Part 1

Ephesians 4:17-20

### Off with the Old, On with the New Part 2

Ephesians 4:19-24  
September 17, 1978

### Principles of New Life

Ephesians 4:25-32  
October 1, 1978

### Walking in Love Part 1

Ephesians 5:1-2  
October 8, 1978

### Walking in Love Part 2

Ephesians 5:2-7  
October 15, 1978

### Living in the Light

Ephesians 5:8-14  
October 22, 1978

### Walking in Wisdom, Part 1

Ephesians 5:15  
October 29, 1978

### Walking in Wisdom, Part 2

Ephesians 5:16-17  
November 5, 1978

### Be Not Drunk with Wine Part 1

Ephesians 5:18  
November 12, 1978

### Be Not Drunk with Wine Part 2

Ephesians 5:18  
November 19, 1978

### Be Not Drunk with Wine Part 3

Ephesians 5:18  
November 26, 1978

### Be Filled with the Spirit Part 1

Ephesians 5:18  
December 3, 1978

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### Be Filled with the Spirit Part 2

Ephesians 5:18-19  
December 10, 1978

### A Plan for Your Family: God's vs. the World's Part 1

Ephesians 5:18-22, 25; 6:1-2  
January 21, 1996

### A Plan for Your Family: God's vs. the World's Part 2

Ephesians 5:18-22, 25; 6:1-2  
January 21, 1996

### Spirit-Filled Music

Ephesians 5:18-19  
January 19, 2009

### Be Filled with the Spirit Part 3

Ephesians 5:19  
December 17, 1978

### Be Filled with the Spirit Part 4: Spirit-Filled Thanksgiving

Ephesians 5:20  
December 31, 1978

### God's Pattern for Wives, Part 1

Ephesians 5:22-24  
February 11, 1996

### God's Pattern for Wives, Part 2

Ephesians 5:22  
February 18, 1996

### God's Pattern for Husbands Part 1

Ephesians 5:25  
February 25, 1996

### God's Pattern for Husbands Part 2

Ephesians 5:25-33  
March 3, 1996

### God's Pattern for Children Part 1

Ephesians 6:1-4  
March 10, 1996

### God's Pattern for Children Part 2

Ephesians 6:1-3  
March 31, 1996

### God's Pattern for Parents Part 1

Ephesians 6:3  
April 14, 1996

God's Pattern for Parents Part 2

Ephesians 6:3  
April 28, 1996

The Key to Maintaining Family Unity

Ephesians 6:3  
June 9, 1996

Spirit-Filled Labor Relations

Ephesians 6:5-9  
March 18, 1979

God's Perspective on Work

Ephesians 6:5-9  
August 31, 1997

Satan's Attack on the Spirit-Filled Church (Includes Rev. 2-3)

Ephesians 6:10  
March 25, 1979

The Believer's Warfare part 1

Ephesians 6:1-13  
April 22, 1979

The Believer's Warfare Part 2

Ephesians 6:10-13  
April 29, 1979

The Armor of God

Ephesians 6:10-13  
April 29, 1979

The Believer's Armor Part 1: The Belt of Truthfulness

Ephesians 6:14  
May 6, 1979

The Believer's Armor Part 2: The Breastplate of Righteousness

Ephesians 6:14  
May 13, 1979

The Armor of God: The Belt of Truthfulness and the Breastplate of Righteousness

Ephesians 6:14  
November 9, 2008

The Believer's Armor Part 3: The Shoes of the Gospel of Peace

Ephesians 6:15  
May 20, 1979

The Armor of God: The Shoes of the Gospel of Peace and the Shield of Faith

Ephesians 6:15-16  
November 16, 2008

The Believer's Armor Part 4: The Shield of Faith

Ephesians 6:16

May 27, 1979

The Believer's Armor Part 5: The Helmet of Salvation Part 1

Ephesians 6:17

June 3, 1979

The Believer's Armor Part 6: The Helmet of Salvation Part 2

Ephesians 6:17

June 10, 1979

The Believer's Armor Part 7: The Sword of the Spirit

Ephesians 6:17

June 17, 1979

The Armor of God: The Helmet of Salvation

Ephesians 6:17

November 23, 2008

The Armor of God: The Sword of the Spirit

Ephesians 6:17

November 30, 2008

Praying at All Times

Ephesians 6:18-24

June 24, 1979

The Armor of God: Praying at All Times

Ephesians 6:18-20

December 7, 2008

**N. James MacDonald**

[\(top\)](#)

*Has preached three different series on Ephesians covering particular topics for a total of fifteen sermons, which are available for purchase and are not dated.*

Hyperlink: <http://store.walkintheword.com/searchadv.aspx?>

[IsSubmit=true&SearchTerm=Ephesians&submit.x=0&submit.y=0](http://store.walkintheword.com/searchadv.aspx?IsSubmit=true&SearchTerm=Ephesians&submit.x=0&submit.y=0)

*Anchors that Hold: Studies from Ephesians 1*

My God is For Me

Ephesians 1:1-11

My Salvation is Secure

Ephesians 1:12-16

My Victory is Assured

Ephesians 1:15-23

*In It to Win It: How to Defeat the Prince of Darkness: Studies in Ephesians 6*

Ten Things You Should Know About Satan

Various

D-Day Everyday

Ephesians 6:10-12

Ready for Battle

Ephesians 6:14-17

In It To Win It

Various

Six Questions About Satan

Various

*The Power of Personal Conviction: Studies in Ephesians 4-5*

Convicted about Unity

Ephesians 4:1-4

Convicted about Ministry

Ephesians 4:7-16

Convicted about Change

Ephesians 4:17-21

Convicted about Speech

Ephesians 4:25-30

Convicted about Forgiveness

Ephesians 4:31-5:2

Convicted about Purity

Ephesians 5:1-14

The Power of Personal Conviction

Ephesians 5:15-20

### **O. John Piper** [\(top\)](#)

*Has preached from Ephesians 54 times, but has not preached through the book verse by verse. These are available for free audio download and are also available in manuscript form for no charge.*

Hyperlink: <http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByScripture/3/>

#### Predestined for Adoption to the Praise of His Glory

*Reflections on Being Adopted by God and Adopting Children*

Ephesians 1:1-6

June 20, 2004

#### God Predestined Us unto Sonship Through Jesus Christ

Ephesians 1:3-6

March 8, 1992

#### God Has Chosen Us in Him Before the Foundation of the Earth

Ephesians 1:4

March 1, 1992

#### Sealed by the Spirit to the Day of Redemption

Ephesians 1:11-14

May 6, 1984

#### His Body: The Fullness of Him Who Fills All in All

Ephesians 1:15-23

September 20, 1992

#### The Immeasurable Greatness of His Power Toward Us

Ephesians 1:15-23

April 4, 2010

#### But God...

Ephesians 2:1-9

December 22, 1985

#### Why Do We Need to Be Born Again? Part 1

Ephesians 2:1-10

December 9, 2007

#### Why We Need a Savior: Captive to an Alien Power, by Nature Children of Wrath

Ephesians 2:1-3

December 15, 1985

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### Why We Need a Savior: Dead in Sins

Ephesians 2:1  
December 8, 1985

### Israel and Us Reconciled in One Body

Ephesians 2:11-22  
September 27, 1992

### Race and Cross

*Racial Harmony Sunday*  
Ephesians 2:11-22  
January 16, 2000

### Remember That You Were Hopeless

Ephesians 2:11-12  
December 27, 1981

### The Unfathomable Riches of Christ, for All Peoples, Above All Powers, Through the Church

*Missions Week*  
Ephesians 3:1-13  
October 24, 2004

### The Cosmic Church

Ephesians 3:10  
March 22, 1981

### Far More Than You Think

Ephesians 3:14-21  
September 29, 1985

### How Can We Be Clothed with Power?

*Missions Week*  
Ephesians 3:14-21  
October 23, 1988

### Maintain the Unity of the Spirit

Ephesians 4:1-6  
May 27, 1984

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### One Lord, One Spirit, One Body for All Time and All Peoples

Ephesians 4:1-6

November 8, 1992

### How Christ Enables the Church to Upbuild Itself in Love

Ephesians 4:4-16

September 17, 1995

### How the Saints Minister to the Body

Ephesians 4:7-16

October 25, 1992

### Why the Saints Minister to the Body

Ephesians 4:7-16

October 18, 1992

### Alone in a Big Church

*A Call to Small Togetherness*

Ephesians 4:11-12

September 20, 1981

### Escape from Futility

Ephesians 4:17-21

September 7, 1986

### Satan Seeks a Gap Called Grudge

Ephesians 4:22-27

December 16, 1984

### Speak Truth with Your Neighbor

Ephesians 4:25

September 28, 1986

### Don't Steal, Work and Give!

Ephesians 4:28

October 5, 1986

### Make Your Mouth a Means of Grace

Ephesians 4:29-30

October 12, 1986

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### Be Kind to One Another

Ephesians 4:31-5:2

October 19, 1986

### Forgive Just as God in Christ Also Has Forgiven You

*Palm Sunday*

Ephesians 4:32-5:2

March 27, 1994

### The Depth of Christ's Love: Its Cost

Ephesians 4:32-5:2

March 26, 1995

### The Darkness of Abortion and the Light of Truth

*Sanctity of Life Sunday*

Ephesians 5:1-16

January 26, 2003

### The Enthronement of Desire

Ephesians 5:3-6

October 26, 1986

### Exposing the Dark Work of Abortion

*Sanctity of Life Sunday*

Ephesians 5:11

January 26, 1992

### Urgency and Gratitude

Ephesians 5:15-20

November 23, 1986

### When Is Abortion Racism?

Ephesians 5:16-17

January 21, 2007

### Singing And Making Melody To The Lord

Ephesians 5:17-20

December 28, 1997

Be Filled with the Spirit

Ephesians 5:18

March 8, 1981

Adam, Where Are You?

*Father's Day*

Ephesians 5:21-28

June 17, 1984

Husbands Who Love Like Christ and the Wives Who Submit to Them

Ephesians 5:21-23; 1 Peter 3:1-7

June 11, 1989

Jesus Is Precious as the Foundation of the Family

Ephesians 5:21-6:9

March 21, 1982

Lionhearted and Lamblike: The Christian Husband as Head, Part 1

Ephesians 5:21-33

March 18, 2007

Lionhearted and Lamblike: The Christian Husband as Head, Part 2

*What Does It Mean to Lead*

Ephesians 5:21-33

March 25, 2007

Marriage: A Matrix of Christian Hedonism

Ephesians 5:21-33

October 16, 1983

Marriage: Pursuing Conformity to Christ in the Covenant

Ephesians 5:21-33

February 25, 2007

Beautifying the Body of Christ

Ephesians 5:22-32

October 11, 1992

Fathers, Bring Them Up in the Discipline & Instruction of the Lord

*A Tribute to My Father, William Solomon Hottle Piper*

Ephesians 6:1-4

June 19, 2005

Marriage Is Meant for Making Children...Disciples of Jesus, Part 1

Ephesians 6:1-4

June 10, 2007

Marriage Is Meant for Making Children...Disciples of Jesus, Part 2

*A Father's Conquest of Anger in Himself and in His Children*

Ephesians 6:1-4

June 17, 2007

Raising Children Who Hope in the Triumph of God

Ephesians 6:4

May 8, 1988

Ready to Move with the Gospel of Peace

Ephesians 6:10-20

May 15, 1988

Spiritual Warfare and Prayer

*Missions Prayer Meeting Devotional*

Ephesians 6:10-20

November 7, 1999

The Weapon Serves the Wielding Power

Ephesians 6:17-20

January 6, 1985

Put on the New Person

Ephesians 4:22-24

September 21, 1986

**P. Chuck Smith**

[\(top\)](#)

*Has preached a series of six sermons on Ephesians, which are not dated. They are available as free audio download and sermon notes.*

Hyperlink: <http://www.twft.com/?page=c2000>

[Ephesians 1](#)

[Ephesians 2a](#)

[Ephesians 2b](#)

[Ephesians 3](#)

[Ephesians 4](#)

[Ephesians 5-6](#)

### **Q. John Stott** [\(top\)](#)

*Has preached verse by verse through Ephesians in thirteen sermons. They are available for free audio download after free registration online.*

Hyperlink: <http://www.allsouls.org/ascm/allsouls/static/ministries/resources/home.html>

#### [All Spiritual Blessings are in Christ](#)

Ephesians 1:1-10

October 6, 1971

#### [When Everything Begins and Ends](#)

Ephesians 1:11-14

November 13, 1971

#### [Open Your Eyes](#)

Ephesians 1:15-23

November 27, 1971

#### [Amazing Grace](#)

Ephesians 2:1-10

November 3, 1971

#### [God's New Society](#)

Ephesians 2:11-22

November 17, 1971

#### [History and Eternity](#)

Ephesians 3:1-14

November 24, 1971

#### [Filled with God's Goodness](#)

Ephesians 3:15-23

December 1, 1971

#### [Unity and Diversity](#)

Ephesians 4:1-16

February 16, 1975

### New Life – New Lifestyle

Ephesians 4:17-5:2

February 23, 1975

### Be What You Are

Ephesians 5:3-20

March 2, 1975

### God's Ideal for Marriage

Ephesians 5:21-23

March 16, 1975

### The Christian at Home and Work

Ephesians 6:1-9

March 10, 1975

### Spiritual Weapons for Spiritual Warfare

Ephesians 6:10-24

March 23, 1975

## **R. Greg Surratt**

[\(top\)](#)

*Has preached all but three of the twenty part verse-by-verse Ephesians series at Seacoast Church. They are not dated and are available for free as audio, video, and sermon notes.*

Hyperlink: <http://www.seacoast.org/?p=842>

*New & Improved*

### Part 1

Ephesians 1:1-2

### Why We Worship God

Ephesians 1:3-14

### Praying for Each Other

Ephesians 1:15-23

### Improved Lives

Ephesians 2:1-10

### Understanding

Ephesians 3:14-21

### Teams

Ephesians 4:1-6

### Gentiles Gone Wild

Ephesians 4:17-24

### Community

Ephesians 4:25

### Dealing with Bitterness

Ephesians 4:25-32

### Generosity

Ephesians 4:28-5:2

### Easter

Ephesians 5:7-14

### What's Wrong with this Community?

Ephesians 5:15-21

### Marriage Part 1

Ephesians 5:28-29

### Marriage Part 2

Ephesians 5:21-33

### Work Relationships

Ephesians 6:5-9

### Parenting

Ephesians 6:1-4

### Warfare

Ephesians 6:10-20

## **S. Chuck Swindoll**

[\(top\)](#)

*Has preached 26 times on Ephesians in a series titled "Becoming a People of Grace: An Exposition of Ephesians". These sermons are not dated and available for purchase as audio cd's.*

Hyperlink: [https://secure2.convio.net/ifl/site/Ecommerce/1016797710?VIEW\\_PRODUCT=true&product\\_id=2941&store\\_id=1101](https://secure2.convio.net/ifl/site/Ecommerce/1016797710?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=2941&store_id=1101)

[Ephesians: A Life-Changing Letter](#)

[Unloading the Theological Truck](#)

[Ten Reasons to Give God Praise](#)

[Praying Like We Mean It](#)

[What Is Christ Doing Now . . . And Why?](#)

[You Were Dead . . . But God!](#)

[God's Artwork on Display](#)

[Breaking Down the Barrier](#)

God's Household

The Mystery, the Ministry, and Me

Paul on His Knees . . . Again

A Worthy Walk

His Gift and Our Gifts

Body Life at Its Best

Here's How to Get Dressed

Steps That Lead to Freedom

A Stirring Summons to Purity

This Little Light: Is It Really Mine?

The Christian Life 101

The Most Challenging of All Relationships (Part One)

The Most Challenging of All Relationships (Part Two)

Secrets of a Nurturing Home

Honoring God in Our Occupations

Standing Firm against Satanic Schemes

Strong Armor for Weak Sheep

Here's How to Finish Well

## *SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL*

### **I. Theologians on Ephesians**

#### **John Chrysostom**

*Preached 24 sermons (homilies) on Ephesians.*

#### **St. Augustine**

*Preached on Ephesians. We have 5 sermons on the book, though he probably preached more.*

#### **St. Thomas Aquinas**

*Gave 44 lectures on Ephesians.*

*Wrote a 313 page commentary on Ephesians.*

#### **Martin Luther**

*While Luther probably wrote and spoke a lot on Ephesians, we only have one sermon from him on the book.*

#### **John Calvin**

*Preached 48 sermons on Ephesians (728 pages).*

*Wrote a 172 page commentary on Ephesians.*

*Commented on Ephesians over 275 times in the Institutes (278x).*

#### **John Owen**

*Preached on Ephesians; we have 4 surviving sermons.*

#### **Jonathan Edwards**

*Preached on Ephesians; we have 18 surviving sermons.*

#### **John Wesley**

*Preached 8 sermons on Ephesians and wrote book notes on each chapter of the letter.*

#### **Charles Hodge**

*Wrote a 224 page commentary on Ephesians.*

#### **Charles Spurgeon**

*Preached 72 sermons on Ephesians*

#### **Karl Barth**

*References Ephesians over 500 times (509x) in his 9233 page Church Dogmatics.*

*Gave 13 academic lectures on Ephesians.*

*“He taught the epistle to his confirmands, preached a series of sermons on it, led a Sunday evening Bible group on it, translated it and wrote a brief interpretative commentary on it.”<sup>79</sup>*

### **II. Theologians’ Quotes on Ephesians**

Charles Spurgeon: “The Epistle to the Ephesians is a complete Body of Divinity. In the first chapter you have the doctrines of the gospel; in the next, you have the experience of the Christians; and before the

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<sup>79</sup> Christopher Asprey, “Remarks concerning Barth’s Ephesians lectures in Göttingen (1921/22) on the occasion of their posthumous publication,” *Letter from the Karl Barth-Archives*, no. 11 (Dec. 10, 2009).

Epistle is finished, you have the precepts of the Christian faith. Whosoever would see Christianity in on treatise, let him “read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest” the Epistle to the Ephesians.”<sup>80</sup>

S. T. Coleridge called Ephesians “the divinest composition of man.”<sup>81</sup>

C. H. Dodd called Ephesians “the crown of Paulinism.”<sup>82</sup>

J. Armitage Robinson called Ephesians “the crown of St Paul’s writings.”<sup>83</sup>

F. F. Bruce called Ephesians “the quintessence of Paulinism” because it “in large measure sums up the leading themes of the Pauline letters, and sets forth the cosmic implications of Paul’s ministry as apostle to the Gentiles.”<sup>84</sup>

Raymond Brown said that only Romans could match Ephesians “as a candidate for exercising the most influence on Christian thought and spirituality.”<sup>85</sup>

Klyne Snodgrass: “The understanding of the gospel in Ephesians challenges and redefines the superficial understanding of the gospel prevalent in our day.”<sup>86</sup>

“When the great Scottish Protestant reformer John Knox was very near to death, the book that was most often read to him was John Calvin’s *Sermons on the Letter to the Ephesians*.”<sup>87</sup>

**MISQUOTATION:** William Barclay and numerous other writers have said that Ephesians has been called the Queen of the Epistles.<sup>88</sup> On p. 71 he says “It has been called ‘the Queen of the Epistles’” (offering no citation of who originally said it), and on p. 82 he says, “That is why Ephesians is the Queen of the Epistles.” This researcher was unable to find any such quotation in the theological literature. Indeed, James Montgomery Boice cites William Barclay as the one who “calls Ephesians the queen of the epistles.”<sup>89</sup> However, William Barclay was presumably referring to an unnamed source from whom he derived this quip. It is best, then, to stop suggesting that Ephesians “has been called” the Queen of the Epistles. It has not.

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<sup>80</sup> <http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/2266.htm#expo>

<sup>81</sup> S. T. Coleridge, *Table Talk*, May 25, 1830, in *Specimens of the Table Talk of the Late Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed H. N. Coleridge (London, 1835), 88

<sup>82</sup> C. H. Dodd, “Ephesians,” *The Abingdon Bible Commentary*, ed F. C. Eiselen, E. Lewis, and D. G. Downey (New York: Abingdon, 1928), 122–25.

<sup>83</sup> J. A. Robinson, *St. Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians* (London: Macmillan, 1904), vii.

<sup>84</sup> F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Free Spirit* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1977), 424.

<sup>85</sup> R. E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York/London: Doubleday, 1997), 620.

<sup>86</sup> K. Snodgrass, *Ephesians: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 18.

<sup>87</sup> William Barclay, *The Letter to the Galatians and Ephesians* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 71.

<sup>88</sup> Barclay, *Galatians and Ephesians*, 71, 82.

<sup>89</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Ephesians: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988), 11.

## WHAT IS SAINTHOOD?

### 1. Sainthood Defined

Most Catholic scholars are careful to distinguish the process of canonization in the Catholic church from the pagan concept of apotheosis—the Greek concept of deification—to which it is often compared. In fact, “Canonization in the Catholic Church is quite another thing. The Catholic Church canonizes or beatifies only those whose lives have been marked by the exercise of heroic virtue, and only after this has been proved by common repute for sanctity and by conclusive arguments. The chief difference [between deification and sainthood], however, lies in the meaning of the term canonization, the Church seeing in the saints nothing more than friends and servants of God whose holy lives have made them worthy of His special love. She does not pretend to make gods (cf. Augustine, *City of God* 22.10; Cyril of Alexandria, *Contra Julianum*, 6).”<sup>90</sup>

Rather than stemming from any pagan concept of deification, “The true origin of canonization and beatification must be sought in the Catholic doctrine of the worship, invocation, and intercession of the saints. As was taught by St. Augustine, Catholics, while giving to God alone adoration strictly so-called, honour the saints because of the Divine supernatural gifts which have earned them eternal life, and through which they reign with God in the heavenly fatherland as His chosen friends and faithful servants.”<sup>91</sup> Put simply, “Catholics honour God in His saints as the loving distributor of supernatural gifts. The worship of latria, or strict adoration, is given to God alone; the worship of dulia, or honour and humble reverence, is paid the saints; the worship of hyperdulia, a higher form of dulia, belongs, on account of her greater excellence, to the Blessed Virgin Mary.”<sup>92</sup> It is important to note, however, that “The Church (Augustine, Reply to Faustus 20.21; cf. *City of God* 22.10) erects her altars to God alone, though in honour and memory of the saints and martyrs.”<sup>93</sup> This being the case, many Catholics see deep Scriptural proof for the concept of canonization: “There is Scriptural warrant for such worship in the passages where we are bidden to venerate angels (Ex. 23:20; Josh. 5:13; Dan. 8:15, 10:4; Lk. 2:9; Acts 12:7; Rev. 5:11, 7:1; Matt. 18:10), whom holy men are not unlike, as sharers of the friendship of God. And if St. Paul beseeches the brethren (Rom. 15:30; 2 Cor. 1:11; Col. 4:3; Eph. 6:18-19) to help him by their prayers for him to God, we must with even greater reason maintain that we can be helped by the prayers of the saints, and ask their intercession with humility. If we may beseech those who still live on earth, why not those who live in heaven?”<sup>94</sup>

Most Protestants are skeptical of the Catholic doctrine of the veneration of saints because it seems to violate the fact that Jesus Christ is said to be the one mediator between God and men. To this, Catholics respond, “But He is our mediator in His quality of our common Redeemer; He is not our sole intercessor nor advocate, nor our sole mediator by way of supplication. In the eleventh session of the Council of Chalcedon (451) we find the Fathers exclaiming, “Flavianus lives after death! May the Martyr pray for us!” If we accept this doctrine of the worship of the saints, of which there are innumerable evidences in the writings of the Fathers and the liturgies of the Eastern and Western Churches, we shall not wonder at

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<sup>90</sup> Beccari, Camillo, “Beatification and Canonization,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 2 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1907).

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

the loving care with which the Church committed to writing the sufferings of the early martyrs, sent these accounts from one gathering of the faithful to another, and promoted the veneration of the martyrs.”<sup>95</sup> This type of argumentation, however, moves beyond the weight of the Biblical evidence to the testimony of church councils, taken by the Catholic church as infallible.

### **2. The History of Sainthood**

Originally, sainthood was limited to those who were martyred for their faith, but was extended to “confessors”—those “who died peacefully after a life of heroic virtue”—in the fourth century. The reason that sainthood was extended to confessors, Catholics think, is completely logical: “The reason of this veneration lies, doubtless, in the resemblance of the confessors’ self-denying and heroically virtuous lives to the sufferings of the martyrs; such lives could truly be called prolonged martyrdoms. Naturally, therefore, such honour was first paid to ascetics and only afterwards to those who resembled in their lives the very penitential and extraordinary existence of the ascetics. So true is this that the confessors themselves are frequently called martyrs.”<sup>96</sup> For example, “St. Gregory Nazianzen calls St. Basil a martyr; St. Chrysostom applies the same title to Eustachius of Antioch...It remained true, however, at all times that it was unlawful to venerate confessors without permission of the ecclesiastical authority as it had been so to venerate martyrs.”<sup>97</sup>

Because of the abuse of many local Bishops, applying the title of saint quite liberally, the ability to make one a saint was eventually limited to the direct authority of the pope: “The first Catholics revered as saints were martyrs who died under Roman persecution in the first centuries after Jesus Christ was born. These martyrs were honored as saints almost instantaneously after their deaths, as Catholics who had sacrificed their lives in the name of God. Over the next few centuries, however, sainthood was extended to those who had defended the faith and led pious lives. With the criteria for canonization not as strict, the number of saints soared by the sixth and seventh centuries. Bishops stepped in to oversee the process, and around 1200, Pope Alexander III, outraged over the proliferation, decreed that only the pope had the power to determine who could be identified as a saint. (Alexander was reportedly angered about one saint in particular whom he believed had been killed in an alcohol-fueled brawl and was therefore not worthy of canonization.)”<sup>98</sup>

It was not until the 17<sup>th</sup> century that the “Vatican’s standards for sainthood were formalized. A non-martyr would need to have performed four posthumous miracles, usually spontaneous healings. (Today, the church requires a team of doctors to verify their veracity and prove that miraculous healings were not the result of modern medicine.) The process included two major steps: beatification, the pope’s recognition that a person is worthy of consideration, which begins a lengthy investigation process; and canonization, the pope’s formal recognition that a person is truly a saint. In each case the argument for sainthood would be rebutted by a Devil’s Advocate, a person appointed by the Church to argue against the case for sainthood. Before becoming pontiff, Pope Benedict XIV was one of the foremost Devil’s Advocates of the 18th century. It wasn’t until 1983 that a revised Code of Canon Law was published that included reforms to the canonization process begun in 1913. Under Pope John Paul II the procedures for investigating and

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Kate Pickert, “A Brief History of Sainthood,” *Time* (Oct. 13, 2008).

recognizing a saint were streamlined, the Devil's Advocate position was eliminated and the number of miracles required for beatification and canonization was reduced to two."<sup>99</sup>

### **3. Beatification and Canonization**

The process of sainthood consists of two major steps: Beatification and Canonization. These terms can be distinguished as follows: "Canonization, generally speaking, is a decree regarding the public ecclesiastical veneration of an individual. Such veneration, however, may be permissive or preceptive, may be universal or local. If the decree contains a precept, and is universal in the sense that it binds the whole Church, it is a decree of canonization; if it only permits such worship, or if it binds under precept, but not with regard to the whole Church, it is a decree of beatification. . . . To sum up, beatification, in the present discipline, differs from canonization in this: that the former implies (1) a locally restricted, not a universal, permission to venerate, which is (2) a mere permission, and no precept; while canonization implies a universal precept."<sup>100</sup>

The preceptive decree is one where the pope makes canonization happen by his decree (it is active). The permissive decree is passive, as the pope allows the process to go forward.

There are, however, two methods of canonization: "Canonization, therefore, creates a cultus which is universal and obligatory. But in imposing this obligation the pope may, and does, use one of two methods, each constituting a new species of canonization, i.e. formal canonization and equivalent canonization. Formal canonization occurs when the cultus is prescribed as an explicit and definitive decision, after due judicial process and the ceremonies usual in such cases. Equivalent canonization occurs when the pope, omitting the judicial process and the ceremonies, orders some servant of God to be venerated in the Universal Church; this happens when such a saint has been from a remote period the object of veneration, when his heroic virtues (or martyrdom) and miracles are related by reliable historians, and the fame of his miraculous intercession is uninterrupted."<sup>101</sup>

The reason that the Pope is able to do this is that because on standard Catholic teaching, he is considered infallible: "Is the pope infallible in issuing a decree of canonization? Most theologians answer in the affirmative. . . . In *Quodlibet* 9a.16, St. Thomas says: "Since the honour we pay the saints is in a certain sense a profession of faith, i.e., a belief in the glory of the Saints we must piously believe that in this matter also the judgment of the Church is not liable to error." These words of St. Thomas, as is evident from the authorities just cited, all favouring a positive infallibility, have been interpreted by his school in favour of papal infallibility in the matter of canonization, and this interpretation is supported by several other passages in the same *Quodlibet*. This infallibility, however according to the holy doctor, is only a point of pious belief. Theologians generally agree as to the fact of papal infallibility in this matter of canonization, but disagree as to the quality of certitude due to a papal decree in such matter. In the opinion of some it is of faith; others hold that to refuse assent to such a judgment of the Holy See would be both impious and rash. . . . many more (and this is the general view) hold such a pronouncement to be theologically certain, not being of Divine Faith as its purport has not been immediately revealed, nor of ecclesiastical Faith as having thus far not been defined by the Church."<sup>102</sup>

The question is, however, whether the Pope actually makes the person canonized in heaven or merely recognizes that the person is already a saint: "What is the object of this infallible judgment of the pope?"

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<sup>99</sup> Kate Pickert, "A Brief History of Sainthood," *Time* (Oct. 13, 2008).

<sup>100</sup> Beccari, Camillo, "Beatification and Canonization," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 2 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1907).

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

Does he define that the person canonized is in heaven or only that he has practiced Christian virtues in an heroic degree? I have never seen this question discussed; my own opinion is that nothing else is defined than that the person canonized is in heaven.”<sup>103</sup> *The same cannot be said, however, for beatification:* “Canonists and theologians generally deny the infallible character of decrees of beatification, whether formal or equivalent, since it is always a permission, not a command; while it leads to canonization, it is not the last step. Moreover, in most cases, the cultus permitted by beatification, is restricted to a determined province, city, or religious body.”<sup>104</sup>

#### **4. The Process of Sainthood**

The process for Sainthood varies between martyrs and confessors/virgins. The beatification of confessors is the most difficult step in the process of canonization. The following steps summarize the process for confessors.

1. A person is chosen by the local episcopal authority to handle all of the judicial processes in communicating with Rome for the process of sainthood to be completed. This person is called the vice-postulator.
2. Three types of inquiries are prepared. a) Informative inquiries tell of the general holiness of the person being proposed for beatification as well as particular descriptions of miracles that their intercession has brought about. b) Processes *de non cultu* are made which ensure that the person has not been publically worshipped and will not be adored until the process of beatification has been completed. c) Inquiries called *Processiculi diligentiarum* recount the writings of the person whose beatification is being considered.
3. The inquiries are then sent to Rome to the Congregation of Rites who then appoints a messenger.
4. The inquiries are opened, translated into Italian, and copied for public viewing. A cardinal is then appointed by the pope to oversee any inquiries of the congregation.
5. The writings of the person in question are revised while the documents are prepared by the advocate. The documents consist of the summary of the informative process, the information, and observations or difficulties noticed by the promoter.
6. The documents are printed and distributed to the cardinals of the Congregation of Rites at least 40 days prior to the date the person’s beatification is to be discussed.
7. The documents are reviewed, and if nothing objectionable is found therein, a decree is published calling for further discussion of the matter.
8. At the next meeting of the Congregation of Rites the appointment is debated by the cardinals. No vote is yet taken.
9. If the cardinals are in favor of the appointment, a decree is issued (signed by the pope). At this point the person is given the title of “Venerable.”
10. A petition is made beginning the process of inquiring (by Apostolic authority) into the miracles (and general character) of the person in question.

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

11. While this process is happening outside of Rome, documents are being prepared for further discussion of the potential beatification of the person.
12. Once the report is received, it is translated into Italian, summarized, and declared valid. At a meeting of the Congregation of Rites it is asked and disputed whether there is any question as to the sanctity of the person or the miracles in question. A resulting decree is published if the response is favorable.
13. A new set of letters are sent to more bishops to further approval of the approval of the miracles. This must be completed within 18 months. The results are translated into Italian and their summary is authenticated by the Chancellor of the Congregation of Rites.
14. The advocate prepares the documents which authenticate the validity of the foregoing discussion.
15. A discussion is held in a meeting called the *congregatio rotalis*. Here any difficulties are answered by the promoter, and if done satisfactorily, a decree establishing the validity of the inquiries and processes is published.
16. Preparation for discussion of the following question is made: Is there evidence that the venerable servant of God practiced virtues both theological and cardinal, and in an heroic degree? This step is of primary importance for confessors. It is discussed in three meetings: ante-preparatory, preparatory, and general. In each meeting the promotor presents all the documents and it is decided whether and difficulties have been satisfactorily solved.
17. When the Congregation of Rites in the above mentioned meeting approves, the pope is summoned to sign a decree that says there is evidence of heroic virtues of the person in question. The decree isn't published until the pope prayerfully considers the issue before giving his final consent.
18. At this point, the miracles are to be proven. They require three eyewitnesses. If they have already been proven valid, then documents regarding the miracles are re-prepared.
19. Discussion of the miracles proceeds in the exact same way as the previous discussion of the virtues. If the decisions are favorable the congregation produces a decree to be signed by the pope, proving the miracles. The reports prepared above are now presented in three stages.
20. After the miracles have been proven, the Congregation of Rites meets to debate one time whether it is safe to proceed with beatification. If the majority agrees that it is favorable, a decree is issued by the pope and the person now becomes known as "Blessed."

For martyrs, however, the process differs.

"The canonization of confessors or martyrs may be taken up as soon as two miracles are reported to have been worked at their intercession, after the pontifical permission of public veneration as described above. At this stage it is only required that the two miracles worked after the permission awarding a public *cultus* be discussed in three meetings of the congregation. The discussion proceeds in the ordinary way; if the miracles be confirmed another meeting is held. The pope then issues a Bull of Canonization in which he not only permits, but commands, the public *cultus*, or veneration, of the saint."<sup>105</sup> Basically, martyrs have a road paved in gold to sainthood.

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

Father James Martin has succinctly summarized in a readable way the process of sainthood in ten steps:

“So here is what you need to do to become a saint, with God’s help of course. And get ready for a long haul, too. It takes the patience of a saint to become one.”<sup>106</sup>

### 1. Be a Catholic

“If you’re already Catholic, congratulations: that’s a big hurdle. If you’re not baptized yet, get baptized as a Catholic. If you’re part of another Christian denomination, join the Catholic Church. That may be the easy part on your path to official sainthood. That’s not to say that people of other faiths can’t achieve holiness; but for canonization in the Catholic Church, you have to be Catholic. Now comes the hard part: live a holy Christian life full of “heroic virtue.” In other words, be a real Christian, and not just a person who says he’s a Christian but doesn’t act like one. Take the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount (and the rest of the Gospels for that matter) seriously. Be charitable, love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you. Give generously to the poor. Devote your life to God even when it’s hard—especially when it’s hard. And if you want to increase your chances even more, invite others to join you in doing this. (Starting a religious order is usually a swift path to sainthood.)

By the way, remember that your holiness is a gift from God. You can work hard at it, but ultimately it is a “grace” or a “gift.” Don’t forget who is in charge. And it’s not you.”<sup>107</sup>

### 2. Die

“You have to be dead before the process of canonization starts. Usually the church waits five years—though that can be waived by the pope, as it has been with Mother Teresa and Pope John Paul II. If you’ve got the presence of mind, it also helps to die a “good death,” that is, one that inspires others with your faith. Now that you’re dead, a good deal of the process of “making” you a saint is up to people on earth. That’s something of a misnomer, actually, since God “makes” saints; the church just recognizes them. But you still have a part to play from your post in heaven. And, by the way, all of this is still up to God, as you’ll soon see.”<sup>108</sup>

### 3. A Local Devotion Grows Up Around Your Memory

“During your life, if you were an especially holy person, you probably got noticed in your locale or perhaps even by the world at large, especially if you were a “public” religious person, like a sister (like Mother Teresa), brother (like Francis of Assisi), priest (like Padre Pio), a founder of a religious order (like Dominic) or pope (like John Paul II). In general, it’s harder for laypeople to become saints not because they’re less holy, but because the process takes a lot of time and persistence, which usually only religious orders (e.g., the Franciscans, Jesuits, Dominicans, etc.) or dioceses have to spare. You could be the holiest mother or father in the world, but your children may not know all the ins and outs of the canonization process. But don’t give up if you’re not a professionally religious person: the Vatican is trying hard to identify those holy lay people worthy of sainthood, and they’ve canonized quite a few lately. Anyway, people who knew you will naturally start praying to you for help and trying to emulate you. And this “local devotion” can’t be faked: the Vatican recently put into effect new rules to prevent any religious congregation or diocese from claiming that people have a real devotion to you, if they really don’t.”<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Fr. James Martin, “How to Become a Saint in Ten Steps,” < <http://www.beliefnet.com/Faiths/Christianity/Catholic/2010/01/How-to-Become-a-Saint.aspx>>.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

### 4. Your Life Is Investigated

“If the local bishop sees that a “devotion” has risen up naturally then he’ll open an investigation into your life and start the canonization ball rolling. Why the local bishop? Because, presumably, those who lived near you know best if you were truly holy. The bishop will (along with a “postulator,” someone in charge of your “cause,” or case) gather together your writings and interview those who knew you to determine if you’re worthy of “public veneration.” At this point, you are called a “Servant of God.” Congratulations. That’s a big step.”<sup>110</sup>

### 5. Your Local Bishop Sends Your Case to the Vatican

“If the bishop’s investigations show that you led a holy life, the Vatican’s Congregation for the Causes of Saints (which is concerned with recognizing saints) will review the case, and, if it agrees, declare that you led a life of “heroic virtue.” At this point, you are called “Venerable.” Catholics are now encouraged to start praying to you for a miracle, if they haven’t already. So you need to start listening from your post in heaven and asking God for a miracle—usually, the healing of an incurable illness.”<sup>111</sup>

### 6. Pray for a Miracle

“Remember: even as a soon-to-be saint you can’t do miracles—only God can. All you do is “intercede,” you pray to God. Theoretically, in heaven you’re in closer to God, which is why people are asking for your help. Another aside: Catholics don’t “worship” the saints. They worship God alone. They “venerate,” or respect the saints. These distinctions—who’s praying and who’s doing the miracle—are important.”<sup>112</sup>

### 7. The Vatican Investigates the Miraculous Cure

“When it comes to declaring a miracle, the church’s standards are extraordinarily high, higher than almost anyone might expect. The miracle—usually a physical healing—is investigated by scientists (often non-Catholics) and must satisfy the following requirements. It has to be: verified by medical records (that is, scientific proof that there was a real medical condition, as well as proof that it is now gone); instantaneous (that is, not a long-drawn out healing), not attributable to any other cause (the healed person can’t say, “I’ve been taking these drugs and I had a miracle”); non-recurring (he can’t say, “I got better but then worse”); and not attributable to any other saint (he can’t say, “I was praying to lots of saints beside you). So the bar is high. If the miracle is accepted as authentic, then...”<sup>113</sup>

### 8. The Vatican Declares You “Blessed”

“In a special “beatification” Mass, normally presided over by the pope but sometimes by the local bishop, the Catholic church declares you “blessed,” and formally proclaims that you are in heaven (though you knew this already, having been there all this time). You are given a “feast day” for Catholics to celebrate your life (normally, the day of your death, or “entrance” into heaven). Churches in your local diocese can be named after you. By the way, if you died a “martyr” (from the Greek word for witness) the pope can skip all the intermediate steps and declare you a blessed, since you gave your life for God.”<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

### 9. Pray for Another Miracle

And let's say that God grants this second miracle. Afterwards, the Vatican investigates the healing, with the same high standards as the first one, and declares it a miracle. You're really close to sainthood now. But don't let it go to your head: keep your humility; otherwise you'll be a lousy saint. Keeping your humility shouldn't be too hard, though, considering you're in God's presence all the time.

### 10. You're a Saint!

"The pope declares you a saint, in a solemn ceremony known as "canonization," usually at a public Mass, perhaps in Rome but perhaps in your own diocese as a way of celebrating your heritage. You are now worthy of "public veneration" throughout the entire church, and the entire church may celebrate your feast day. Many more schools, parishes and Catholic groups will take you as their "patron," or special protector. You've made it! You're part of the great "communion of saints." But since you're infinitely happy already in heaven, it probably won't add much to your joy. In fact, you've now got more work to do, because even more people will be praying for your intercession. So you'll be very busy from now until the end of time."<sup>115</sup>

## **5. The Cost of Sainthood**

\*Costs have been converted from Italian Lire to U.S. dollars at the 1913 exchange rate (1.93) and then converted into current amounts based on approximate inflation. That said, these numbers are at best approximations.

To decoration of the Basilica, lights, architectural designs, labor, and superintendence—\$580,820

Procession, Pontifical Mass, preparation of altars in Basilica —\$30,836

Cost of gifts presented to Holy Father — \$5467

Hangings, Sacred Vestments, etc. — \$49,366

Recompense for services and money loaned — \$13,395

To the Vatican Chapter as perquisites for decorations and candles — \$68,403

Propine and Competenza — \$64,359

Incidental and unforeseen expenses — \$16,980

**Total — \$829,626**

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

## PAUL'S USE OF "IN CHRIST"

### **Introduction**

The letters of Paul are shot through with the phrase "in Christ" and its variations. The phrase is one element of the larger idea of union with Christ, a doctrine that has been discussed and refined throughout the history of the church, and which is fundamental to the whole of salvation in Christ.<sup>116</sup> It is in many ways all-encompassing of the Christian experience, and there is more than one way to talk about it. It is largely found in John and Paul, who do not speak of it exactly the same way. This does not mean they differed, only that union with Christ is a vast and almost mysterious idea. It is more like a beautiful image to explore rather than a body of scientific evidence to pick through. This helps explain some of the diversity of thought on the topic.

On union with Christ, Bruce Demarest lists four general ways of understanding the doctrine in the history of the church: (1) Ontological or mystical union—"absorption into the divine life" (Mystical Theologians), (2) Sacramental union—union through partaking of the sacraments (Catholic, Lutheran), (3) Covenantal union—union with Christ in the covenant of grace as opposed to Adam in the covenant of works (Reformed Covenantal Theologians), (4) Moral union—moral and relational union (Liberal, Rationalist), (5) Experiential union—"personal identification and fellowship with the Savior," which is a discrete stage of *ordo salutis* (many Evangelicals).<sup>117</sup>

Paul's use of the phrase "in Christ" has also been debated in modern scholarship. Some have understood Paul as "equating Christ with the Spirit," understanding him as "an all-pervading fluid," while others have connected it to an "early Jewish expectation of a real, physical union of the elect with the Messiah."<sup>118</sup> Some have understood it in the sense of union of all believers into a "corporate personality" with shared experience and destiny, and others prefer to see the language only referring to participation in the saving death and resurrection of Christ.<sup>119</sup> In the twentieth-century, it was prominently argued by some that the mystical idea of "being-in-Christ" is the fundamental element of Pauline theology, even more so than justification by faith, while others have denied or qualified this theory.<sup>120</sup>

Of course, none of this implies that all explanations and explorations are equal, or as biblically faithful. As always, we are anchored by the text of Scripture, which provides the limits for us on this and every subject. So we turn to the biblical texts. Wayne Grudem writes that union with Christ is "a phrase used to

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<sup>116</sup> John Murray writes that the believer "cannot think of past, present, or future apart from union with Christ" (*Redemption Accomplished and Applied* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955], 164). For a brief "crash course" on the doctrine, see Justin Taylor's blog post here: <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justintaylor/2011/02/09/union-with-christ-a-crash-course/>.

<sup>117</sup> Bruce Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation: Foundations of Evangelical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1997), 314-26.

<sup>118</sup> Mark A. Seifrid, "In Christ," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1993), 434. On scholarly history of interpretation, see also Ernest Best, *One Body in Christ: A Study in the Relationship of the Church to Christ in the Epistles of the Apostle Paul* (London: SPCK, 1955), 8-19.

<sup>119</sup> Seifrid, "In Christ," 434.

<sup>120</sup> Two well-known proponents of the former idea have been Albert Schweitzer in the early part of the twentieth-century and E. P. Sanders in the last few decades.

summarize several different relationships between believers and Christ” found in Scripture, “through which Christians receive every benefit of salvation.”<sup>121</sup> He mentions four aspects of these relationships: we are in Christ, Christ is in us, we are like Christ, and we are with Christ.<sup>122</sup> In what follows we are largely interested in what it means that we are “in Christ,” especially as Paul uses the phrase (*en Christō* in Greek). For Paul, the “expression was a habit” out of which he “creates a symphony of language” with several variations, such as “in Christ,” “in him,” and “in the Beloved.”<sup>123</sup> Below we want to explore the phrase and the concept it holds.

We will look first at evidence found in the biblical texts themselves before summarizing and drawing it all together. The phrase is most prominent in the book of Ephesians, which provides our logical starting point.

### **“In Christ” in Ephesians**

#### ***Ephesians 1:3-14***

It is often noted that Ephesians 1:3-14 is a benediction (*berekah*), the most common form of Jewish prayer.<sup>124</sup> The section is actually one long sentence in Greek, which serves as a praise to God while at the same time recounting the glories of salvation in Christ. The phrase, “in Christ,” or a variation of it (e.g., “in him”), saturates the chapter. Thomas Schreiner writes, “The diversity of expressions to describe being in Christ in this one long sentence (Eph 1:3-14) is astonishing, and the sheer repetition of the formula indicates that it is crucial in Pauline thought.”<sup>125</sup> Below is a compilation of every use in Ephesians 1:1-14 (with emphasis added):

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful *in Christ Jesus* (1:1).

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us *in Christ* with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places (1:3).  
Even as he chose us *in him* before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him (1:4).

To the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us *in the Beloved* (1:6).

*In him* we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace (1:7)

Making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth *in him* [ESV: “Christ”] (1:9).

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<sup>121</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 840.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 841.

<sup>123</sup> Lewis B. Smedes, *Union with Christ: A Biblical View of the New Life in Jesus Christ*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 55.

<sup>124</sup> Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 37; Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1990), 10.

<sup>125</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2001), 156.

As a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things *in him*, things in heaven and things on earth (1:10).

*In him* we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will (1:11).

So that we who were the first to hope *in Christ* might be to the praise of his glory (1:12).

*In him* you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit (1:13).

The structure of Ephesians 1:3-14 can even be broken down according to the “in him/Christ” phrases. Below is an adaptation of one commentator’s method for structuring the passage.<sup>126</sup>

Section	Opening	Closing
1:3-6	“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . who has blessed us <i>in Christ</i> .”	“ . . . with which he has blessed us in the <i>in the Beloved</i> .”
1:7-10	“ <i>In him/whom</i> we have redemption”	“ . . . all things in heaven and earth <i>in him</i> .”
1:11-12	“ <i>In whom</i> also we have been made heirs”	“ . . . the first to hope <i>in Christ</i> .”
1:13-14	“ <i>In whom</i> also you . . . believed”	“ . . . for the praise of his glory.”

The final section (1:13-14) is the only one that does not end with a variation of “in Christ,” probably because “for the praise of his glory” serves as a final conclusion of praise to God, like a bookend with “Blessed be God” at the beginning. Note also the Trinitarian character of the passage as it moves from Father choosing, to Christ accomplishing redemption, to Spirit sealing believers, all of which orbits around the idea of being “in him/Christ.”

From this section alone, then, we see several things about believers that take place “in Christ.” First, the saints are “faithful in Christ,” which seems simply to designate the recipients as believers (1:1). Further, in Christ we are blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places (1:3) and chosen before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him (1:4). We are blessed with his grace (1:6) and have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses (1:7). We have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to God’s purpose (1:11), and, finally, we have been sealed with the Holy Spirit (1:13).

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<sup>126</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 43.

### *The Rest of Ephesians*

Paul's "in Christ" language continues throughout Ephesians:

That he worked *in Christ* when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places (1:20).

[God has] raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places *in Christ Jesus*, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us *in Christ Jesus* (2:6-7).

For we are his workmanship, created *in Christ Jesus* for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them (2:10).

But now *in Christ Jesus* you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ (2:13).

*In whom* [i.e., Christ] the whole structure [of the household of God], being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord (2:21).

*In whom* [ESV: "him"] you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit (2:22).

This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise *in Christ Jesus* through the gospel (3:6).

This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized *in Christ Jesus* our Lord (3:11).

To him be glory in the church and *in Christ Jesus* throughout all generations, forever and ever (3:21).

Assuming that you have heard about him and were taught *in him*, as the truth is in Jesus (4:21).

*In whom* we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him (3:12).

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God *in Christ* forgave you (4:32).

Not every usage here speaks of believers being in Christ, but many of them do. Believers are raised with Christ and caused to sit with him in the heavenly places (2:6). We are shown the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in the coming ages (2:7). We are created for good works (2:10). Gentiles, once far off and separate from the promises made to Israel, are brought near and partake of same promise (2:13; 3:6). The household of God grows into a holy temple (2:21), and in him we are being built into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit (2:22). We have boldness and access to God (3:12). We are forgiven (4:32).

As is usually the case with the phrase in Paul, each exact usage in Ephesians is best determined from context. For example, while some have more of an instrumental sense, "through Christ's agency," others have a more "local" sense that involves incorporation into Christ.<sup>127</sup> It is difficult to say Paul means only one thing every time he uses the phrase.

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<sup>127</sup> Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 97 n. 49.

### “In Christ” Elsewhere in Paul

While the phrase is prominent in Ephesians, it is found in many other places in Paul. For space purposes, only a few important examples have been given below:<sup>128</sup>

So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God *in Christ Jesus* (Rom 6:11).

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are *in Christ Jesus* (Rom 8:1).

So we, though many, are one body *in Christ*, and individually members one of another (Rom 12:5).

And because of him you are *in Christ Jesus*, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption (1 Cor 1:30).

For as in Adam all die, so also *in Christ* shall all be made alive (1 Cor 15:22).

Therefore, if anyone is *in Christ*, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come (2 Cor 5:17).

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one *in Christ Jesus* (Gal 3:28).

For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found *in him*, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith (Phil 3:8-9).

For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead *in Christ* will rise first (1 Thess 4:16).

Who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us *in Christ Jesus* before the ages began (2 Tim 1:9).

### What to Make of It

What can we take away from all this biblical evidence? First, Paul likes this idea a lot. The phrase “in Christ” and its variations, such as “in the Lord” and “in him,” occur 216 times in Paul.<sup>129</sup> They are, however, nearly absent from the rest of the NT except the writings of John, where we often find its use with the pronoun: “*In him* was life, and the life was the light of men” (John 1:4), “Whoever abides *in me* and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit” (John 15:5), and, “By this we know that we abide *in him* and

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<sup>128</sup> As an illustration of how often the phrase is used, a search on the exact phrase “in Christ” in Greek turns up the following: Rom 3:24; 6:11, 23; 8:1, 2, 39; 9:1; 12:5; 15:17; 16:3, 7, 9, 10; 1 Cor 1:2, 4, 30; 3:1; 4:10, 15, 17; 15:18, 19, 31; 16:24; 2 Cor 2:17; 3:14; 5:17, 19; 12:2, 19; Gal 1:22; 2:4, 17; 3:14, 26, 28; Eph 1:1, 3; 2:6, 7, 10, 13; 3:6, 21; 4:32; Phil 1:1, 13, 26; 2:1, 5; 3:3, 14; 4:7, 19, 21; Col 1:2, 4, 28; 1 Thess 2:14; 4:16; 5:18; 1 Tim 1:14; 3:13; 2 Tim 1:1, 9, 13; 2:1, 10; 3:12, 15; Phlm 1:8, 20, 23. This does not include variations like “in him” or phrases that are worded differently but have the same idea. Additionally, not all of those above are used in a way to describe believers being “in Christ,” though many are.

<sup>129</sup> Demarest, *Cross and Salvation*, 313.

he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit” (1 John 4:13).<sup>130</sup> However, John’s use is not exactly the same as Paul’s (e.g., Paul does not emphasize as much as John the idea of Christ in *us*).<sup>131</sup> All this to say that the idea of being “in Christ” is highly significant for Paul.

But beyond the fact he is fond of the idea, it is hard to give an overall statement that says, “Paul liked it, and this is what he meant by it: \_\_\_\_\_.” As Mark Seifrid writes, the expression “is used over a triangular field of meaning rather than in a single, ‘technical’ sense.”<sup>132</sup> In one corner you find a local sense (“certain ones/churches [are] in Christ”), in another Christ is an instrument of God (“God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ [2 Cor 5:19]), and in another the phrase refers to manner of an action (“I speak the truth in Christ” [Rom 9:1])—Paul’s use of the phrase moves between these ideas of “locality, instrumentality and modality.”<sup>133</sup> Similarly, Schreiner says Paul’s use “oscillates between the ideas of manner, locality and instrumentality.”<sup>134</sup> Peter O’Brien appears to agree, writing that “the precise force must be derived from each context.”<sup>135</sup>

### ***Christ and Adam***

Despite this variety of meaning, one connection we can note is between Paul’s phrase “in Christ” and his “Adam Christology.” The most important text here is 1 Corinthians 15:21-22, where we read, “For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as *in Adam* all die, so also *in Christ* shall all be made alive” (emphasis added; cf. also Rom 5:12-21). Schreiner explains it this way,

Adam and Christ are the two representative heads for humanity. When Paul says believers are ‘in Christ,’ he means that they are incorporated in Christ rather than in Adam. Christ, not Adam, is now their representative and head. . . . Those who are in Adam experience all the liabilities of being descended from him. Similarly, those in Christ experience all the blessings that accrue to those who belong to God.<sup>136</sup>

Thus, while it is difficult to pin Paul down on only one definition of “in Christ,” it seems that underlying his general usage is the idea that believers are part of the new order and humanity in Christ and have left behind the old order that was in Adam.<sup>137</sup>

### ***A Multifaceted Idea***

Beyond this connection, it may be better to make a comprehensive list of texts and concepts related to the idea and let it all sink in as a multi-dimensional idea rather than trying to limit the phrase to one meaning. Below are a few attempts of different theologians to do this very thing. As with all lists, there will be

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid.; Seifrid, “In Christ,” 433.

<sup>131</sup> Seifrid, “In Christ,” 433.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Schreiner, *Paul*, 158.

<sup>135</sup> O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 97 n. 49. So also A. J. M. Wedderburn, “Some Observations on Paul’s Use of the Phrases ‘In Christ’ and ‘With Christ,’” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 25 (1985): 87.

<sup>136</sup> Schreiner, *Paul*, 158-59.

<sup>137</sup> On this point, see also Michael Parsons, “‘In Christ’ in Paul,” *Vox Evangelica* 18 (1988): 29; R. David Rightmire, “Union with Christ,” in *Baker Theological Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 790-92.

debatable categories and texts within those categories, but, as long as we recognize this, they provide a good overview.

Bruce Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*

Demarest writes, “The *en Christō* and related expressions found in the Pauline writings do not embody a single idea but are elastic phrases that embrace a wide range of meanings.”<sup>138</sup> He breaks them down as follows:

1. Synonym for Christian (Rom 16:7; 2 Cor 12:2; cf. Phlm 16 [probably also Eph 1:1])
2. To mark instrument or agency, “by” or “through Christ” (Rom 3:24; 5:10b; 1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 3:14; 5:19 (cf. v. 18); Gal 2:17; 3:8, 14)
3. To mark locale (Rom 8:39; Phil 2:5)
4. To mark authority, “on the authority of Christ” (1 Thess 4:1)
5. To say “on behalf of Christ” (Phil 1:13)
6. To mark sphere or reference (Rom 16:8-12; 1 Cor 7:39; 15:31, 58; Eph 1:9; 3:11; Phil 3:3; 1 Thess 4:1)
7. To describe “incorporative union or identification with Christ,” which he connects to John’s idea of the “mutual indwelling of believers in Jesus and in the Father” (in Paul he cites, among others, Rom 8:1; 1 Cor 1:30; 15:22; 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 3:28; Eph 1:3-4; Phil 1:1; 3:9; Col 1:28)

Anthony Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*

Hoekema examines the union of Christ and believers, giving the following list (note that not every one uses the formula “in Christ,” though the idea of the text is closely related).<sup>139</sup>

In Christ . . .

1. We are regenerated (Eph 2:4-5, 10)
2. We live out our union with Christ through faith (Gal 2:20; Eph 3:16-17)
3. We are justified (1 Cor 1:30; 2 Cor 5:21; Phil 3:8-9)
4. We are sanctified (1 Cor 1:30; 2 Cor 5:17)
5. We persevere (Rom 8:38-39)
6. We die (Rom 14:8; cf. Rev 14:13)
7. We are raised (Col 3:1; 1 Cor 15:22)
8. We are glorified (Col 3:4; 1 Thess 4:16-17)

Murray Harris, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*

Harris writes, “In the many uses of this common Pauline formula [“in Christ”], the [“in”] has no uniform function but seems to express the following range of relationships.”<sup>140</sup>

1. Incorporative Union (“incorporated into Christ”) (2 Cor 5:17, 21; Rom 8:1)
2. Sphere of reference (2 Cor 12:2; Phil 3:3; Rom 16:7)
3. Agency or instrumentality (“by Christ”) (Rom 3:24; 2 Cor 3:14)
4. Cause (“because of Christ”) (Col 2:10)
5. Mode (Gal 3:28: “You are all one by being in Christ Jesus”)
6. Location (Rom 8:39; Phil 2:5)
7. Authoritative basis (1 Thess 4:1: “on the authority of the Lord Jesus”)

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<sup>138</sup> Demarest, *Cross and Salvation*, 326.

<sup>139</sup> Anthony A. Hoekema, *Saved by Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 59-64.

<sup>140</sup> Murray J. Harris, “Prepositions and Theology in the Greek New Testament,” in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 3:1192.

### Lewis Smedes, *Union with Christ*

Smedes breaks down Paul's "in Christ" theme in the following manner.<sup>141</sup>

1. God Working in Christ (2 Cor 5:19; Rom 3:23; 8:11; Col 2:15)
2. Persons in Christ (2 Cor 5:17; Rom 8:1; Phil 3:9; 1 Cor 15:22; Eph 1:4; 1 Cor 3:1; Eph 4:15; 1 Tess 4:16)
3. The Church in Christ (1 Thess 1:1; 2:14; Phil 1:1; Eph 1:1; Col 1:2; Gal 2:4; Rom 12:5; Gal 3:28)
4. New Life in Christ (1 Cor 1:2; Gal 2:17; 1 Cor 7:22; 2 Cor 5:21; Phil 4:7; Eph 1:3, 12; Gal 3:8, 26)
5. Life's Actions in Christ (1 Cor 1:5; 4:10, 17; 7:39; Gal 5:10; Phil 1:14; 2 Cor 1:19; Rom 16:10)
6. The Apostle in Christ (1 Cor 4:15, 17; 15:31; 2 Cor 2:17; Rom 9:1; Phil 2:1, 19; 4:13; Phlm 8)

### Thomas Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ*

Every spiritual blessing belongs to believers in Christ (Eph 1:3). Those who are in Christ are a new creation (2 Cor 5:17); they are redeemed (Rom 3:24; Eph 1:7) and made sons of God (Gal 3:26). What marks out Christian communities or assemblies, then, is that they are in Christ (Gal 1:22; Col 1:2; cf. 1 Thess 1:1). Both Jews and Gentiles have been brought near to God in Christ (Eph 2:13). God has reconciled the world to himself in Christ (2 Cor 5:19). The blessing of Abraham is available to Jews and Gentiles in Christ (Gal 3:14). Thus, believers from every social class, ethnic group and gender are one in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:28). Believers have been chosen before the world began in Christ (Eph 1:4), and it is only by virtue of God's work that they are in Christ (1 Cor 1:30). No condemnation comes to those in Christ (Rom 8:1), and believers are alive to God in Christ Jesus (Rom 6:11). Believers are seated in the heavenlies with Christ (Eph 2:6) and experience freedom in him (Gal 2:4). When we see the comprehensive blessings that belong to Christ, it is clear that the promise to reclaim the world for God is inaugurated through Christ. The church is a new society that expresses in part what God intended when he made Adam and Eve. The saving promises made to Abraham are becoming a reality in Christ since he reverses the curse and devastation imposed on the world through the first Adam.<sup>142</sup>

### Josh Patterson, *The Village Church*

In a recent blog post, Patterson provides a list of various "in Christ" ideas in Scripture. Below are his Pauline references:<sup>143</sup>

1. In Christ, I am ... resurrected to new life (Rom. 6:5)
2. In Christ, I am ... a slave of righteousness (Rom. 6:18)
3. In Christ, I am ... enslaved to God (Rom. 6:22)
4. In Christ, I am ... a son of God (Rom. 8:14)
5. In Christ, I am ... a joint heir with Christ, sharing His inheritance (Rom. 8:17)
6. In Christ, I am ... the dwelling place of God (1 Cor. 6:19)

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<sup>141</sup> Smedes, *Union with Christ*, 55-58.

<sup>142</sup> Schreiner, *Paul*, 159.

<sup>143</sup> For the full list, see <http://www.thevillagechurch.net/the-village-blog/identity-in-christ-or-apart-from-christ/>.

7. In Christ, I am ... united to the Lord (1 Cor. 6:19)
8. In Christ, I am ... a member of Christ's body (1 Cor. 12:27)
9. In Christ, I am ... what I am, by God's grace (1 Cor. 15:10)
10. In Christ, I am ... a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17)
11. In Christ, I am ... reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:18-19)
12. In Christ, I am ... the seed of Abraham (Gal. 3:29)
13. In Christ, I am ... a saint (Eph. 1:1)
14. In Christ, I am ... an heir of God since I am a son of God (Gal. 4:6-7)
15. In Christ, I am ... blessed with every spiritual blessing (Eph. 1:3)
16. In Christ, I am ... God's workmanship, made to do good works (Eph. 2:10)
17. In Christ, I am ... a fellow citizen of God's family (Eph. 2:11)
18. In Christ, I am ... a prisoner of Christ (Eph. 4:1)
19. In Christ, I am ... righteous and holy (Eph. 4:24)
20. In Christ, I am ... a citizen of heaven (Phil. 3:20)
21. In Christ, I am ... hidden with Christ in God (Col. 3:3)
22. In Christ, I am ... an expression of the life of Christ (Col. 3:4)
23. In Christ, I am ... I am chosen of God, holy and dearly loved (Col. 3:12)
24. In Christ, I am ... a child of light and not of darkness (1 Thess. 5:5)
25. In Christ, I am ... an heir to eternal life (Titus 3:7)

### **Conclusion**

In sum, union with Christ has many elements, as does Paul's use of the phrase "in Christ." Though we can summarize and draw some conclusions, it probably remains wise to treat the phrase in Paul on a text-by-text basis. Still, as a general theological idea, union with Christ could not be more important. Demarest writes that while many of us think of Christ more as a Savior outside of us than as one in whom we dwell and who dwells in us, "the heart of Paul's religion is union with Christ. This more than any other conception . . . is the key which unlocks the secrets of the soul."<sup>144</sup>

While the subject is complex, certainly one of its strongest components is that believers are "in Christ" as he is the representative head of a new humanity, no longer under the dominance of the old order in Adam. Believers are also united to Christ in his death and resurrection. Both of these are more objective elements of union with Christ. However, the more subjective or even mystical element is not entirely absent in Paul, either. As one scholar writes, "In its implication the term ['in Christ'] underlies much of the apostle's explanation of the believer's awareness of the sanctifying work of Christ's Spirit conforming him to the image of the Lord to whom he belongs and in the manifestation of this relationship in the life and communion of the body of Christ, the church."<sup>145</sup> There is an experiential union, by faith, in the power of the Spirit, that believers live in with Christ, transforming them into his image. All of this highlights the complexity but also sheer beauty of union with Christ and what it means to be "in him."

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<sup>144</sup> Demarest, *Cross and Salvation*, 314, quoting James S. Stewart, *A Man in Christ* (New York: Harper, n.d.), 147.

<sup>145</sup> Parsons, "In Christ," 40.

## *HOMILETICAL TIPS*

1. [Eph 1:1-2 & Acts 19](#)
2. [Eph 1:3-14](#)
3. [Eph 1:15-23](#)
4. [Eph 2:1-10](#)
5. [Eph 2:11-22](#)
6. [Eph 3:1-13](#)
7. [Eph 3:14-21](#)
8. [Eph 4:1-6](#)
9. [Eph 4:7-16](#)
10. [Eph 4:17-24](#)
11. [Eph 4:25-32](#)
12. [Eph 5:1-8a](#)
13. [Eph 5:8b-21](#)
14. [Eph 5:22-24](#)
15. [Eph 5:25-33](#)
16. [Eph 6:1-4](#)
17. [Eph 6:5-9](#)
18. [Eph 6:10-20](#)
19. [Eph 6:21-24](#)
20. [Commentaries on Ephesians](#)

## 1. Ephesians 1:1-2 & Acts 19

**Big Idea:** Intro the “Saints in Ephesus”

### Word Studies

- “Saints” (1:1)
  - “The identification of the readers as ‘saints’ (lit. ‘holy ones’) is Paul’s regular description of Christians (cf. 1 Cor. 1:1, 2; 2 Cor. 1:1; rom. 1:1; Phil 1:1). The antecedents of the term are to be found in the Old Testament. Israel was God’s holy people (Exod. 19:6), chosen by him and appointed to his service... Christians are ‘saints’, not in the sense that they are very pious people, but because of the new relationship they have been brought into by God. It is not because of their own doing or good works but on account of what Christ has done.”<sup>146</sup>
  - “He gives the name of saints to those whom he afterwards denominates faithful in Christ Jesus. No man, therefore, is a believer who is not also a saint; and, on the other hand, no man is a saint who is not a believer.”<sup>147</sup>

### Background Info

- The City of Ephesus
  - “Originally a Greek colony, Ephesus was now the capital of the Roman province of Asia and a busy commercial port (long since silted up). It was also the headquarters of the cult of the goddess Diana (or Artemis) whose temple, after being destroyed in the middle of the fourth century BC, had gradually been rebuilt to become one of the seven wonders of the world. Indeed, the success of Paul’s mission in Ephesus had so threatened the sale of silver models of her temple that the silversmiths had stirred up a public outcry.”<sup>148</sup>
- The Riot in Acts 19
  - “The riot of Ephesus was triggered by Paul’s teaching that ‘man-made gods are no gods at all’. Christianity makes no peace with idolatry. The scene at Ephesus was that of the triumph of the gospel over pagan idolatry. The temple of Diana was once one of the seven wonders of the world. Today it has no members. Diana was not so great after all.”<sup>149</sup>

### Theological Meaning

- Martyn Lloyd-Jones: High Doctrine for Ordinary People
  - “Let me emphasize also that this is not a letter addressed to some unusual and exceptional Christian people...but a letter to ordinary church members. That is from every standpoint a most important observation, and for this reason that everything the Apostle says here about Christians and members of churches must therefore be equally true of us. All the

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<sup>146</sup> Peter Thomas O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 87.

<sup>147</sup> John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*, ed. Joseph Haroutunian, Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1958), Comment on Eph 1:2.

<sup>148</sup> John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Ephesians: God's New Society*, Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England: InterVarsity, 1986), 23.

<sup>149</sup> R. C. Sproul, *The Purpose of God: An Exposition of Ephesians* (Fearn: Christian Focus, 1994), 14.

high doctrine which we have in this Epistle is something that you and I are meant to receive.”<sup>150</sup>

### Notables

- Jesus Christ (or Christ Jesus) mentioned three times in the first sentence.

### Illustrations

- **Biblical**
  - What do you think of when you think of a saint? Paintings of biblical figures with halos over their heads? Mother Teresa serving the needy in Kolkata, India? The apostle Paul did not think of saints this way. He thought of Christian men and women like those in Corinth (1 Cor. 1:2) who were abusing spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 14:23), getting drunk on Communion wine (1 Cor. 11:21), and entangled in sexual sin (1 Cor. 5:1; 6:12-20). He calls *these* men and women saints. For Paul, sainthood is not derived from something wonderful you’ve accomplished nor are you eliminated from it by something horrible you’ve done. *Anyone* who is connected to Jesus by faith in his person and work is a saint. God’s saints are your average sinful person who loves Jesus in cities like Ephesus and Corinth—and yours.
- **Christian Classics**
  - God can make even serial killers saints. If the testimony of the convicted cannibalistic killer Jeffrey Dahmer’s conversion to Christ is authentic, God has made him a saint. In *Dark Journey Deep Grace: Jeffrey Dahmer’s Story of Faith*, church minister Roy Ratcliff tells the story of how Dahmer came to faith in Jesus.<sup>151</sup> The sins of a mass murderer are no match for the saving grace of Jesus. God’s great grace can save any sinner and make them holy saints.

## 2. Ephesians 1:3-14

**Big Idea:** Every spiritual blessing we have in Christ from election in eternity past to glorification in eternity future.

### Word Studies

- “in Christ” (1:3)
  - “signifies that God’s gracious gifts come not only through the agency of Christ but also because the recipients are incorporated in him who is himself in the heavenly realm. The phrase *in Christ*, together with its variants ‘in him’ and ‘in whom’ occurs eleven times in the paragraph... This constantly repeated formula has an essential function in the eulogy, which surveys the whole of God’s redemptive plan: it is ‘in Christ’ alone that God has blessed men and women from eternity to eternity.”<sup>152</sup>
  - “Union with Christ is the fountainhead from which flows the Christian’s every spiritual blessing—repentance and faith, pardon, justification, adoption, sanctification, perseverance, and glorification. Chosen in Christ before the creation of the world, and in the divine mind united with Christ in his death and resurrection, the elect, in response to

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<sup>150</sup> Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *God’s Ultimate Purpose: An Exposition of Ephesians 1:1-23* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1979), 23.

<sup>151</sup> Roy Ratcliff, *Dark Journey Deep Grace: Jeffrey Dahmer’s Story of Faith* (Abilene, TX: Leafwood, 2006).

<sup>152</sup> O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 97–98.

God's effectual call, are through God's gift of faith actually united to Christ. Their union with Christ is in no sense the effect of human causation. "The union which the elect have with Christ is the work of God's grace, whereby they are spiritually and mystically, yet really and inseparably, joined to Christ as their head and husband" (Larger Catechism, Question 66). By virtue of his actual union with Christ the Husband in his death and resurrection, the Christian, as Christ's "bride," is forgiven of his sin and liberated from the law—his previous "husband"—and made capable of doing that which he could never do before, namely, "bear holy fruit to God" (*Rom. 7:4–5*). To the degree that the Christian "reckons himself dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus" (*Rom. 6:11*), that is to say, to the degree that the Christian takes seriously the reality of his Spirit-wrought union with Christ, to that degree he will find his definitive sanctification coming to actual expression in his experiential or progressive sanctification. The holiness of the Christian's daily walk directly depends upon his union with the Savior."<sup>153</sup>

- "every spiritual blessing" (1:3)
  - "Everything that Christians have received through God's saving act in Christ is comprehensively summarized in the expression *every spiritual blessing*... The nature of these gracious gifts is made plain in the following words of the eulogy (vv. 4-14), and include election to holiness, adoption as God's sons and daughters, redemption and forgiveness, a knowledge of God's gracious plan to sum up all things in Christ, the gift of the Spirit, and the hope of glory."<sup>154</sup>
- "mystery" (1:9)
  - "In Colossians 'mystery' refers to the heart of Paul's message and has to do with the fulfillment of God's plan of salvation in Christ here and now (1:26-27)."<sup>155</sup>
- "unite all things in him" (1:10)
  - "The unusual verb used here derives from a word meaning the 'main point', 'sum', or 'summary'... Christ is the one *in whom* God chooses to sum up the cosmos, the one in whom he restores harmony to the universe. He is the focal point, not simply the means, the instrument, or the functionary through who all this occurs.... The emphasis is now on a universe that is centered and reunited in Christ. The mystery which God has graciously made known refers to the summing up and bringing together of the fragmented and alienated elements of the universe ('all things') in Christ as the focal point."<sup>156</sup>

### Background Info

- Form of Passage: OT Blessing
  - "This opening passage with its outburst of praise has the form of an extended blessing or *berakah* ("Blessed be God, who has..."); the OT and Jewish worship provide the background for this form."<sup>157</sup>
- OT Form, Unique Content

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<sup>153</sup> Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 739.

<sup>154</sup> O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 95.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 111–12.

<sup>157</sup> Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary 42 (Dallas, TX: Word, 1990), 10.

- “It appears that the eulogy of Eph 1:3-14 is somewhat unique in that its roots are in the OT and in keeping with the Jewish-Hellenistic style, and yet its content goes beyond them.”<sup>158</sup>

### Theological Meaning

- Calvin: Immediate designs (election, redemption, sanctification, etc.) and the chief design (the glory of God).
  - *There are so many theologically rich concepts in this passage, but how do they all fit together? Calvin says that the spectrum of God’s gracious works for his people (immediate designs) all point to the one chief design, the glory of God.*
  - “‘That we should be holy’. This is the immediate, but not the chief design; for there is no absurdity in supposing that the same thing may gain two objects. The design of building is, that there should be a house. This is the immediate design, but the convenience of dwelling in it is the ultimate design. It was necessary to mention this in passing; for we shall immediately find that Paul mentions another design, the glory of God. But there is no contradiction here; for the glory of God is the highest end, to which our sanctification is subordinate.”<sup>159</sup>
  - “Here again he mentions the final cause of salvation; for we must eventually become illustrations of the glory of God.”<sup>160</sup>
- John Stott: Salvation is Trinitarian
  - “He makes what seems to be a deliberate reference to the Trinity. For the origin of the blessing is *the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*, who is also ‘our Father’ (verse 2); its sphere is God the Son, for it is *in Christ*, by virtue of our union with him, that God has blessed us; and its nature is spiritual, *every spiritual blessing*, a phrase which may well mean ‘every blessing of the Holy Spirit’, who as the divine executive applies the work of Christ to our hearts.”<sup>161</sup>
- Charles Hodge: “Spiritual” refers to the Holy Spirit
  - “These blessings are *spiritual* not merely because they pertain to the soul, but because derived from the Holy Spirit, whose presence and influence are the great blessing purchased by Christ.”<sup>162</sup>

### Notables

- In the original Greek these 12 verses (202 words) form one long sentence. This is not uncommon for prayers and hymns.
- In the first 14 verses of Ephesians Jesus is mentioned 15 times.
- “In Christ” (or “Him”, etc.) occurs 11 times in first 14 verses
- “In Christ” (or “Him”, etc.) occurs 36 times in Ephesians

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<sup>158</sup> Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002), 159.

<sup>159</sup> Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*, Comment on Eph 1:4.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, comment on Eph 1:12.

<sup>161</sup> Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, 33.

<sup>162</sup> Charles Hodge, *Ephesians*, Crossway Classic Commentaries (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1994), 28.

## Illustrations

- **Biblical**

- God's people have always been elected unto blessing. One of the first places this theme is found in Scripture is in God's calling of Abraham. God chooses Abraham, an idolatrous moon-worshipper from Ur (Gen. 11:31), and promises to bless him (Gen. 12:2). God did not bless Abraham because Abraham blessed God, but he blessed Abraham because he decided from eternity past to use Abraham as an instrument of his blessing to the nations (Gen. 12:3). God had planned to send his Son Jesus, who would bless every nation on the earth, through the lineage of Abraham (Gal. 3:8, 14). Election is associated with blessing not mainly because of Abraham, but because from eternity past spiritual blessing is linked to Jesus (Eph. 3:3) who is God's agent of lavish grace to a sinful world (Eph. 3:7-8).

- **Christian Classics**

- Charles Spurgeon contrasts God's adoption with human adoption: "A man, when he adopts a child sometimes is moved thereto by its extraordinary beauty, or at other times by its intelligent manners and winning disposition. But, beloved, when God passed by the field in which we were lying, he saw no tears in our eyes till he put them there himself; he saw no contrition in us until he had given us repentance; and there was no beauty in us that could induce him to adopt us—on the contrary, we were everything that was repulsive; and if he had said, when he passed by, 'Thou art cursed, be lost forever,' it would have been nothing but what we might have expected from a God who had been so long provoked, and whose majesty had been so terribly insulted. But no; he found a rebellious child, a filthy, frightful, ugly child; he took it to his bosom, and said, 'Black though thou art, thou art comely in my eyes through my son Jesus; unworthy though thou art, yet I cover thee with his robe, and in thy brother's garments I accept thee;' and taking us, all unholy and unclean, just as we were, he took us to be his—his children his forever."<sup>163</sup>

### **3. Ephesians 1:15-23**

**Big Idea:** A Prayer for thankfulness, knowledge, a church living in light of their resurrection

#### **Word Studies**

- "a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him" (1:17)
  - "Knowledge without wisdom can be a menace; wisdom is that insight into the nature of things, that sense of what is fitting, which enables one to co-ordinate and use one's knowledge aright. Men who know many things are all around us; men of spiritual wisdom are so rare that they are worth far more than their weight in gold. But the knowledge of which the apostle speaks is not primarily a knowledge of things or facts; it

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<sup>163</sup> Charles H. Spurgeon, "Adoption", No. 360, The Charles H. Spurgeon Library, Version 1 (AGES Digital Library CDROM), 183.

is the personal knowledge of God. And this knowledge is impossible unless God is pleased to make Himself known.”<sup>164</sup>

- “having the eyes of your hearts enlightened” (1:18)
  - “The heart in Scripture is the seat of the intelligence and will, and it is this inward vision which needs to be illuminated by the Spirit if we are to know God and appreciate His revealed truth and His eternal purpose.”<sup>165</sup>
- “greatness of his power...of his great might” (1:19)
  - “Not content with the superlative word, he piles synonym on synonym as he describes how God’s ‘power’ (*dynamis*) operates according to the inworking (*inergia*) of the strength (*kratos*) of His might (*ischys*).”<sup>166</sup>
- “he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand” (1:20)
  - “The language of exaltation used here is that of the common early Christian tradition of Christ’s session at the right hand of God, which takes up Ps 110:1, one of the OT most frequently referred to in the NT.”<sup>167</sup>
- “all rule and authority and power and dominion” (1:21)
  - “We must conclude about this list of “powers” that they are to be understood as evil and angelic in character. They cannot be interpreted as good or as both good and evil since the author makes them enemies of Christ through his allusion to Ps 110:1. This is also consistent with the other references to the “powers” in the letter, where they can only be understood as evil (6:11, 12, 16, 2:2; 4:8, 27).”<sup>168</sup>
- “not only in this age, but also in the one to come” (1:21)
  - “Paul himself saw Christian believers as those “upon whom the end of the ages has come” (1 Cor 10:11)...the writer’s emphasis on Christ’s exaltation to heaven and its benefits for the Church indicates clearly that he believes the age to come has already been inaugurated.”<sup>169</sup>
  - Two Ages<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Ephesians: A Verse-by-Verse Exposition* (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1961), 39.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

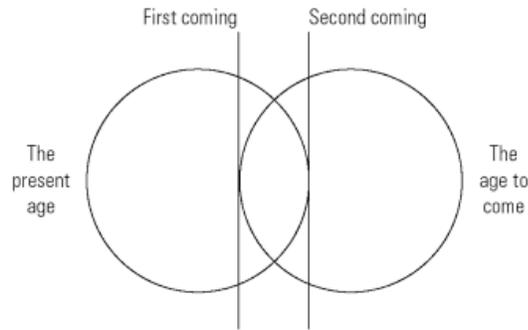
<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>167</sup> Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 61.

<sup>168</sup> Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians, Power and Magic: The Concept of Power in Ephesians in Light of Its Historical Setting* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1992), 56.

<sup>169</sup> Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 65.

<sup>170</sup> Vaughn Roberts, *God's Big Picture: Tracing the Storyline of the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 124.



- “put all things under his feet” (1:22)
  - “The words of Psa. 8:6, first applied to Adam as he left the creative hand of God, are applied to the Second Man who has broken the deadly entail of the fall and by His redemptive work won the sovereignty which is His as Head of the new creation.”<sup>171</sup>
- “his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all” (1:23)
  - “The sequence of thought here seems to be: by his resurrection and ascension Christ is exalted to be Lord of all, he is head of all things for the church; the church is his body intended to express him in the world; more than that, the church is intended to be a full expression of him by being filled by him whose purpose it is to fill everything there is.”<sup>172</sup>

### Background Info

- Prayer in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century
  - “Like pious Jews, pious Christians apparently had a time set aside for prayer each day. Many pious Jews prayed several hours a day, and if Paul continued such a custom we can understand how he could pray for all his churches.”<sup>173</sup>
- Magical Practices in Ephesus
  - “1) Ephesus had a reputation for a prolificity of magical practices. Since Ephesus was the leading city of Asia Minor, its influence in the sphere of magic very likely extended throughout the province. 2) Magic was primarily concerned with the acquisition of supernatural powers and the manipulation of the spirit world in the interest of the magician. The magical papyri give us a rare insight into the beliefs and fears of the common people in the Hellenistic world. 3) Hellenistic magic is therefore quite relevant to our study in Ephesians. It was widely practiced in the area to which the epistle was written and it was chiefly concerned with ‘power’ and supernatural ‘powers.’”<sup>174</sup>

### Theological Meaning

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<sup>171</sup> Bruce, *The Epistle to the Ephesians*, 43.

<sup>172</sup> Francis Foulkes, *The Letter of Paul to the Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, 2nd ed., Tyndale New Testament Commentaries 10 (Leicester, England: InterVarsity, 1989), 76.

<sup>173</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), Comment on Eph 1:15-16.

<sup>174</sup> Arnold, *Ephesians, Power and Magic*, 20.

- Clinton Arnold: Christ Above All Powers
  - “In the prayer in Eph 1:15-23, the writer wants to impress indelibly upon his readers that no conceivable being can even come close to matching Christ in power or authority. Upon raising Christ from the dead, almighty God exalted him to a position of unrivaled authority from where he exercises his lordship. The significant Christological statements in the prayer are made by the author for their direct ecclesiological relevance – the church now shares in this resurrection power. The goal of the prayer is that the readers will be made aware of and appropriate this unsurpassed power which is available to them.”<sup>175</sup>
- F. F. Bruce: What About the Cross?
  - “When the New Testament writers wish to show the fullness of God’s love, they point to the death of Christ... (Rom 5:8). But if the death of Christ is the chief demonstration of the love of God, the chief demonstration of His power is the resurrection of Christ.”<sup>176</sup>
- Herman Bavinck: Death, Resurrection, and Exaltation
  - “It is the crucified but also the resurrected and exalted Christ whom the apostles proclaim. From the vantage point of the exaltation of Christ, they view and describe his early life, suffering, and death. For the work he now carries out as the exalted mediator, he laid the foundations in his cross. In his battle with sin, the world, and Satan, the cross has been his only weapon. By the cross he triumphed in the sphere of justice over all powers that are hostile to God. But in the state of exaltation, consequently, he has also been given the divine right, the divine appointment, the royal power and prerogatives to carry out the work of re-creation in full, to conquer all his enemies, to save all those who have been given him, and to perfect the entire kingdom of God.”<sup>177</sup>
- J. A. Fitzmeyer: Christ’s Resurrection is the Beginning of the New Creation
  - The resurrection power “emanates from the Father, raises Jesus from the dead at the resurrection, endows him with a new vitality, and finally proceeds from him as the life-giving, vitalizing force of the ‘new creation’ and the new life that Christians in union with Christ experience and live.”<sup>178</sup>

### Notables

- In the original Greek this entire passage is one long sentence.
- The noun “love” occurs more often in Ephesians than in any other Pauline epistle except 1 Corinthians (which of course is much longer).

### Illustrations

- **Biblical**
  - For a person to be given a rich inheritance from God is one thing, but for men and women to be said to be the inheritance of God is another thing altogether. Jesus tells the story of one son who squanders the generous inheritance given to him by his father on foolish living, and a father who loving and graciously accepts his son back into his own house with all the rights and privileges of sonship (Luke 15:11-32). We all in one way or another squander the rich inheritance that Jesus has given us, and God not only continues to pour out a rich inheritance but he speaks of us as his own inheritance. He delights not only in generously giving sinful people a great inheritance, but he takes delight in saving

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>176</sup> Bruce, *The Epistle to the Ephesians*, 41.

<sup>177</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 3:473-74.

<sup>178</sup> Quoted in O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 139.

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his people from their sins and enjoying them forever. Like the father in Jesus' parable, God delights to receive (Luke 15:27) his redeemed people and celebrate (Luke 15:32) with them in eternity. Prayer itself should be seen in this context. God delights to be with his people. Therefore his people can pray with the kind of exuberance and confidence that Paul prays with.

- **Christian Classics**

- Paul's prayer here overflows with praise. Prayer and praise are regularly commingled in his letters. He could rarely ask God for something without praising him for something else. In this passage his prayer for the Ephesians is soaked in praise. The final moments of John Wesley's life resulted in a similar holy combination. One who was with him, Betsy Ritchie, says that Wesley would ask those who were with him to pray and praise. She writes, "...he called me to him and said, 'Betsy, you Mr. Bradford, and the others pray and praise.' We knelt down, and truly our hearts were filled with the Divine Presence; the room seemed to be filled with God."<sup>179</sup>

#### 4. Ephesians 2:1-10

**Big Idea:** Jesus Conquered Satan and death to save us by grace through faith to "walk" in good works

#### Word Studies

- "sons of disobedience...children of wrath (2:2-3)
  - "The word 'son' has 'the thought of individual freedom, and the dignity or responsibility of personal choice,' while 'child' depicts a close relationship and dependence on the parent. One does not call an eighteen-year-old male in the family a child but a son. Thus to be a son of disobedience is one who by his own choice disobeyed God. To be a child of wrath is one who by his relationship to his parent or ancestor comes under God's wrath... Hence, the unregenerate not only has the distinction of being called a son of disobedience but also a child of wrath."<sup>180</sup>
- "we were dead in our trespasses" (2:5)
  - "Paul has spoken of the plight of sinners and reverts to it now by drawing attention to the end results – "we were dead in trespasses." This is not the death that we all undergo at the end of our mortal life, but a state of estrangement from God, which means the absence of all life that is worth calling life."<sup>181</sup>
- "so that in the coming ages he might show" (2:7)
  - "The reason God quickened, raised, and seated believers together with Christ is that he might demonstrate his grace in the coming ages."<sup>182</sup>
- "immeasurable riches of his grace" (2:7)
  - "The riches of God's grace are boundless. God's grace is not rationed out, so to speak, so that when we have received a certain amount it is cut off. Nor can we say that if we slip into sin it is cut off. God's grace is exceeding great and it is lavished on sinful and

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<sup>179</sup> *The Journal of John Wesley*, Percy Livingstone Parker ed., (Chicago: IL: Moody Press), 418.

<sup>180</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 322.

<sup>181</sup> Leon Morris, *Expository Reflections on the Letter to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994), 47.

<sup>182</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 337.

imperfect people... No matter how great our sin, God's grace is more than sufficient to meet our need."<sup>183</sup>

- “by grace” (2:8)
  - “...is mentioned first for the sake of emphasis”<sup>184</sup>
- “through faith” (2:8)
  - “Whereas ‘grace’ is the objective cause or basis of salvation, ‘through faith’ is the subjective means by which one is saved. This is important, for the salvation that was purchased by Christ’s death is universal in its provision, but it is not universal in its application. One is not automatically saved because Christ died, but one is saved when one puts trust in God’s gracious provision.”<sup>185</sup>
- “and this...is the gift of God” (2:8)
  - “The neuter pronoun ‘this’ may refer to one of three things: the ‘grace,’ the verb ‘saved,’ the noun ‘faith.’”
  - “*Touto* [this] is probably best taken, therefore, as referring to the preceding clause as a whole, and thus to the whole process of salvation it describes, which of course includes faith as it means.”<sup>186</sup>
- “We are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus” (2:10)
  - “Paul adds to this that we are God’s workmanship. He does not refer here to God’s creation of us and to his setting of us in this world, but his meaning is that men, as they are born in Adam, are unfit for the heavenly life, and that if they think they will gain anything by that, they greatly deceive themselves, because they are but as dead creatures and as carcasses in which is nothing but rotteness. For proof of this we need seek no further than this present word, in which he says that we are created in Jesus Christ. Here therefore St. Paul draws a comparison with the double birth of which all the faithful partake. For we have all of us one general creation by which we live in this world, but God creates us new again when he vouchsafes to give us newness of life by his gospel.”<sup>187</sup>

### Background Info

- “the prince of the power of the air” (2:2)
  - “For the people of that time, the gods were held to live in heaven while humans had their abode on earth. The air in between was regarded as the home of spirits, beings intermediate between the gods and people. Many of the spirits were seen as evil. Paul is using this popular conception to bring out the truth that Satan is served by hosts of spirit beings and that it was these spirits that had been dominant in the lives of the Ephesians before they came to know the freedom that Christ gives.”<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> Morris, *Expository Reflections on the Letter to the Ephesians*, 52.

<sup>184</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 340.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, 341.

<sup>186</sup> Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 112.

<sup>187</sup> Jean Calvin, *Sermons on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, Revised Translation. (London: Banner of Truth, 1973), 160-61.

<sup>188</sup> Morris, *Expository Reflections on the Letter to the Ephesians*, 43.

### Theological Meaning

- Calvin: God’s Glory in Salvation
  - “Paul has shown so far that our salvation is the true mirror in which to behold the infinite glory of God, for it is his will to be known by his goodness above all things.”<sup>189</sup>
- Clement of Alexandria (c. 200): The Same Story From Eden
  - “Therefore (for the seducer is one and the same) he that at the beginning brought Eve down to death, now brings thither the rest of mankind. Our ally and helper, too, is one and the same—the Lord, who from the beginning gave revelations by prophecy, but now plainly calls to salvation... Therefore, let us flee from “the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience,” and let us run to the Lord the saviour...”<sup>190</sup>

### Notables

- “The apostle chooses not to explain the grace of God until he makes inescapably clear the desperate need of human beings.”<sup>191</sup>

### Illustrations

- **Biblical**
  - Noah was a righteous man who lived his life walking with God (Gen. 6:9) and trusting his word (Gen. 6:22). His righteousness did not reside within himself, but stemmed from God gracious favor (Gen. 6:8). In the midst of a sinful generation like our own, Noah trusted God believing his word and walking in the good works that God had planned for him. He believed that God was going to judge the earth, and from that belief he obeyed God and built an ark of salvation for him and his family. In doing so, he models the righteousness that comes by faith and the good works that such a life exhibits (Heb. 11:7).
- **Christian Classics**
  - Charles Spurgeon gives several illustrations for the kind of faith that works: “Faith is the root of obedience, and this may be clearly seen in the affairs of life. When a captain trusts a pilot to steer his vessel into port he manages the vessel according to his direction. When a traveler trusts a guide to conduct him over a difficult pass, he follows the track which his guide points out. When a patient believes in a physician, he carefully follows his prescriptions and directions. Faith which refuses to obey the commands of the Savior is a mere pretense, and will never save the soul. We trust Jesus to save us; He gives us directions as to the way of salvation; we follow those directions and are saved.”<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Calvin, *Sermons on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, 155.

<sup>190</sup> Clement of Alexandria, “Exhortation To The Heathen,” in *Fathers of the Second Century: Hermas, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, and Clement of Alexandria*, ed. Phillip Schaff, ANF 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2004), ch. 1.

<sup>191</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 307.

<sup>192</sup> Charles H. Spurgeon, *All of Grace*, The Charles H. Spurgeon Library, Version 1 (AGES Digital Library CDROM), 40.

### 5. Ephesians 2:11-22

**Big Idea:** Jews and Gentiles are reconciled in Jesus Christ

#### Word Studies

- “called ‘the uncircumcision’ by what is called the circumcision” (2:11)
  - “Circumcision...was sufficiently distinctive in the first century for them [the Jews] to be called the ‘circumcision’, while they dismissed the rest of the world as the ‘uncircumcision’. For Jews circumcision, which had been given by God to Abraham (Gen. 17), was the physical sign of their covenant with the Lord.”<sup>193</sup>
- “one new man” (2:15)
  - “Once the divisive law by which Jews and Gentiles had been alienated from one another was set aside, there was nothing to keep the two elements of humanity apart. Christ brought them together in a sovereign act that was nothing less than a new creation. Paul has already spoken of God’s salvation in terms of a new creation (2:10). Believers are his workmanship who have already been *created* in Christ Jesus for good works, and these are part of God’s intention for that new creation. Here in v. 15 the same creation language is employed for this new creation, but now the focus of attention (as throughout vv. 14-18) is on Christ’s mighty work: he is the creator of a new humanity through his death.”<sup>194</sup>
- “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets” (2:20)
  - “Since apostles and prophets were both groups with a teaching role, it seems clear that what constitutes the church’s foundation is neither their person nor their office but their instruction... In practical terms this means that the church is built on the New Testament Scriptures.”<sup>195</sup>

#### Background Info

- Circumcision
  - “In ancient Jewish beliefs, non-Jews could never participate in the fullness of the covenant without circumcision, although they could be saved by keeping some basic commandments. To be circumcised was to be grafted into the community of Israel, to become part of God’s covenant people.”<sup>196</sup>
- Cornerstone
  - “Paul derived the image of Christ as the cornerstone from Ps 118:22, probably via Jesus’ teaching... Mk 11:10.”<sup>197</sup>
- Dividing Wall of Hostility
  - The Jewish Historian Josephus (37-c. 100 AD) describes the dividing wall, saying that the temple was “encompassed by a stone a stone wall for a partition, with an inscription which forbade any foreigner to go in under pain of death.”<sup>198</sup> “A partition made of stone

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<sup>193</sup> O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 211.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 199-200.

<sup>195</sup> Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, 106-07.

<sup>196</sup> Keener, *IVP Bible Background*, Comment on Eph 2:11-13.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., Comment on 2:19-22.

<sup>198</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities*, XV. 11.5.

all round, whose height was three cubits. Its construction was very elegant; upon it stood pillars at equal distance from one another, declaring the law of purity, some in Greek and some in Roman letters, that ‘no foreigner should go within that sanctuary.’”<sup>199</sup>

- “Paul writes this letter from prison because he has been falsely charged with taking a non-Jew inside the temple in Jerusalem (Acts 21:28). Taking a non-Jew beyond a particular dividing point in the temple was such an important breach of Jewish law that the Romans even permitted Jewish leaders to execute violators of this law. Paul’s readers in Ephesus and Asia undoubtedly know why Paul is in prison (Acts 21:27, 29); thus for them, as well as for Paul, there can be no greater symbol of the barrier between Jew and non-Jew than “the dividing wall” of verse 14. But Paul says that this dividing wall is shattered in Christ.”<sup>200</sup>
- Racism in NT Context
  - “Around the time Paul was writing these words, arguing for racial unity in Christ, Jews and Syrians were massacring each other in the streets of Caesarea, a city where he had been not long before (Acts 23:23). Here Paul does not simply mimic a common stand against racism in his culture; he condemns racism and segregation of a religious institution even though he has to challenge his culture to do so.”<sup>201</sup>
- Jew and Gentile in NT Context
  - “The Jew had an immense contempt for the Gentile. The Gentiles, said the Jews, were created by God to be fuel for the fires of hell. God, they said, loves only Israel of all the nations that he had made... It was not even lawful to render help to a Gentile mother in her hour of sorest need, for that would simply be to bring another Gentile into the world. Until Christ came, the gentiles were an object of contempt to the Jews. The barrier between them was absolute. If a Jewish boy married a Gentile girl, or if a Jewish girl married a Gentile boy, the funeral of that Jewish boy or girl was carried out. Such contact with a Gentile was the equivalent of death.”<sup>202</sup>

### Theological Meaning

- G. K. Beale: The dwelling place of God (temple) in Christ and his Body (church) (2:21-22)
  - “The phrase ‘temple of God’ in the Old Testament referred to that place where God’s presence uniquely dwelt on earth... The focus is now on the whole covenant community forming a spiritual temple in which God’s presence dwells... Christ has identified his body as the true temple.... Therefore, Christians who are identified with Christ are also presently identified with the temple.”<sup>203</sup>
- Athanasius: Christ spreads his arms on the cross to the Jews and the Gentiles
  - “Again, if the Lord’s death is the ransom of all, and by His death “the middle wall of partition” is broken down, and the calling of the nations is brought about, how would He have called us to Him, had He not been crucified? For it is only on the cross that a man dies with his hands spread out. Whence it was fitting for the Lord to bear this also and to

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<sup>199</sup> Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, V.5.2.

<sup>200</sup> Keener, *IVP Bible Background*, Comment on Eph 2:14-16.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, Comment on Eph 2:19-22.

<sup>202</sup> William Barclay, quoted in Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, 91.

<sup>203</sup> G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Temple* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 316–17.

spread out His hands, that with the one He might draw the ancient people, and with the other those from the Gentiles, and unite both in Himself.”<sup>204</sup>

### Illustrations

- **Biblical**
  - One of the places in the Old Testament where God’s heart for reconciliation of Jew and Gentile takes place is in the story of Naaman, the gentile king of Syria, who was a leper, and a little Jewish girl who had been taken from her homeland by Naaman’s Syrian raiders (2 Kings 5:1-14). This little girl could have been angry and bitter toward her captor, but instead desires his healing. Through the maiden and the work of Elisha the prophet, God heals Naaman of his leprosy and makes him clean. The heart of God for the salvation of all peoples and races is seen in the eyes of the little girl, and is epitomized in the work of Jesus Christ who makes all nationalities who trust him unified and one (Eph. 2:15).
- **Christian Classics**
  - Martin Luther King Jr.’s “Letter from a Birmingham Jail”, written during the civil rights movement of the early 1960’s, is similar to the imprisoned Paul’s letter to the Ephesians in that both demonstrate how the gospel of Jesus has social and racial implications. Paul proclaimed the reality of the unity of Jew and Gentile in the person and work of Jesus Christ, and Martin Luther King Jr. pleaded with the white church in America to recognize the brotherhood of African Americans. He states, “In the midst of a mighty struggle to rid our nation of racial and economic injustice, I have heard many ministers say: ‘Those are social issues, with which the gospel has no real concern.’ And I have watched many churches commit themselves to a completely other worldly religion which makes a strange, un-Biblical distinction between body and soul, between the sacred and the secular.”<sup>205</sup>

## 6. Ephesians 3:1-13

**Big Idea:** Writing from prison, Paul speaks of God’s plan to reconcile nations to himself through Jesus Christ.

### Word Studies

- “the mystery” (3:3)
  - In Eph 1:9-10 ‘mystery’ “referred to God’s all-inclusive purpose which has its ultimate goal the uniting of all things in heaven and earth in Christ. Here, a more limited dimension to the mystery focuses on Gentiles, along with Jews, being incorporated into the body of Christ and thus participating in the divine salvation.”<sup>206</sup>
- “made known to me by revelation” (3:3)

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<sup>204</sup> Athanasius, *St. Athanasius on the Incarnation* (London: Mowbray, 1953), 25.3.

<sup>205</sup> Martin Luther King Jr., “Letter from Birmingham Jail”, April 16, 1963, African Studies Center, University of Pennsylvania, Accessed online: [http://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles\\_Gen/Letter\\_Birmingham.html](http://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Letter_Birmingham.html) (August 14, 2010).

<sup>206</sup> O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 228.

- “The *revelation* granted to Paul occurred on the Damascus road when ‘God...was pleased to reveal his Son in me’ (Gal. 1:12, 15-16).”<sup>207</sup>
- “least of all the saints...unsearchable riches of Christ” (3:8)
  - “Here are the noblest strains of eloquence to paint the exceeding low opinion the apostle had of himself, and the fullness of unfathomable blessings which are treasured up in Christ.”<sup>208</sup>
- “rulers and authorities in the heavenly places” (3:10)
  - “The rulers in question are probably the whole host of heavenly beings; not merely God’s angels nor merely the evil powers of 6:12 but both.”<sup>209</sup>
- “through the church the manifold wisdom of God might be made known” (3:10)
  - “There can be no doubt that the apostle labors to place in the strongest light the mercy of God toward the Gentiles, and the high value of the gospel. For this purpose he declares, that the preaching of the gospel exhibits the manifold grace of God, with which, till now, the heavenly angels themselves were unacquainted. The wisdom of God, therefore, which was manifested by uniting Jews and Gentiles in the fellowship of the gospel, ought to be regarded by men with the highest admiration.”<sup>210</sup>
- “according to the eternal purpose” (3:11)
  - “How carefully does he guard against the objection, that the purpose of God has been changed! A third time, he repeats that the decree was eternal and unchangeable, but must be carried into effect by *Christ Jesus our Lord*, because in him it was made. Thus he declares, that the proper time for publishing this decree belongs to the kingdom of Christ.”<sup>211</sup>

### Background Info

- “Stewards”
  - “‘Stewards’ were household managers, often slaves or freedmen, with great responsibility and prestige in a wealthy home.”<sup>212</sup>
- “Mystery”
  - “The term translated “mystery” was used in mystery cults and elsewhere, but the main background for Paul’s use of the term is in Daniel 2.”<sup>213</sup>

### Theological Meaning

- John Stott: The gospel impacts more than individuals
  - “The good news of the unsearchable riches of Christ which Paul preached is that he died and rose again not only to save sinners like me (though he did), but also to create a single

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<sup>207</sup> Ibid., 228-29.

<sup>208</sup> John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament* (Salem, Ohio: Schmul, 1976), Comment on Eph 3:8.

<sup>209</sup> D. A. Carson et al., eds., *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, 4th ed. (Leicester, England: InterVarsity, 1994), 1233.

<sup>210</sup> Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*, Comment on Eph 3:10.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., Comment on Eph 3:11.

<sup>212</sup> Keener, *IVP Bible Background*, Comment on Eph 3:1-2.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., Comment on Eph 3:5-6.

new humanity; not only to redeem us from sin but also to adopt us into God's family; not only to reconcile us to God but also to reconcile us to one another. Thus the church is an integral part of the gospel. The gospel is good news of a new society as well as of a new life."<sup>214</sup>

### Illustrations

- **Biblical**

- God's people have always included foreigners. The prophet Isaiah tells of a coming time when God's people will consist of all nations (Is. 66:18). Surprisingly, Isaiah prophesies that people of Gentile nations will declare his glory and that he will even take some for priests and Levites (Is. 66:21). God will take those who are not ethnic Israel and make them Israel. In other words, those who were not God's people are now made a people. Because of the work of Jesus any person from any race and culture who trusts Jesus is a part of God's people.

- **Christian Classics**

- The ex-slave trader and author of "Amazing Grace", John Newton, was a man on a mission to make the grace of Jesus known. Like Paul he was radically converted from a despicable former life of violence and called for racial reconciliation through the gospel of Jesus Christ. After Newton's conversion he went from a life as a slave-ship captain by selling African slaves, to becoming instrumental in the squelching of the British slave trade. He became good friends with the British politician William Wilberforce and also a pastoral figure to him. Wilberforce was a central political player in the abolitionist movement in Great Britain, and Newton encouraged him continue on in politics when Wilberforce considered moving into the pastorate.<sup>215</sup> The loss of Wilberforce to the abolitionist cause would have been devastating.<sup>216</sup>
- E.M. Bounds, the nineteenth and twentieth century man of prayer, wrote, "Prayer has all the force of God in it. Prayer can get anything which God has. Thus prayer has all of its plea and its claim in the name of Jesus Christ, and there is nothing too good or great for God to give that name."<sup>217</sup> Any Christian can pray with the kind of passion and overwhelming exuberance that Paul demonstrates in this passage, because of confidence in who God is and what he has done through Jesus (Eph. 3:11-12). God has given every believer unencumbered access to him.

## 7. Ephesians 3:14-21

**Big Idea:** Paul again prays for the indwelling power of God in the church to do more than they dare to even dream for Jesus Christ

### Word Studies

- "the Father, from whom every family...on earth is named" (3:14-15)

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<sup>214</sup> Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, 128-29.

<sup>215</sup> *John Newton: From Disgrace to Amazing Grace*, (Wheaton, IL: Good News Publishers, 2007), 22.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>217</sup> *The Reality of Prayer* (1924), *The Complete Works of E.M. Bounds on Prayer*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), 242.

- “From whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name does not teach that God is the spiritual *Father* of every being in the universe. It does not, as claimed by modern liberalism, teach the universal fatherhood of God and the universal brotherhood of man... *Every family in heaven and on earth* refers to the saints of every age – those now *in heaven* and those still remaining *on earth*.”<sup>218</sup>
- “the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge” (3:19)
  - “It is not that it is apart from knowledge, it is not that it is against knowledge, but it goes beyond the head and comes into the heart.”<sup>219</sup>
- “to him be glory” (3:21)
  - “Paul has been explaining God’s eternal plan of salvation, and here he states the purpose of the plan: to bring glory and honour to God. God’s glory is made manifest in the church as those who have experienced salvation live together in unity, serve together in harmony and worship God together without discrimination.”<sup>220</sup>
- “that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (3:19)
  - “The fullness of God, which is best explained as his presence and power, his life and rule, immanent in his creation, has been mediated to believers through Christ, in whom the fullness was present bodily...As believers are strengthened through the Spirit in the inner person, as they allow Christ to dwell in their hearts through faith, and as they know more of the love of Christ, so the process of being filled up to all the fullness of the life and power of God will take place.”<sup>221</sup>
  - “It is this eschatological perspective that explains how the Church, which is already the fullness (cf. 1:23; also Col 2:10), is still to be filled and to attain to the fullness (cf. also 4:13; 5:18). The relationship between what the Church is and what the Church is to become...reflects ultimately the tension between the ‘already’ and the ‘not yet’ which this writer has inherited from Pauline eschatology. What the Church already is in principle, it is increasingly to realize in its experience.”<sup>222</sup>

### Background Info

- Standing During Prayer
  - “The mention of the posture of kneeling in the terminology for prayer is significant, since the more usual Jewish and early Christian practice was to pray standing.”<sup>223</sup>
- End of Prayers and Response to Prayer
  - “Jewish people customarily ended their prayers with a blessing to God; sometimes the blessings closed with “forever and ever” (cf. 1 Chron 16:36; Ps 106:48). It was likewise customary to respond to prayers and benedictions with ‘Amen.’”<sup>224</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> John MacArthur, *Ephesians* (Chicago: Moody, 1986), 102.

<sup>219</sup> Sproul, *The Purpose of God*, 86.

<sup>220</sup> Tokunboh Adeyemo, ed., *Africa Bible Commentary: A One-Volume Commentary Written by 70 African Scholars* (Nairobi, Kenya: WordAlive, 2006), 1433.

<sup>221</sup> Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 214–15.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

<sup>224</sup> Keener, *IVP Bible Background*, Comment on Eph 3:20-21.

### Theological Meaning

- Martin Lloyd-Jones: To *know* the love of God
  - “You can be aware of another’s love to you by the actions of that person, but what love craves for always is a personal statement. Love always desires a personal word; it is not content with the general manifestations. The Apostle is asserting here that it is possible for Christian people to ‘know’ the love of Christ in that personal, immediate, direct, experimental, experiential sense. Over and above the conceptual knowledge there is this experimental knowledge. This is such a glorious possibility that the Apostle says that he is bowing his knees before God the Father and praying incessantly that the Ephesian Christians may know it. He knows that they are believers, he has already reminded them of that; they have been ‘sealed with the Spirit’, and there are many other things which are true of them; but he feels that they do not *know* this love as they should. Not only are they lacking in a conceptual understanding of it, they do not know it in experience as he did; and so his prayer is that they may come to know it in that way.”<sup>225</sup>

### Illustrations

- **Biblical**
  - God answers prayer in wonderfully unimaginable ways. One place this is found in Scripture is when several Christians are praying together in Jerusalem after the murder of James the brother of John and the imprisonment of Peter (Acts 12:1-19). It is probable that the believers were praying for Peter’s deliverance, as they would have been concerned for his life, especially after the martyrdom of James, but the Scripture simply states that they were praying (Acts 12:12). Indeed things would have been quite tense for believers in Jerusalem. Yet even in the act of praying these believers are surprised when God actually answers prayers beyond what they could have imagined, and instead of being in prison Peter winds up at their front door. God had miraculously sent an angel to rescue Peter in prison and get him to the house of these praying believers.
- **Christian Classics**
  - Jonathan Edwards, the significant pastor-revivalist of New England during the Great Awakening in the earlier part of the eighteenth century, felt strongly that prayer for greater visitations of God’s blessing was necessary for the people of God. He wrote, “... undoubtedly, that which God abundantly makes the subject of his *promises*, God’s people should abundantly make the subject of their *prayers*. It also affords them the strongest assurances that their prayers shall be *successful*. With what confidence may we go before God, and pray for that, of which we have so many exceeding precious and glorious promises to plead!”<sup>226</sup> Ephesians 4:14-21 encourages every believer to pray for God’s fullness in their lives with the kind of pleading upon the promises that Edwards calls for, and not to settle for a passive and modest Christian experience.

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<sup>225</sup> Martin Lloyd-Jones, *The Unsearchable Riches of Christ: An Exposition of Ephesians 3:1 to 21* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1980), 235.

<sup>226</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *An Humble Attempt to Promote Explicit Agreement and Visible Union of God’s People, in Extraordinary Prayer, For the Revival of Religion and the Advancement of Christ’s Kingdom on Earth*, The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 2, Reprinted from an 1834 edition in Great Britain, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 291.

## 8. Ephesians 4:1-6

**Big Idea:** Paul exhorts unity among the church

### Word Studies

- “the calling to which you have been called” (4:1)
  - “The calling in question is to share in Christ’s rule over the new creation (1:20-22; 2:6), and to be part of the heavenly temple (2:19-22)... This is not a call for men and women to *build* God’s kingdom; it is a warning to *keep*, stay within (‘Maintain!’) the unity God has already inaugurated in Christ (by the events of 2:11-22) and into which we are brought by the Spirit who brings us Christ and his benefits.”<sup>227</sup>
- “one body...one Spirit...one hope...one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father...” (4:4-6)
  - “The sevenfold use of “one” (*eis, mia, en*) emphasizes unity. First, there is one body (*en soma*), which refers to the universal church... Second, there is the one Spirit (*en pneuma*) referring to the Holy Spirit mentioned in 2:18, 22... Third, there is one hope... defined as eager expectation of the outworking of God’s plan. The hope presented in Ephesians is the reality that all things will be headed up in Christ (1:9)... Fourth, there is one Lord. In the previous the third person of the Trinity was discussed, Paul now considers the second person, Christ. Fifth, there is one faith... the subjective faith which is exercised by all Christians in Christ their Lord... Sixth, there is one baptism... refer[ing] metaphorically to the believer’s baptism into Christ’s death, speaking of the believer’s union with Christ in his death and resurrection... ‘One God and Father of all’... speaks of God the Father. This marks the climax, for God is the one unifying factor in both testaments.”<sup>228</sup>

### Background Info

- ‘Humility’ in Greek Thought
  - “Most Greek writers viewed “meekness” in the sense of “humility” negatively, unless it was the socially appropriate self-abasement of a social inferior to a superior.”<sup>229</sup>

### Theological Meaning

- Trinity in Ephesians

Reference	Father	Son	Spirit
1:3	Blessed be the God and Father	of our Lord Jesus Christ	every spiritual blessing
1:11-13	him who works all things according to his will	to hope in Christ	sealed with the promised Holy Spirit
1:17	God...the Father of glory	our Lord Jesus Christ	a spirit of wisdom and of revelation
2:18	access...to the Father	through him	in one spirit
2:22	a dwelling place for God	in him	by the Spirit

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<sup>227</sup> Carson et al., *New Bible Commentary*, 1235–36.

<sup>228</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 514-18.

<sup>229</sup> Keener, *IVP Bible Background*, Comment on Eph 4:1-2.

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3:2-5	the stewardship of God's grace	the mystery of Christ	revealed...by the Spirit
3:14-17	the Father...the riches of his glory	so that Christ may dwell in your hearts	through his Spirit
4:4-6	one God and Father	one Lord	one Spirit
5:18-20	giving thanks...to God the Father	in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ	be filled with the Spirit

- Cyprian of Carthage (c. 250): Can you stand without the church?
  - “Who, then, is so wicked and faithless, who is so insane with the madness of discord, that either he should believe that the unity of God can be divided, or should dare to rend it—the garment of the Lord—the Church of Christ? ...And again, he says, “Forbearing one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” Do you think that you can stand and live if you withdraw from the Church, building for yourself other homes and a different dwelling...?”<sup>230</sup>

### Illustrations

- **Biblical**
  - Paul practiced what he prayed for, especially regarding the unity of the church. One of Paul's principal displays of unity in his own life was his relationship with John Mark. Paul and Barnabas disagreed over taking John Mark with them again on further mission work (Acts 15:39), because John Mark had deserted Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey (Acts 13:13). However, Paul eventually ministered with John Mark again (Col. 4:10-11), even saying that his companionship was a “comfort” to him, demonstrating that wholehearted unity between brothers can occur again even after painful separation.
- **Christian Classics**
  - One present day example of the kind of unity that Paul calls the church to is the Lausanne movement, which began in 1966 in a partnership between the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association and *Christianity Today*. The Lausanne movement is radically committed to worldwide evangelization and is composed of different Christian individuals and denominations devoted to the spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Time magazine called the Lausanne Congress, held in 1974, “a formidable forum, possibly the widest-ranging meeting of Christians ever held.”<sup>231</sup> This global movement continues today and it is believed that in October of 2010 in Cape Town, South Africa over 4,000 leaders from 200 countries will meet to continue in their passion to have *the whole church take the whole gospel to the whole world*.

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<sup>230</sup> Cyprian of Carthage, *On the Unity of the Church*, Treatise 1, ch. 8.

<sup>231</sup> “About the Lausanne Movement”, Accessed online: <http://www.lausanne.org/about.html> (August 16, 2010).

### 9. Ephesians 4:7-16

**Big Idea:** Paul speaks of growing up in maturity as the church because everyone uses their gifts to serve one another

#### Word Studies

- “he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth” (4:9)
  - “9-10 could be taken in one of three ways. Either that the one who ascended on high also descended into Hades; or that the one who ascended is the one who earlier descended to incarnation and humiliation of the cross; or that the one who ascended also then redescended (in the Spirit) to bring his gifts to humankind. How do we decide? The phrase ‘the lowest parts of the earth’ is probably rightly interpreted by the NIV and GNB, and especially the REB to mean ‘the lowest level (of the universe; as seen from heaven), down to the very earth’, and so we should exclude the first option. The third option is possible, but v 10 suggests that Christ ascends and fills the universe from heaven (see on 1:23 for this), rather than that he redescends from it to bring gifts. The second option is probably to be preferred; the point being that the one who ascended and now fills the world (and gives the different graces to us) is none other than the one who first descended in humility to incarnation and death for us (cf. 2:14-17).”<sup>232</sup>
  - ““Lower parts of the earth” probably means the realm of the dead, hence that Jesus had died (Ezek 32:24), although it could mean his descent from heaven to become a servant at his incarnation (Phil 2:7; cf. Ps 139:15).”<sup>233</sup>
- “equip the saints” (4:12)
  - “The word “equip,” *kartartismos*, occurs only here in the New Testament. It is a medical term. The venerable Greek physician Galen used it of setting a dislocated joint. It is derived from the verb *kartartidzo*, which occurs several times in the New Testament in various contexts: to mend or repair nets (Mat. 4:21), to make fit, to become qualified for your task (Luke 6:40), to frame the pre-creation chaos into a working cosmos (Heb. 11:3) – all variations on restoring or creating the condition of wellness or wholeness (*artios*). A body is held together by its joints. If what is “joined and knit together by every ligament” (4:16) is “out of joint,” or stiff with arthritic stubbornness, or swollen with hubris, the body does not function as intended.”<sup>234</sup>

#### Background Info

- Paul’s Use of Psalm 68:18 (Eph 4:7-8)
  - “Unity does not mean uniformity. Christ gives different spiritual gifts to individuals. Because these are gifts, they cannot be earned (4:7). Paul quotes psalm 68:18, implying that these gifts are like the rewards that a victorious general distributes to his supporters, who may not even have been present at the battle (4:8). They are proof of Christ’s victory over his enemies.”<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>232</sup> Carson et al., *New Bible Commentary*, 1236.

<sup>233</sup> Keener, *IVP Bible Background*, Comment on Eph 4:9-10.

<sup>234</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, *Practice Resurrection: A Conversation on Growing up in Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 237–38.

<sup>235</sup> Adeyemo, *Africa Bible Commentary*, 1422.

### Theological Meaning

- Calvin: Christ appoints pastors for His church
  - “The government of the church, by the preaching of the word, is first of all declared to be no human contrivance, but a most sacred ordinance of Christ. The apostles did not appoint themselves, but were chosen by Christ; and, at the present day, true pastors do not rashly thrust themselves forward by their own judgment, but are raised up by the Lord. In short, the government of the church, by the ministry of the word, is not a contrivance of men, but an appointment made by the Son of God.”<sup>236</sup>

### Illustrations

- **Biblical**
  - God builds up his church through spiritual gifts. This is illustrated at Pentecost after Peter’s sermon in Jerusalem where thousands of newly converted believers begin to gather under apostolic teaching and service to one another (Acts 2:42-47). God’s gift of apostolic teaching (Acts 2:42) and each individual’s particular gifts of serving one another by generous giving (Acts 2:45) created a maturing community that did the work of the ministry and built up the body of Christ (Eph. 4:12). The church flourishes when God’s leadership gifts of the five-fold ministry (Eph. 4:11) and the multiplicity of gifts within every member of the body of Christ (Eph. 4:12) are functioning in tandem with one another.
- **Christian Classics**
  - God doesn’t need a gifted pastor alone to bless and mature a local church. In the mid-1800’s God blessed Scottish pastor Robert Murray M’Cheyne’s local church when he was sick and away from his flock, “It was during the time of Mr. M’Cheyne’s sore sickness that his flock in Dundee were receiving blessing from the opened windows of heaven. Their pastor was lying at the gate of death, in utter helplessness. But the Lord had done this on very purpose; for he meant to show that he needed not the help of any; he could send forth new labourers, and work by new instruments, when it pleased him.”<sup>237</sup> God uses the whole body to build up the body.

## 10. Ephesians 4:17-24

**Big Idea:** Put off the old life, put on the new

### Word Studies

- “futility of their minds” (4:17)
  - “The Greeks in particular prided themselves on their mental excellence... We should not miss the emphasis Paul places on the use of the intellect in this passage. He refers to the ‘mind’ and the ‘understanding’ of the Gentiles but also to their ‘ignorance,’ and he will go on to speak of believers as those who ‘learn’ Christ, who have been ‘taught’ in him and have been renewed in the spirit of their ‘mind.’ There is far more to being a Christian

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<sup>236</sup> Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*, Comment on Eph 4:11.

<sup>237</sup> Andrew Bonar, *The Life of Robert Murray M’Cheyne*, (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1962, first published 1844), 128

than intellectual achievement, but we should be clear that being a follower of Christ means using the brains God has given us to their fullest capacity.”<sup>238</sup>

- “put on the new self” (4:24)
  - Gregory of Nyssa (4<sup>th</sup> century): “There is but one garment of salvation, namely Christ. Hence the ‘new man’ created in God’s likeness is none other than Christ. One who has put on Christ has thus put on the new person created in God’s likeness.”<sup>239</sup>

### Background Info

- ‘Gentile’ Behavior (4:17)
  - “Premarital sex, homosexual intercourse and idolatry were typically Gentile sins from which nearly all Jews abstained. By contrast, pagans were raised this way; many Greek boys were ushered into “manhood” by an older man’s molestation.”<sup>240</sup>

### Theological Meaning

- Stott: New Creation and a New Mind
  - “Looking back over these verses, we can perhaps grasp more clearly the two solid doctrinal foundations for Christian holiness which Paul has laid... First, we have experienced a new creation, and secondly, in consequence, we have received a new mind which is constantly being renewed.”<sup>241</sup>
- Stott: The Christian Mind
  - “If heathen degradation is due to the futility of their minds, then Christian righteousness depends on the constant renewing of our minds.”<sup>242</sup>

### Illustrations

- **Biblical**
  - Paul’s entire argument in this passage is built on indicatives and imperatives. An indicative is a certainty, while an imperative is a command. Paul commands the church in Ephesus to put off the old man (imperative), because they already have already been made new men (indicative). The greatest biblical paradigm for this is found in the gospel of Jesus Christ. The gospel itself is an indicative—Jesus Christ died for sinners, yet remains paired with an imperative—believe in what Jesus has done! The whole Christian life is shaped by indicatives and imperatives—by regularly repenting, believing, and acting in accord with what Jesus Christ has already done on our behalf.
- **Christian Classics**
  - Martyn Lloyd-Jones gives a good example of what it means to put off the old man and put on the new man, “...when the Apostle tells us to put off the old man, he means, Stop being what you are not!...We say to a man, Don’t be a baby! You are now an adult man, well then, do not behave as if you were a baby! Stop being what you are not! That is putting off the old man. Putting on the new man is the opposite of this. It is, be what you

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<sup>238</sup> Morris, *Expository Reflections on the Letter to the Ephesians*, 135.

<sup>239</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, quoted in *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture 8 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 174.

<sup>240</sup> Keener, *IVP Bible Background*, Comment on Eph 4:17-19.

<sup>241</sup> Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, 182-83.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

are! The trouble with us all is that we are not what we are. I am not trying to be paradoxical; this is Christianity! Be what you are!”<sup>243</sup>

### 11. Ephesians 4:25-32

**Big Idea:** Overcoming bitterness and taming the tongue

#### Word Studies

- “with his neighbor” (4:25)
  - “Each of the exhortations has to do with personal relationships within the body of Christ (vs. 25). In particular, they are intended to foster unity within the people of God.”<sup>244</sup>
- “grieve the Holy Spirit” (4:30)
  - “These things and others of their kind *grieve the Holy Spirit* (a telling allusion to Is. 63:10) in the sense that they oppose the very direction of his reconciling, unifying, new-creation work in the believer.”<sup>245</sup>

#### Background Info

- “Holy Spirit...by whom you were sealed” (4:30)
  - “A wax seal would have a mark of ownership or identification stamped in it, identifying who was attesting what was inside the container that had been sealed.”<sup>246</sup>

#### Theological Meaning

- Calvin: Implications of Being a New Man
  - “From this head of doctrine, that is, from the righteousness of the new man, all godly exhortations flow, like streams from a fountain; for if all the precepts which relate to life were collected, yet, without this principle, they would be of little value. Philosophers take a different method; but, in the doctrine of godliness, there is no other way than this for regulating the life. Now, therefore, he comes to lay down particular exhortations, drawn from the general doctrine. Having concluded from the truth of the gospel, that righteousness and holiness ought to be true, he now argues from the general statement to a particular instance.”<sup>247</sup>
- O’Brien: The Theological Basis for the Admonition
  - “The exhortation to live in love summarizes the preceding specific admonitions, while the motivating clause about Christ’s death, which provides the theological basis for the admonition, rounds out the passage in a climactic way.”<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Darkness and Light: An Exposition of Ephesians 4:17-5:17* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1982, Second printing, June 2000), 170.

<sup>244</sup> O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 334.

<sup>245</sup> Carson et al., *New Bible Commentary*, 1239.

<sup>246</sup> Keener, *IVP Bible Background*, Comment on Eph 1:13-14; 4:30.

<sup>247</sup> Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*, Comment on Eph 4:25.

<sup>248</sup> O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 335.

### Illustrations

- **Biblical**

- Bitterness of heart often leads to a poisonous tongue. Three days after the redemption of Israel from Egypt by the miracle of the parting of the Red Sea the people of Israel began to grumble because the only water they could find was bitter (Ex. 15:22-27). The bitter water they drank reflected the state of their hearts, as it only took three days for the people of Israel to become bitter at God for not doing what they expected him to do. Because God did not provide as quick as they would like their hearts became hard and their tongues spouted off complaints. God's grace, the remedy for bitterness, is evident in this event, as he mercifully sweetens Marah's bitter waters and leads Israel to Elim, which contained "twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees" (Ex. 15:27). Throughout Israel's history the remedy for bitterness consistently stood in front of the people of Israel, but as their story continues, bitterness and grumbling became a consistent sin, as they continued to neglect the remedy of grace that God always provided.

- **Christian Classics**

- The Princeton theologian B.B. Warfield was not only a prolific theologian, but illustrates how one can still be fruitful in the church of Jesus Christ without becoming bitter over a tragic event. John Piper explains, "...in 1876, at the age of twenty-five, [Warfield] married Annie Pierce Kinkead and took a honeymoon to Germany. During a fierce storm Annie was struck by lightning and permanently paralyzed. After caring for her for thirty-nine years, Warfield laid her to rest in 1915. Because of her extraordinary needs, Warfield seldom left his home for more than two hours at a time during all those years of marriage."<sup>249</sup> Warfield was convinced that trusting in and writing about the sovereign grace of God was much better than wallowing in the bitterness of a heartbreaking life-changing event.

## 12. Ephesians 5:1-8a

**Big Idea:** Walk as children of the light without sexual sin or coveting

### Word Studies

- "Imitators of God" (5:1)
  - "It is the only place in the bible where these words occur... How is possible to imitate one who is infinitely above us, the sovereign God of the universe? We are to imitate God 'as dearly loved children.'... When we look at the passage in which the command to imitate God occurs we see at once that it is not just any attribute of God that Paul has in mind for our imitating, though it would be possible to imitate God in more ways than the one he mentions. What Paul chiefly has in mind is the imitation of God's love. Indeed, this is what ties Ephesians 5:1 to the end of chapter 4 and links it also to the following verse."<sup>250</sup>
- "walk in love" (5:2)

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<sup>249</sup> Steve Halliday and William Travis eds., *How Great Thou Art: A Daily Devotional*, (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 1999), 107.

<sup>250</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Ephesians: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998), 171–73.

- “The two statements [‘be imitators of God’ and ‘walk in love’] parallel each other, for to imitate God is to walk in love.”<sup>251</sup>
- “fragrant offering” (5:2)
  - “The Old Testament sacrifices were spoken of as a ‘sweet savour’, to express metaphorically their acceptability before God (Gn. 8:21; Ex. 29:18, 25, 41; Lv. 1:9, 13, 17). To an infinitely higher degree was the sacrifice of Christ pleasing to the Father.”<sup>252</sup>

### Background Info

- Sinful Society
  - “Premarital and other immoral sex, insolent speech and sexual humor were as common in ancient pagan society as they are today.”<sup>253</sup>
- “deceive you with empty words” (5:6)
  - “Some forms of Gnosticism in the second century and onwards, of which adumbrations can be traced even in the first century, held that such practices as the apostle here condemns were irrelevant to the spiritual life, because they had to do with the body, whereas the spiritual life was concerned only with the soul.”<sup>254</sup>

### Theological Meaning

- F. F. Bruce: Darkness and Light
  - “The opposed themes of light and darkness are frequently used in the New Testament to denote the divine kingdom as against all that is contrary to it... The basic principle of this opposition is stated most succinctly in 1 John 1:5, ‘God is light, and in him is no darkness at all’. The calling forth of light from darkness in the creation narrative of Gen1. 1:2ff is used as a picture of the expulsion of moral darkness by the inflowing of heavenly light (2 Cor 4:6). The Eternal Word, agent of God in the first creation, is the very embodiment of heavenly light and shines in His incarnation as ‘the light of the world’ (John 8:12; 9:5), ‘the light lighteth every man’ (John 1:9)... So here, the Christians addressed are described as having formerly been not mere *in* darkness, but darkness itself, during their years of paganism; through faith-union with Christ, however, they have become light in Him.”<sup>255</sup>

### Illustrations

- **Biblical**
  - The steps to sexual sin and covetousness are illustrated in the very first sin. Eve’s first bite of the forbidden fruit progressed through a deadly triple combination. She *saw* that it was “good for food”, that it was an *attractive* “delight to the eyes”, and that it was “to be *desired* to make one wise” (Gen. 3: 6). These three things all culminated in her acting upon her sinful desires and taking the fruit. Sexual sin and covetousness follows the same sequence: you see a particular person or object, notice its attractiveness, begin to desire and burn for it, and finally take it as your own. Sin is fought with the gospel by the same progression: you see the good news of Jesus, you find him overwhelmingly

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<sup>251</sup> O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 353.

<sup>252</sup> Foulkes, *The Letter of Paul to the Ephesians*, 147.

<sup>253</sup> Keener, *IVP Bible Background*, Comment on Eph 5:3-6.

<sup>254</sup> Bruce, *The Epistle to the Ephesians*, 104.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

compelling, you desire him, and make him your own. Jesus proves more satisfying than the fleeting pleasures of sin.

- **Christian Classics**
  - Augustine of Hippo, the fifth-century bishop of Milan, and one of the most influential figures in church history, was also a self-proclaimed slave of sexual lust.<sup>256</sup> In his classic *Confessions* he writes of how his heart was won away from the sweetness of lust to the sweetest pleasure of knowing God. He states, “How sweet did it suddenly become to me to be without the sweetness of trifles! And it was now a joy to put away what I formerly feared to lose. For Thou didst cast them away from me, O true and highest Sweetness. Thou didst cast them away, and in their place Thou didst enter in thyself—sweeter than all pleasure....Now was my soul free from the gnawing cares of seeking and getting, of wallowing in the mire and scratching the itch of lust. And I prattled like a child to Thee, O Lord my God—my light, my riches, and my salvation.”<sup>257</sup>

### 13. Ephesians 5:8b-21

**Big Idea:** Walk in the light without drunkenness, living in the dark, sing and worship

#### Word Studies

- “Therefore it says, ‘Awake...’” (5:14)
  - “The most likely explanation is that we have here another little fragment of an early Christian hymn. It might well be from a baptismal hymn, since coming to Christ and being baptized were spoken of as enlightenment (cf. Heb 6:4; 10:32).”<sup>258</sup>
- “the days are evil” (5:16)
  - “The days are evil because they are controlled by the god of this age (2:2) who opposed God and his kingdom and who will try to prevent any opportunities for the declaration of God’s program and purposes.”<sup>259</sup>
- “be filled with the Spirit...” (5:18)
  - “Although the point is often missed in the English translations, verses 18-21 form one long sentence, with five participles modifying the imperative ‘be filled with the Spirit’.... Spirit-filled Christians are people whose lives are characterized by singing, thanksgiving, and mutual submission.”<sup>260</sup>It is
- “psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” (5:19)
  - “It is not possible to distinguish sharply between the three terms, ‘psalms’, ‘hymns’, and ‘songs’. They are the most common words used in the LXX for religious songs, and occur interchangeably in the titles of the psalms.”<sup>261</sup>
- “spiritual songs” (5:19)

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<sup>256</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, Albert C. Outler trans., (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 120.

<sup>257</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, Albert C. Outler trans., (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 174.

<sup>258</sup> Foulkes, *The Letter of Paul to the Ephesians*, 155.

<sup>259</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 694.

<sup>260</sup> O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 387–88.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*, 394.

- “That such hymns can be described as ‘spiritual’ says nothing about their spontaneity; instead, the focus is on the source of their inspiration, namely, the Holy Spirit. And the fact that believers address one another in these psalms and songs shows that Paul has intelligible communication in view, not meditation, unknown speech, or glossolalia.”<sup>262</sup>

### Background Info

- Drunkenness in Greco-Roman Culture
  - “Many people in the ancient world believed that drunkenness could produce a sort of inspiration or possession by Dionysus, god of wine. Dionysus’s most active worshipers yielded control of themselves to him and performed sexual acts or acts full of sexual symbolism (often to the distaste of conservative Romans). Here Paul may contrast this behavior with inspiration by God’s Spirit. People did not think of Dionysus every time someone became drunk, however; drunkenness was more commonly associated simply with loss of self-control. It was standard practice in both the late-night banquets of the rich and the taverns of the poor.”<sup>263</sup>

### Theological Meaning

- O’Brien: Praying in Jesus’ name (5:20)
  - “Although Ephesians 5:20 is the only reference in the New testament to thanks being offered in Jesus’ name, elsewhere it is said to be ‘through him’ . . . , which means that thanksgiving could now be addressed to God through him as the mediator who had opened the way to the Father’s presence. ‘Name’ in these passages refers to all that a person stands for and what he has accomplished. Accordingly, Christians filled by the Holy Spirit give thanks to God the Father on the basis of who Jesus is and what he has accomplished for his people by his death and resurrection.”<sup>264</sup>
- Bruce: Thanking God Through Christ and For Christ
  - “Thanksgiving is properly rendered to God in the name of Christ, not only because He is the One through whom we approach God, but also because He Himself constitutes our crowing subject for thanksgiving.”<sup>265</sup>

### Illustrations

- **Biblical**
  - Jesus is the example par excellence of how to live reliant upon the Spirit in a dark world. He did not avoid the dark world but entered into it and was known to be a drunkard and a glutton because he enjoyed food and drink with drunkards and gluttons (Luke 7:33-34). However, he never sinned by drinking or eating beyond moderation and lived and taught in such a way that sinners believed that he was the Messiah and Savior of the world. He did so because the Spirit of the Lord was upon him and he proclaimed liberty and God’s favor to those captive in sin and shame (Luke 4:18). The Spirit-filled do not avoid the world but enter into it and bring life and light to a world full of dark and dead sinners.
- **Christian Classics**
  - The Protestant Reformer John Calvin did not believe that the Spirit-filled life meant that drinking wine was forbidden. In fact, Calvin’s annual salary included several barrels of

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<sup>262</sup> Ibid., 395.

<sup>263</sup> Keener, *IVP Bible Background*, Comment on Eph 5:18.

<sup>264</sup> O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 398.

<sup>265</sup> Bruce, *The Epistle to the Ephesians*, 112.

wine.<sup>266</sup> In order to be true to the Scriptures Calvin believed that humanity should enjoy God's gift of wine, while at the same time he remained outspoken about the abuse of it in drunkenness. His commentary on Psalm 104:15 shows his commitment to enjoying moderate drinking, "As the prophet in this account of the divine goodness in providence makes no reference to the excesses of men, we gather from his words that it is lawful to use wine not only in cases of necessity, but also thereby to make us merry."<sup>267</sup> Calvin, however, plainly took a stand against drunkenness: "...all who have any regard to moderation or decency ought to avoid and abhor drunkenness."<sup>268</sup>

### 14. Ephesians 5:22-24

**Big Idea:** Wives submit to your husbands

#### Word Studies

- "Your own husbands" (5:22)
  - "This term "your own" shows that the relationship of leadership and submission between a woman and her husband should be different from the relationship of leadership and submission which she may have with men in general. Husbands and wives have responsibilities to each other in marriage that they do not have to other men and women."<sup>269</sup>
- "head" (5:23)
  - "This word head (*kephale*) implies authority...Paul indicates the significance of "head" (*kephale*) by saying that "the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is head of the church" (verse 23)...It is virtually certain that in comparing the headship of the husband over the wife to the headship of Christ over the church, the apostle is using the term *kephale* for the husband as he does for Christ, namely, as one who has authority and is the leader... When we ask how that headship was established, we are aided by Paul's treatment of this question in 1 Corinthians 11:1ff., where ...Paul refers to Genesis 2:21-24 and states that the order of creation of man and woman and the fact that woman was created to help the man (and not vice versa) demonstrate that God had established man as the head over the woman by this divine action and its inherent intent (1 Corinthians 11:8-9)... It is evident in Ephesians 5 itself that Paul has Genesis 2 and its

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<sup>266</sup> Jim West, "A Sober Assessment of Reformational Drinking", Accessed online: <http://www.wittenberghall.com/index.asp?Action=Anchor&CategoryID=4&BlogID=149> (August 16, 2010).

<sup>267</sup> Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*, Comment on Psalm 104:15 .

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.*, Comment on Eph 5:18.

<sup>269</sup> John Piper, "A Vision of Biblical Complementarity: Manhood and Womanhood Defined According to the Bible," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne A. Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 44.

principles in mind, because he quotes Genesis 2:24 at Ephesians 5:31.”<sup>270</sup>

### Background Info

- Household Codes
  - “The section 5:21-6:9 addresses what we call “household codes.” In Paul’s day, many Romans were troubled by the spread of “religions from the East” (e.g., Isis worship, Judaism and Christianity), which they thought would undermine traditional Roman family values. Members of these minority religions often tried to show their support for those values by using a standard form of exhortations developed by philosophers from Aristotle on. These exhortations about how the head of a household should deal with members of his family usually break down into discussions of husband-wife, father-child and master-slave relationships. Paul borrows this form of discussion straight from standard Greco-Roman moral writing. But unlike most ancient writers, Paul undermines the basic premise of these codes: the absolute authority of the male head of the house.”<sup>271</sup>
- Marital Age in NT Context
  - “Husbands were normally older than their wives, often by over a decade in Greek culture (with men frequently marrying around age thirty and women in their teens, often early teens).”<sup>272</sup>

### Theological Meaning

- Piper: A Husband’s Authority Points to Christ’s Authority
  - “*Mature masculinity does not assume the authority of Christ over woman, but advocates it.* The leadership implied in the statement, “The husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church” (Ephesians 5:23), is not a leadership that gives to the man all the rights and authority that Christ has. The analogy between Christ and the husband breaks down if pressed too far, first because, unlike Christ, all men sin. Christ never has to apologize to his church. But husbands must do this often. Moreover, unlike Christ, a husband is not preparing a bride merely for himself but for another, namely Christ. He does not merely act as Christ, but also for Christ. At this point he must not be Christ to his wife lest he be a traitor to Christ. Standing in the place of Christ must include a renunciation of the temptation to be Christ. And that means leading his wife forward to depend not on him but on Christ. And practically, that rules out belittling supervision and fastidious oversight. She also stands or falls before her own master, Jesus Christ.”<sup>273</sup>

### Illustrations

- **Biblical**
  - The apostle Peter chose Abraham’s wife Sarah as a model of submission when encouraging churches on the subject of marriage (1 Pet. 3:6). In his letter he is particularly referencing Sarah’s response when the divine messenger from God tells Abraham that she will have a baby son (Gen. 18:1-15). Sarah is eavesdropping on the

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<sup>270</sup> George W. Knight III, “Husbands and Wives as Analogues of Christ and the Church,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne A. Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 169–70.

<sup>271</sup> Keener, *IVP Bible Background*, Comment on Eph 5:21–6:9.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*, Comment on Eph 5:22-24.

<sup>273</sup> Piper, “A Vision of Biblical Complementarity: Manhood and Womanhood Defined According to the Bible,” 38.

conversation, and she laughs at this news as both she and Abraham are quite elderly at the time. She says to the Lord, “After I am worn out, and my lord is old, shall I have pleasure?” (Gen. 18:12). Sarah still honors and respects her husband with the title “lord” even in her response to news that she finds a bit ridiculous.

- **Christian Classics**

- Elisabeth Elliot, the wife of Jim Elliot who was martyred in 1956, was commonly asked, “What do you mean by submission?” She answered this way, “A Christian woman, then, in submission to God, recognizes the divinely assigned authority of her husband (he didn’t earn it, remember, he received it by appointment). She then sets about leading her full strength to helping him do what he’s supposed to do, be what he’s supposed to be—her *head*. She’s not always trying to get her own way. She’s trying to make it easier for him to do his job. She seeks to contribute to *his* purpose, not to scheme how to accomplish her own.”<sup>274</sup>

## 15. Ephesians 5:25-33

**Big Idea:** Husbands love your wives

### Word Studies

- “love” (5:25)
  - “The key word, love, appears six times in Ephesians 5:25-33. It denotes the husband’s duty to his wife. Interestingly enough his role, headship, was stated in the section addressed to his wife (verse 23), not in the section addressed to him. Paul does not say to husbands, “Be head over your wife!” Instead he commands them, twice, to love their wives (verses 25 and 28): “Husbands, love your wives,” and, “husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies.” The command is explicated by reference to the analogy of Christ’s love for the church (verses 25ff.)”<sup>275</sup>
- “he who loves his wife loves himself” (5:28)
  - “Both Leviticus and Ephesians assume that a person will look after his or her own interests and welfare. Similarly, in the ‘golden rule’ Jesus urged his hearers to treat others as they themselves like to be treated (Matt. 7:12)... Genesis 2:24, which is cited in v. 31... declares that in marriage husband and wife are ‘one flesh’... Accordingly, the husband’s obligation to love his wife as his own body is not simply a matter of loving someone else just like he loves himself. It is, in fact, to love himself.”<sup>276</sup>
- “this mystery” (5:32)
  - “The relationship of a husband to a wife in marriage was going to illustrate the relationship of the Lord Jesus Christ to those he would one day redeem from sin’s slavery. The relationship of a wife to her husband was going to illustrate the relationship the people of God, the church, would have to Jesus Christ. This is why the name of Christ occurs again and again throughout this great passage...”<sup>277</sup>

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<sup>274</sup> “What Do You Mean by Submission”, *The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter*, March/April 1983. <http://www.elisabethelliott.org/newsletters2/mar.apr.1983.pdf> (August 24, 2010).

<sup>275</sup> Knight III, “Husbands and Wives as Analogues of Christ and the Church,” 171.

<sup>276</sup> O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 426–27.

<sup>277</sup> Boice, *Ephesians*, 205.

- “love his wife...respect her husband” (5:33)
  - “In vs. 33, at the conclusion of the section of exhortatory material, Paul rounds off his discussion with two summarizing exhortations in which the duties and responsibilities of husbands and wives are briefly restated.”<sup>278</sup>

### Background Info

- Husbands in NT Context
  - “Although it was assumed that husbands should love their wives, ancient household codes never list love as a husband’s duty; such codes told husbands only to make their wives submit. Although Paul upholds the ancient ideal of wifely submission for his culture, he qualifies it by placing it in the context of mutual submission: husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church, by willingly laying down their lives for them. At the same time that he relates Christianity to the standards of his culture, he subverts his culture’s values by going far beyond them.”<sup>279</sup>
- Bridal Prenuptial Washing
  - “This “washing” probably alludes figuratively to the bride’s prenuptial washing (of course, washing was natural before any occasion on which one wished to impress another positively). After this washing the bride was perfumed, anointed and arrayed in wedding clothes. The betrothal ceremony in Judaism also came to be called “the sanctification of the bride,” setting her apart for her husband.”<sup>280</sup>

### Theological Meaning

- Ray Ortlund: The Practical is Grounded in the Theological
  - “The Christ/church parallel is not merely illustrative but the generating theological centre of his entire presentation. This explains why verse 33 seems to yank the discussion abruptly back to husbands and wives in the here and now; the theological and ultimate were so much at the forefront of Paul’s teaching that they stood in danger of eclipsing the practical and immediate.”<sup>281</sup>

### Illustrations

- **Biblical**
  - The love story in the book of Ruth signifies the self-sacrificial love that a man has for his wife. The love of Boaz the Bethlehemite for Ruth, a Moabite widow and enemy of Israel (Ruth 1:4-5), is a type of the kind of love that shows the love of Christ for his sinful bride, the church. Boaz takes Ruth as his wife even though she was a Moabite and redeems her and the property leftover from the death of Ruth’s husband’s family property by purchasing it. The great lengths that Boaz went to in order to marry Ruth demonstrate his self-sacrificial love for her that is a model for husbands.
- **Christian Classics**
  - The final moments between Adoniram Judson, the first Protestant missionary to Burma from America, and his dying second wife Sarah reveal the deep care that he had for his wife’s spiritual health and the romantic love that existed between them. “At two o’clock in the morning, wishing to obtain one more token of recognition, I roused her attention

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<sup>278</sup> O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 438.

<sup>279</sup> Keener, *IVP Bible Background*, Comment on Eph 5:25.

<sup>280</sup> *Ibid.*, Comment on Eph 5:26.

<sup>281</sup> Raymond C. Ortlund, *Whoredom: God's Unfaithful Wife in Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 156.

and said, 'Do you still love the Saviour?' 'O yes,' she replied, 'I ever love the Lord Jesus Christ.' I said again, 'Do you still love me?' She replied in the affirmative, by a peculiar expression of her own. 'Then give me one more kiss;' and we exchanged that token of love for the last time. Another hour passed,—and she ceased to breathe."<sup>282</sup> The example of Adoniram Judson's love for his wife and care for her soul reveals that the work of the ministry should never eclipse one's responsibility to one's wife.

### 16. Ephesians 6:1-4

**Big Idea:** Children and their parents, especially fathers

#### Word Studies

- “Obey” (6:1)
  - “Obedience to parents is part of our relationship to God and...disobedience to parents is at heart a spiritual rebellion.”<sup>283</sup>
- “in the lord” (6:1)
  - “Obedience...is to be carried out not simply because the other party has superior authority and status but as part of their Christian discipleship and therefore ‘as to the Lord’ or ‘as to Christ’ (cf. 5:22; 6:5). Their relationship to their parents presents children with a sphere in which to carry out obedience to their Lord.”<sup>284</sup>
- “Honor your father and mother” (6:2)
  - “It was understood as involving not only a respectful attitude but also care for the parents’ physical needs when they became old. So for children still in the father’s house it would mean obedience to parents, and for those who had left home it would mean continued deference to and care for aging parents.”<sup>285</sup>
- “do not provoke your children” (6:4)
  - “A Roman father had absolute power over his family. He could sell them as slaves; he could make them work in his fields, even in chains; he could take the law into his own hands, for law was in his own hands, and he could punish as he like; he could even inflict the death penalty on his child. Further, the power of the roman father extended over the child’s whole life, so long as the father lived.”<sup>286</sup>
- “discipline and instruction” (6:4)
  - “The first word-group could refer to education or training in a comprehensive sense... with the second term pointing to the more specific aspect of this training that takes place through verbal admonition or correction.... Accordingly, learning Christ and being instructed in the truth that is in Jesus occur not only within the Christian community as a

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<sup>282</sup> Arabella M. Willson, *Lives of the Three Mrs. Judsons: Mrs. Ann H. Judson, Mrs. Sarah B. Judson, Mrs. Emily C. Judson, Missionaries to Burmah* (Boston: Lee and Shepard, Publishers, 1855), 316. [http://www.gutenberg.org/files/16863/16863-h/16863-h.htm#CHAPTER\\_XVI](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/16863/16863-h/16863-h.htm#CHAPTER_XVI) (August 24, 2010).

<sup>283</sup> Boice, *Ephesians*, 212.

<sup>284</sup> Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 402.

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid.*, 405.

<sup>286</sup> William Barclay, Quoted in Boice, *Ephesians*, 211.

whole, but also and particularly within the family, coming from fathers whose lives are being shaped by this Christ-centered apostolic tradition.”<sup>287</sup>

- Martin Luther: “Spare the rod and spoil the child- that is true. But beside the rod keep an apple to give him when he has done well.”<sup>288</sup>

### Background Info

- Discipline in NT Context
  - “Jewish and Greco-Roman writers unanimously agreed that children needed to honor their parents... At the same time, children were often taught through beating, which was standard in child rearing and education; fathers were considered responsible for their education. Paul is among the minority of ancient writers who seem to disapprove of excessive discipline (6:4). (Greek and Roman society was even harsher on newborn children; because an infant was accepted as a legal person only when the father officially recognized it, babies could be abandoned or, if deformed, killed. Early Christians and Jews unanimously opposed both abortion and abandonment...)”<sup>289</sup>

### Theological Meaning

- Ted Tripp: Obedience to God is Reflected in Obedience to Parents
  - “The most important lesson for the child to learn in this period is that he is an individual under authority. He has been made by God and has a responsibility to obey God in all things. The key passage of Scripture for this period is...Ephesians 6:1-3... Submission to earthly authority is a specific application of being a creature under God’s authority. Submission to God’s authority may seem distant and theoretical. Mom and Dad, however, are present. Obedience to God is reflected in a child’s growing understanding of obedience to parents.”<sup>290</sup>

### Illustrations

- **Biblical**
  - Eli, a priest in Israel before the reign of Israel’s first King Saul, illustrates how not to father sons. Eli’s sons Hophni and Phinehas were “worthless” men (1 Sam. 2:12) who dishonored the priesthood that they held by blaspheming God (1 Sam. 3:13). Though Eli did eventually rebuke his sons (1 Sam. 2:22-25) he did not raise them up in the instruction of the Lord. Instead he honored his sons before God by letting them continue in the priesthood despite their gross sexual immorality (1 Sam. 2:22) and abuse of their priestly office and the sacrificial offerings (1 Sam. 2:12-17). Fathers are not to become overbearing in their correction of their children, but to be passive in both correction and encouragement in the Lord is a grave sin.
- **Christian Classics**
  - Sometimes the best way to be a dad is to go to prison. At least, this was the case with John Bunyan, the writer of the incomparable *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. Bunyan was a non-conformist Puritan pastor in England in the mid-1600’s, and was imprisoned for his conviction of not conforming to the Church of England’s *Book of Common Prayer*.

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<sup>287</sup> O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 446.

<sup>288</sup> Quoted in Boice, *Ephesians*, 215.

<sup>289</sup> Keener, *IVP Bible Background*, Comment on Eph 6:1-4.

<sup>290</sup> Tedd Tripp, *Shepherding a Child's Heart*, 2nd ed. (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd, 1995), 129-30.

Because of this he was separated from his entire family—his wife and children, one of whom, his oldest daughter, Mary, was born blind.<sup>291</sup> Bunyan's relationship with her particularly made "his imprisonment, when Mary was ten years old, an agonizing separation."<sup>292</sup> Bunyan models the kind of parenting that values Jesus and his word above all else. Not every father will have to make the choice Bunyan made and be taken away from their wife and children, but every Christian father should lead their family in such a way that Christ is shown to own his deepest affection.

### 17. Ephesians 6:5-9

**Big Idea:** Slaves and Masters

#### Word Studies

- "with fear and trembling" (6:5)
  - Not with servile fear of his master, but with the fear of God in his heart. The collocation of 'fear and trembling' in the service of God appears in 1 Cor. 2:3 with reference to Paul himself and in 2 Cor 7:15 and Phil 2:12 with reference to Christians. For Christian slaves the service of their earthly masters was a special form of the service of God, to be discharged in a spirit of reverence towards Him."<sup>293</sup>
- "not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers" (6:6)
  - "Any slave would put on a show of working hard when the master's eye, or the foreman's was on him. But why should he exert himself except when it was to his advantage to do so? He owed his owner nothing; he was enslaved against his will.... But a Christian slave in the first century (and much more a Christian employee in the twentieth) has the highest possible motive for doing his work well; it is primarily Christ, and not his earthly master, that he is endeavoring to please."<sup>294</sup>
- "Masters, do the same to them" (6:9)
  - "In what is a shocking exhortation to slave owners in the first century Graeco-Roman world, the apostle admonishes masters: *treat your slaves in the same way*.... It does not mean, however, that masters are to serve their slaves... More likely it points to their *attitudes and actions*, which, like those of slaves, are to be *governed* by their relationship to their heavenly Lord."<sup>295</sup>

#### Background Info

- Slavery in NT Context
  - "In the hierarchical societies of the early Roman Empire, the legal ownership of human beings who could be used as property (chattel slavery) had long been widespread and regarded as appropriate and moral. ... As many as one-third of the population of the

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<sup>291</sup> John Piper, *The Hidden Smile of God: The Fruit of Affliction in the Lives of John Bunyan* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 50.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid.

<sup>293</sup> Bruce, *The Epistle to the Ephesians*, 123.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid., 123–24.

<sup>295</sup> O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 454.

empire were enslaved, and an additional large percentage had been slaves earlier in their lives...The Christian movement developed in such a social and cultural context, with the result that many important passages in early Christian documents cannot be understood apart from keen awareness of those features that make Greco-Roman slavery unique...It is natural then to think that knowledge of New World slavery [i.e. USA] can provide the modern interpreter with insight into the social, economic and legal context of the early Christians. Yet such information has frequently created serious misunderstandings. Modern readers must overcome their temptation to read into any ancient Jewish, Greek or Roman text their knowledge of modern slavery."<sup>296</sup>

### Theological Meaning

- John Chrysostom (c. 347-407): One Common Master
  - "Society arrangements, like laws made by sinners, acknowledge these distinction of classes. But we are all called to accountability before the law of the common Lord and Master of all. We are called to do good to all alike and to dispense the same fair rights to all. God's law does not recognize these social distinctions. If anyone should ask where slavery come from and why it has stolen into human life...This horrid thing was begotten by sin."<sup>297</sup>

### Illustrations

- **Biblical**
  - Paul's letter to Philemon is addressed to the wealthy master of a servant who became very dear to Paul named Onesimus. Onesimus may have been a fugitive slave who stole money from Philemon and fled to Rome, yet while in Rome was converted to Jesus under Paul's ministry and became a personal friend to Paul and worker in his ministry. Paul's letter appeals to Philemon to receive Onesimus as a brother instead of a slave (1:16). It is a testimony to Jesus' transforming grace in working relationships, and demonstrates how Paul subverted the cultural views of authority of that day in slave-master relationships.
- **Christian Classics**
  - Frederick Douglass, the former slave and African American Methodist abolitionist leader in America in the nineteenth century, wrote the following indictment upon those Christian slave-masters in his autobiography: "What I have said respecting and against religion, I mean strictly to apply to the—slaveholding religion—of this land...I love the pure, peaceable, and impartial Christianity of Christ; I therefore hate the corrupt, slaveholding; women-whipping, cradle-plundering, partial and hypocritical Christianity of this land... We have men-stealers for ministers, women-whippers for missionaries, and cradle-plunderers for church members."<sup>298</sup> Douglass' righteous rant against hypocritical slave-masters is a warning to all employers who dare abuse the authority God has given them. The employer-employee relationship is nothing like the slave-master relationship in Douglass' day, but his prophetic call is a reminder to employers to treat every person without partiality and build justice into every facet of one's business practice.

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<sup>296</sup> "Slavery," in Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids, eds., *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Developments* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997).

<sup>297</sup> Chrysostom, Quoted in *Ancient Christian Commentary*, 206.

<sup>298</sup> *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*, (Boston, MA: Anti-Slavery Office, No. 25 Cornhill, 1845), 93-94. <http://www2.hn.psu.edu/faculty/jmanis/f-douglas/Narrative-Douglass.pdf> (August 25, 2010). Reprint, Pennsylvania State University, 2004.

## 18. Ephesians 6:10-20

**Big Idea:** Spiritual warfare

### Word Studies

- “Be strong” (6:10)
  - “*Be strong* perhaps fails to bring out the force of the passive verb (‘be strengthened’).”<sup>299</sup>
- “armor of God” (6:11)
  - “The author presents the armor of God as the strength of believers which enables them to resist the diabolic ‘powers’ of darkness. Each of the material weapons used as metaphors depicts some aspect of divine strength.”<sup>300</sup>
- “truth...gospel...word of God” (6:14, 15, 17)
  - “Many of the concepts overlap as in the three-fold mention of the gospel (v. 14 as ‘truth’; v. 15, ‘the gospel’; and v. 17, ‘the word of God’). This emphasis on the gospel undoubtedly highlights the importance of the gospel in opposing the evil ‘powers.’”<sup>301</sup>

### Background Info

- Form: Battle Speech
  - “Aspects of Paul’s conclusion resemble the exhortations that generals gave to their armies before battle.”<sup>302</sup>
- Roman Armor
  - “although Paul borrows his language from the Old Testament, the image Paul’s words in this paragraph would have evoked for most of his readers is that of a Roman soldier ready to do battle. Most adults who heard his letter read would have seen Roman soldiers and could relate this image to their spiritual warfare against the demonic powers at work in the world; God who fought for them had supplied them his armor.”<sup>303</sup>
- Belt, Breastplate
  - “The “belt” or “girdle” may refer to the leather apron beneath the armor or to the metal belt protecting the lower abdomen. The “breastplate” normally consisted of leather overlaid with metal, and it protected the chest in battle; like the helmet (6:17), it was used only in battle, not for normal wear. Roman soldiers were to face forward in battle, side by side, so the armor needed to protect only their front.”<sup>304</sup>
- Boots
  - “Soldiers needed to wear sandals or boots (technically the Roman *caliga*, a half boot) so they could advance toward the enemy undistracted about what they might step on; this gear was essential to their “preparation” for battle. Paul takes the image especially from

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<sup>299</sup> Carson et al., *New Bible Commentary*, 1242.

<sup>300</sup> Arnold, *Ephesians, Power and Magic*, 110.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid., 111–12.

<sup>302</sup> Keener, *IVP Bible Background*, Comment on Eph 6:10-20.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid., Comment on Eph 6:14.

the herald of Isaiah 52:7 who announces good news: sharing the message of Christ advances God's army against the enemy's position."<sup>305</sup>

- Shield
  - “Roman soldiers were equipped with large rectangular wooden shields, four feet high, the fronts of which were made of leather. Before battles in which flaming arrows might be fired, the leather would be wetted to quench any fiery darts launched against them. After Roman legionaries closed ranks, the front row holding shields forward and those behind them holding shields above them, they were virtually invulnerable to any attack from flaming arrows.”<sup>306</sup>
- Helmet, Sword
  - “The bronze helmet, equipped with cheek pieces, was necessary to protect the head; though essential garb for battle, it was normally not worn outside battle. For the phrase “helmet of salvation” see Isaiah 59:17; cf. comment on Ephesians 6:14. The sword (*gladius*, 20-24 inches long) was a weapon used when close battle was joined with the enemy and the heavy pikes that frontline soldiers carried were no longer practical. Thus Paul implies that the battle is to be joined especially by engaging those who do not know God's word (the gospel) with its message, after one is spiritually prepared in the other ways listed here. Paul's ministry was thus particularly strategic, because it included close-range battle advancing into enemy ranks (vv. 19-20).”<sup>307</sup>

### Theological Meaning

- Arnold: The Gospel & Spiritual Warfare
  - “The goal of the ‘spiritual warfare’ in this passage...: “to strive for the extension of the Gospel and to strive to deepen its gifts in one's personal life are aspects of the one task given to man, to seek the goal of God himself and His rule of righteousness.” The struggle/warfare can best be described in terms of an offensive aspect (making known the gospel) and a defensive aspect (resisting temptation; endurance). The demonic ‘powers’ are bent on regaining their control in the lives of believers. Through a variety of means they attempt to block the progress of the gospel and cause believers to walk according to the pattern of their former manner of life. Victory over the ‘powers’ is not assured apart from the appropriation of the power of God.”<sup>308</sup>
- Arnold: Spiritual Warfare & Redemption History
  - “Spiritual warfare is fought in the context of the church existing in two ages and in two spheres of power. The work of Christ has given believers access to some of the blessings of the age to come, but the age of this world has not ended; the days are evil until Christ pours out his wrath on the world and consummates the salvation of believers. Hence, Christians are engaged in a conflict with the demonic ‘powers’ but with access to the more powerful provisions of God.”<sup>309</sup>

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<sup>305</sup> Ibid., Comment on Eph 6:15.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid., Comment on Eph 6:16.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid., Comment on Eph 6:17.

<sup>308</sup> Arnold, *Ephesians, Power and Magic*, 121.

<sup>309</sup> Ibid., 122.

## Illustrations

- **Biblical**
  - Jesus illustrates the way in which to engage in spiritual warfare. In his forty days of fasting in the wilderness following his baptism he was tempted by the devil (Mt. 4:1-11). In each of his enemy's temptations Jesus combated them with quotations from Scripture (Mat. 4:4, 7, 10). He fought Satan with the weapon of the Spirit, namely, the word of God; and if Jesus battled Satan with Scripture how much more should believers use the Bible against the assaults of the evil one.
- **Christian Classics**
  - Billy Graham has preached countless numbers of evangelistic sermons to a myriad of people, and is a wonderful example of a man who wore the shoes of "readiness given by the gospel of peace" (Eph. 6:15). In his autobiography he gives an account of how the reality of spiritual warfare impacts his gospel preaching, "Sometimes I pick out someone in the audience who seems to be especially burdened and preach directly to that person. Preaching also involves us in a spiritual battle with the forces of evil. I am always deeply conscious that I am absolutely helpless and that only the Holy Spirit can penetrate the minds and hearts of those who are without Christ...I am reminded often of Jesus' parable of the seed of the sower (see Mark 4:1-20), knowing that all I am doing is sowing seed. It is God—and only God—who can make that seed bear fruit."<sup>310</sup>

## 19. Ephesians 6:21-24

**Big Idea:** Final encouragement and Tychicus

### Word Studies

- "Peace" (6:23)
  - "Peace – this verse recapitulates the whole epistle."<sup>311</sup>
  - "'Peace' is here given a prominent position... Certainly its emphatic position here is in accordance with the theology of Ephesians, where peace is closely related to reconciliation in 2:14-18, and virtually equivalent to salvation (cf. 2:5-8)...The apostle, then, reminds his readers of the peace of God which is theirs, and he desires that it may flow through them to others."<sup>312</sup>
- "Grace" (6:24)
  - "He closes, as he began, with the invocation of God's grace upon his readers."<sup>313</sup>
- "love incorruptible" (6:24)
  - "The noun refers to 'immortality, incorruption', which elsewhere in Paul characterizes the life of the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:42, 50, 52-54; Rom. 2:7; 1 Tim. 1:10)... It is preferable to regard immortality as more directly linked with god or one of his blessings rather than the quality of believers' love...grace, which has appeared often in Ephesians,

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<sup>310</sup> *Just As I Am: The Autobiography of Billy Graham*, (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1999), 324.

<sup>311</sup> Wesley, *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament*, Comment on Eph 6:23.

<sup>312</sup> O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 493.

<sup>313</sup> Bruce, *The Epistle to the Ephesians*, 135–6.

is imperishable, not subject to corruption, while immortality flows out of God's grace shown in the present but also in the coming ages."<sup>314</sup>

### Background Info

- Mail in NT Context
  - "Mail and other news were normally carried by travelers, because the Roman Empire had no official postal service except for imperial business."<sup>315</sup>
- Tychicus
  - "As for Tychicus, he was a native of the province of Asia, as can be learned from Acts 20:4, where he is included among the delegates of the Gentile churches who accompanied Paul to Judaea in AD 57 to hand over those churches' gifts to their brethren in Jerusalem. He is mentioned also in the Pastoral Epistles as a messenger of Paul (2 Tim 4:12; Titus 3:12). On the present occasion he was probably Paul's special envoy to the churches of the province of Asia which had been planted in the course of Paul's Ephesian ministry, to deliver this letter, or copies of it, to all of them. In Col. 4:7 Paul not only calls him his 'beloved brother and faithful minister...but also his fellow slave.'<sup>316</sup>

### Theological Meaning

- O'Brien: The Last Two Verses Summarize the Entire Epistle
  - "Consistent with the letter as a whole (chaps. 1-3 and 4-6), vv. 23 and 24 focus, first, on God's gracious gifts which have been bestowed on believers in the Lord Jesus Christ; and, secondly, on the glad response of love that they are to make to Christ."<sup>317</sup>

### Illustrations

- **Biblical**
  - Paul surrounded himself with encouragers. Besides Tychicus whom Paul sent to Thessalonica to encourage that community of faith, his close friend Joseph, who accompanied him on several missionary journeys, was re-named Barnabas, which means son of encouragement, by the apostles (Acts 4:36). To have your name changed to anything like son of encouragement would mean that you were uniquely marked by that spiritual gift. Due to the kinds of sufferings that Paul and the other apostles had to endure for Christ, having a person around that excelled in encouragement would have been paramount.
- **Christian Classics**
  - Sarah Edwards, the wife of Jonathan Edwards, brought great encouragement to those who entered her home. Not only did she care for the needs of her large family, but she intentionally encouraged Samuel Hopkins. Hopkins entered the Edwards' home as a young man during a depressed season in his life, and upon seeing his sad demeanor Sarah intentionally encouraged him that God was going to do wonderful things through him.<sup>318</sup> Hopkins later became a pastor, theologian, and an important abolitionist. He always

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<sup>314</sup> O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 494–95.

<sup>315</sup> Keener, *IVP Bible Background*, Comment on Eph 6:21-22.

<sup>316</sup> Bruce, *The Epistle to the Ephesians*, 135.

<sup>317</sup> O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 495.

<sup>318</sup> Noel Piper, *Faithful Women and Their Extraordinary God* (Wheaton, IL: Good News Publishers, 2005), 26.

treasured his time spent in the Edwards' home and the encouragement he received there at a pivotal time in his life.

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# I AM A SAINT / *Ephesians 1:1-2*

## **Introduction**

Paul begins the book of Ephesians the same way he begins many of his letters: his name, the recipients, and a greeting.<sup>319</sup> His epistle openings follow the common form of his day, but Paul often adds variation and “pours theological content into his greetings.”<sup>320</sup> In Ephesians, for example, he doesn’t just say, “Paul, to my friends in Ephesus.” He says, “Paul, an *apostle* of Jesus Christ *by the will of God*, to the *saints* in Ephesus.” This is followed by another phrase, “and are faithful [or ‘believing’] in Christ Jesus,” which further describes the recipients of the letter.<sup>321</sup> What we want to look at, however, is the word “saints.” Why does Paul use this term? What is a “saint” for him?

## **Origin of the Word**

The word “saints” (*hagioi*) that Paul uses in his letters is really just the plural form of the word “holy” (*hagios*). The Greek lexicon BDAG says that the word was “[originally] a cultic concept, of the quality possessed by things and persons that could approach divinity . . . used as a pure [substance] . . . the holy (thing, [person]).”<sup>322</sup> In the Greek translation of the OT (the Septuagint), the word *hagios* regularly translates the Hebrew word *qādōš*, the basic idea of which is “separation unto God.”<sup>323</sup> Thus, in the NT the *hagioi* are “believers, loyal followers, saints”—“Christians consecrated to God.”<sup>324</sup> Beyond this, though, we need to look at the usage of the word throughout the Bible, first in the OT, then in Paul and the NT.

## **Israel and the OT**

The idea of the people of God as “holy ones” or “saints” is rooted in the concept of Israel as a holy nation, a people consecrated for God. In Exodus 19:5-6 God says to Israel, “Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a *kingdom of priests and a holy nation*.” Beyond this general idea, the specific use of the word *hagioi* to denote “saints” in the Septuagint is found in several places in the OT, the most common being Psalms and Daniel. Below are three examples:

As for the *saints* in the land, they are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight. (Psa 16:3)

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<sup>319</sup> Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 83.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid. See also Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 34-35.

<sup>321</sup> Ernest Best, *Ephesians*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998), 101. Some want to see this second phrase as describing a different group of people, but this is unlikely. They are “saints” who are also “faithful” (or “believing”) in Christ Jesus.

<sup>322</sup> Walter Bauer, Frederick William Danker, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilber Gingrich, eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. [BDAG] (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 10-11.

<sup>323</sup> Everett F. Harrison, “Saint, Saintliness,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 1049.

<sup>324</sup> BDAG, 11.

Oh, fear the LORD, you his *saints*, for those who fear him have no lack! (Psa 34:9)

But the *saints* of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, forever and ever. (Dan 7:18)<sup>325</sup>

Additionally, sometimes we find “saints” in English for a different Greek word meaning “holy” (*hosios*), as in Psalm 37:28: “For the LORD loves justice; he will not forsake his saints [*hosious*]. They are preserved forever, but the children of the wicked shall be cut off.” Thus, the basic idea is that the OT used the word “holy” to describe things that were consecrated and set apart for God, and this idea came to describe people, as in the examples from Psalms and Daniel. This, then, carries over into the NT, where believers are said to be the temple of God, a holy people, and a royal priesthood. The language of the OT cult is applied to the church, which is made up of the “holy ones,” the “saints” With this in mind, we look more closely at Paul, who uses the term most often in the NT.

### Paul’s Usage

Though in our culture there are a lot of notions as to what makes someone a saint, whether an official saint of the church or our “saint of a friend,” most of these do not reflect Paul’s usage. When Paul calls believers “saints,” he does so within the biblical line that stretches back to the Old Testament, moves through the NT, and closes out in the book of Revelation. Paul seems to be especially fond of using the term in his greetings, as he does here in Ephesians 1:1. We find it also at the beginning of Romans (1:7), 1 Corinthians (1:2), 2 Corinthians (1:1), Philippians (1:1), and Colossians (1:2). But he uses it in many other places, too.<sup>326</sup> Below are his uses in Ephesians:

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the *saints* who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus. (1:1)

For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the *saints*. (1:15)

Having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the *saints*. (1:18)

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the *saints* and members of the household of God. (2:19)

To me, though I am the very least of all the *saints*, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ. (3:8)

[So that you] may have strength to comprehend with all the *saints* what is the breadth and length and height and depth. (3:18)

To equip the *saints* for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ. (4:12)

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<sup>325</sup> Daniel’s use is especially interesting when compared with the book of Revelation (more on this below).

<sup>326</sup> Here is the master list: Rom 1:7; 8:27; 12:13; 15:25-26, 31; 16:2, 15; 1 Cor 1:2; 6:1-2; 14:33; 16:1, 15; 2 Cor 1:1; 8:4; 9:1, 12; 13:12; Eph 1:1, 15, 18; 2:19; 3:8, 18; 4:12; 5:3; 6:18; Phil 1:1; 4:22; Col 1:2, 4, 12, 26; 1 Thess 3:13; 2 Thess 1:10; 1 Tim 5:10; Phlm 1:5, 7.

But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among *saints*. (5:3)

Praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the *saints*. (6:18)

In addition to these examples in Ephesians, below are some representative examples from Paul's other letters:

To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be *saints*. (Rom 1:7)

And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the *saints* according to the will of God. (Rom 8:27)

At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the *saints*. (Rom 15:25)

When one of you has a grievance against another, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the *saints*? (1 Cor 6:1)

Or do you not know that the *saints* will judge the world? (1 Cor 6:2)

Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the *saints* greet you. (2 Cor 13:12-13)

All the *saints* greet you, especially those of Caesar's household. (Phil 4:22)

Giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the *saints* in light. (Col 1:12)

The mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his *saints*. (Col 1:26)

So that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his *saints*. (1 Thess 3:13)

Because I hear of your love and of the faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the *saints*. (Phlm 5)

So, while the term "saints" gets its meaning from its root word ("holy") and its use in the OT, within Paul it is usually used without explanation or fanfare. It is simply his term for the people of God who are in Christ. It is an assumed given that this is who the church is.

### **Elsewhere in the NT**

Outside of Paul, we see the idea in a few other NT books. First, Peter explicitly connects the idea of Israel as God's holy nation in Exodus 19:5-6 with the church in 1 Peter 2:9: "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." Besides this more general idea, the actual term "saints" is used a few times outside of Paul. Its only use in the Gospels is Matthew 27:52, when Jesus dies:

The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the *saints* who had fallen asleep were raised.

In Acts it is used within the context of the Jewish believers (see 9:13, 32, 41; 26:10). For example,

But Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your *saints* at Jerusalem.” (9:32)

It is also found in Hebrews 6:10 (also 13:24):

For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the *saints*, as you still do.

And, finally, Jude 3:

Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the *saints*.

### **A Word on Daniel and Revelation**

While not a Pauline usage, the use of “saints” in Daniel and Revelation is worth a mention, as it informs a broader biblical theology of sainthood. The word is used often throughout the book of Revelation to describe the people of God as they are persecuted and martyred by the enemy, over whom they eventually have victory (see 5:8; 8:3-4; 11:18; 13:7, 10; 14:12; 16:6; 17:6; 18:20, 24; 19:8; 20:9). This usage is the last we have in the Bible of the term. Everett Harrison writes,

The next stage of development appears in the book of Revelation, where separation unto the Lord, which characterized saints, leads to Satan-inspired persecution from the world (Rev. 13:7; 14:12) and even to martyrdom (16:6; 17:6). Here are the seeds for the Roman Catholic concept of saints as a peculiarly holy or self-sacrificing person who is worthy of veneration.<sup>327</sup>

While interpretation of both Daniel and Revelation is difficult, it is still interesting to compare the use of the word in the scene Daniel paints and the one John paints in Revelation. Compare the passages below:

**Daniel 7:17-27:** “These four great beasts are four kings who shall arise out of the earth. But the *saints* of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, forever and ever.’ Then I desired to know the truth about the fourth beast, which was different from all the rest, exceedingly terrifying, with its teeth of iron and claws of bronze, and which devoured and broke in pieces and stamped what was left with its feet, and about the ten horns that were on its head, and the other horn that came up and before which three of them fell, the horn that had eyes and a mouth that spoke great things, and that seemed greater than its companions. As I looked, this horn made war with the *saints* and prevailed over them, until the Ancient of Days came, and judgment was given for the *saints* of the Most High, and the time came when the *saints* possessed the kingdom. Thus he said: ‘As for the fourth beast, there shall be a fourth kingdom on earth, which shall be different from all the kingdoms, and it shall devour the whole earth, and trample it down, and break it to pieces. As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom ten kings shall arise, and another shall arise after them; he shall be different from the former ones, and shall put down three kings. He shall speak words against the Most High, and shall wear out the *saints* of the Most High, and shall think to change the times and the law; and they shall be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time. But the court shall sit in judgment, and his dominion shall be taken away, to be consumed and destroyed to the end. And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the *saints* of the Most High; their kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey them.’

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<sup>327</sup> Harrison, “Saint,” 1049.

**Revelation 13:5-10:** And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months. It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven. Also it was allowed to make war on the *saints* and to conquer them. And authority was given it over every tribe and people and language and nation, and all who dwell on earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain. If anyone has an ear, let him hear: If anyone is to be taken captive, to captivity he goes; if anyone is to be slain with the sword, with the sword must he be slain. Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the *saints*.

**Revelation 20:7-9:** And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the *saints* and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them.

Thus, the saints as a whole are those set apart for God who stand against the Satanic influence in the world, many of whom suffer violently and are killed for their testimony about Jesus. But they are also the ones who are given ultimate, eternal victory over Satan, the beast, and their minions.

### **Scholarly Comment**

Below is a compilation of scholarly comment from dictionaries and Ephesians commentaries on the subject of “saints” both in Ephesians and throughout Scripture.

#### ***Theological Dictionary of the New Testament***

“There thus arises a new people of God within the old . . . In the powerful historical sweep of Paul the concept of the people of God has burst its national limits and come to be equated with the Church of Christ. On the holy stump of the OT people of God the new branches from the Gentile world have been engrafted (R. 11:17), and they are sanctified by the stump. The stump is obviously Christ . . . (R. 15:12) ordained to rule over the Gentiles. . . . Originally contained in Jewish Christianity, with which the [*hagioi*] are often equated even in Acts (9:13, 32, 41; 26:10), the holy people of God now extends to the Gentile world. . . . As [*hagioi*] they are members of a cultic circle grounded in the sacrifice of Christ.”<sup>328</sup>

#### ***New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology***

“In the Pauline Epistles . . . [‘the saints’] was primarily not an ethical expression but a parallel to concepts like ‘called’ (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1), ‘elect’ (Rom. 8:33; Col. 3:12) and ‘faithful’ (Col 1:2). It implies association with the Holy Spirit. Christ is their sanctification as well as their righteousness and redemption (1 Cor. 1:30), and thus the One in whom they become holy to the true God.”<sup>329</sup>

#### ***Harold Hoehner***

OT use of the Hebrew word for “holy”: “Both the substantive and adjective can be used to denote God’s unique character, but they can also be used of things, places, and persons. When the term is used to refer

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<sup>328</sup> Otto Procksch, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 1, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 106-07.

<sup>329</sup> Horst Seebass, in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 2, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 229-30.

to things, places, and persons, it does not in itself connote any inherent holiness . . . . Thus, the basic idea is that which is consecrated to God or to God's service."<sup>330</sup>

NT use of "saints": "The reason that saints are to abstain from the sins of the ungodly is because their bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:15-20) and because of their position as saints (Eph 5:3), not because they were inherently holy in themselves. The idea, then, is that they had the position of saints and thus were to act saintly. They obtained this position because they had appropriated Christ's work to their lives (1 Cor 6:11) rather than gained it by acting saintly. Therefore, in the context of the Bible and of the NT in particular, the term 'saint' does not have the cultic concept nor does the saint possess a quality that allows him or her to claim divinity. The term is applied to all believers. The believer can approach God only because he or she has obtained a righteous standing or position on the basis of Christ's work by means of faith. Paul addresses his letters to these people."<sup>331</sup>

### ***Ernest Best***

"[*Hagioi*] is a term frequently used of all Christians . . . especially in the addresses of letters . . . . It derives from the OT where God is often termed the Holy One; his people are then also holy or saints. . . . Since the words saints and believers are linked in Col 1.2 [as in Eph 1:1] . . . they may have been an accepted description of Christians in the Pauline school."<sup>332</sup>

### ***Peter O'Brien***

"The antecedents of the term are to be found in the Old Testament. Israel was God's holy people (Exod. 19:6), chosen by him and appointed to his service. Since the one who had brought them into a covenant relationship was holy, Israel herself was to be a holy nation (Lev. 11:44; 19:2, etc.). Christians are 'saints', not in the sense that they are very pious people, but because of the new relationship they have been brought into by God. It is not because of their own doing or good works but on account of what Christ has done. They are set apart for him and his service; as the people of his own possession they are the elect community of the end time whose lives are to be characterized by godly behaviour. Paul will expand on the implications of this term at 1:4, where holiness is the intended result of God's election, and at 5:26, 27, where it is viewed as the effect of Christ's death on behalf of his church."<sup>333</sup>

### ***Andrew Lincoln***

"The readers, then, are described in the light of their relationship to God, not primarily, of course, in terms of their actual moral condition, but as his holy people in continuity with the OT designation of Israel [cf. Exod 19:6]. The writer will expand on the implications of this term [*hagioi*] in 1:4 where he sees holiness as the result of God's election and in 5:26, 27 where he views it as an effect of Christ's death on behalf of the Church."<sup>334</sup>

### ***Frank Thielman***

"The term [*hagioi*, saints] takes its meaning from the OT, which speaks of God choosing his people from among all peoples of the earth to be 'a royal priesthood and a holy [*hagion*] nation' [Exod 19:5-6]. Because of this status, Israel should 'be holy' [*hagioi*] as God is 'holy' ([*hagios*]; Lev. 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7). Israel's holy status, given to it by God, should be lived out in holy conduct: those whom God has separated as his special people should live in a way that is separate from the surrounding environment. In

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<sup>330</sup> Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 138.

<sup>331</sup> Ibid., 139-40

<sup>332</sup> Best, *Ephesians*, 101.

<sup>333</sup> O'Brien, *Ephesians*, 87.

<sup>334</sup> Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1990), 5-6.

Ephesians, Paul's use of [*hagios*] and related words follows the same pattern. Christ has made believers holy [*hagiazō*] through the cleansing bath of the gospel (5:26), and so they have this status as a gift from God. Yet they must live in a way that is consistent with this status—they should be 'holy [*hagios*] and blameless before him in love' (1:4), and their conduct should be what is 'proper for holy people [*hagiois*]' (5:3).<sup>335</sup>

### **Further Considerations**

Two additional comments should be made before concluding. First, Paul's use of "saints" has a very corporate nature. "Except for Philippians 4:21, it is not used in the singular, and even there it reflects the corporate idea—'every saint.'"<sup>336</sup> This probably explains why Paul uses it so much in Ephesians, since Ephesians has such a strong focus on the church, the body of Christ made up of both Jews and Gentiles. All are saints in him. As Harrison notes, "In Ephesians, where there is strong emphasis on the unity of the church, 'all the saints' becomes almost a refrain [1:15; 3:8, 18; 6:18]."<sup>337</sup>

Second, being a saint is both a gift and a calling. We are already saints. It is not something we work up to. It is a gift from God. In fact, if you are a Gentile, based on Romans 11, it is almost like a double-gift. You were a "wild olive shoot" grafted into the promises of grace already given to Abraham (Rom 11:17). As one scholar writes, "Although Gentile Christians are saints, too, because they were given access to the faith of Abraham and the people of the old Testament, when redemptive history is discussed the Jews are specially designated the 'saints' while the Gentiles are considered believers who were later admitted into this 'holy' Jewish nucleus."<sup>338</sup> It is astounding that pagans who didn't know God and were going their own way with regard to the work of God through the promise of Abraham in the world can now participate in those promises. Language that was reserved for the holiest of elements in the religion of Israel is now applied to those who had no idea who this God was and were living in the passions of their flesh as "children of wrath" (Eph 2:3). These are now the "holy ones," the saints.

So while Calvinists emphasize the doctrine of total depravity—and the Bible certainly makes it clear that we are sinful and in need of redemption—the use of "saints" to describe us shows that depravity is not the whole story. Depravity is part of the old order. Saints are who we *really* are if we are in Christ. Because of the already/not yet tension, of course, we are still sinful and always will be until Christ returns for us. But in a very real sense, the old has passed, and the new has come. In Christ, who is our life, we are *saints*. And our sainthood does not depend upon us. It depends on Jesus, and who we are *in him*. We are *his* holy ones.

Thus, being called a saint is a gift. But it is also something we are being called *to*. Since we are not home yet, we must continually fight to press into our identity and make it more and more our own. God says, "You shall be holy, for I am holy" (1 Pet 1:16, quoting Lev 11:44). We are saints, and we must *be* who we are. One scholar writes, "Saints acquire their status by divine call (Rom. 1:7)," but "doubtless there is latent in the use of this term the idea that relationship to God involves conformity to his will and character," as we see in Ephesians 5:3: "But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper *among saints*." So knowing we are saints impels us forward to take hold more and more of what we actually are.

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<sup>335</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 34.

<sup>336</sup> Harrison, "Saint," 1049.

<sup>337</sup> Ibid. On the corporate nature of being "saints," he also notes that the "Apostles' Creed enshrines this significance of the word in the statement, 'I believe . . . in the communion of saints.'"

<sup>338</sup> John McRay, "Saints," in *Baker Theological Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 701.

### **Conclusion**

Though we hear all kinds of uses of the word “saint” within our culture, for Paul, the fundamental usage is to describe all believers—every follower of Jesus Christ is a saint. The root of the word relates to the fact that they are set apart, consecrated, holy to God. Becoming a saint for Paul did not require any kind of working up to it. It only required belief that Jesus was the Christ, the son of the living God. Those who follow Jesus are the “holy ones,” not because of anything they have done, but because of the person *in which* they live—Jesus. They are his chosen people, his royal priesthood, his saints and holy ones. This is me. This is you.

## *I AM BLESSED / Ephesians 1:3 - 14*

### **Introduction**

Ephesians 1:3-14 is a long benediction to God. In it, Paul praises (“blesses”) God because God has so richly blessed us in Christ. Throughout, Paul recounts the details of these immeasurable blessings. The passage is complicated grammatically, comprised of one, seemingly never-ending sentence in the Greek. As one commentator writes, “Ephesians 1:3-14 is one long sentence (of 202 words) marked by an accumulation of relative clauses and phrases whose relation to one another is often difficult to determine.”<sup>339</sup> However, the overall point and impact of Paul’s words are clear. God is to be praised for the rich blessings he has poured out on believers in Christ. Below we will look at the general concept of blessing as well as the details of the passage.

### **Ephesians 1:3-14 as Benediction/Blessing**

We begin with the overarching theme, which is that of “blessing.” Paul opens with the phrase, “Blessed be God.” The word for “blessed” is the Greek adjective *eulogētos*. The word is related to two other words in the same verse. First, the verb *eulogeō*, “to bless,” when Paul writes that God is the one “who has blessed us in Christ.” Second, the noun *eulogia*, “blessing” (cf. the English word “eulogy”), when Paul writes that God has blessed us with “every spiritual blessing.” The word group can have the sense of “speak well of, praise, extol” or “bestow a favor, provide with benefits.”<sup>340</sup> Both senses appear here: “Blessed be God” = “Praise be to God,” and “blessed us in Christ” = “bestowed favor on us in Christ.”

The Greek word *eulogētos* is used in the Septuagint to translate the Hebrew word *berakah*. The *berakah* was a common form used in Jewish worship of God and would certainly be in Paul’s mind as he penned these verses. Frank Thielman writes,

The benediction, or *berakah*, has been for centuries the most common form of Jewish prayer and central to the piety of devout Jewish living. Long before the first century, Jews used both lengthy benedictions in corporate worship and brief benedictions in daily life as a way of praising God for various gracious gifts.<sup>341</sup>

He goes on to give examples in Scripture, such as David celebrating victories God had given (see 2 Sam 22:47-49, which became part of Israel’s songbook in Psa 18:46-48), Solomon at the dedication of temple (1 Kings 8:56-61), and after the return from exile (Neh 9:5). There are many shorter benedictions throughout the OT. Below are a few examples<sup>342</sup>:

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<sup>339</sup> Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 90. On the unique character of the passage, see also O’Brien’s article, “Ephesians I: An Unusual Introduction to a New Testament Letter,” *New Testament Studies* 25 (1979): 504-16.

<sup>340</sup> Walter Bauer, Frederick William Danker, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilber Gingrich, eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. [BDAG] (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 408.

<sup>341</sup> Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 37.

<sup>342</sup> In the NT, see Luke 1:68-75; 2 Cor 1:3-4; 1 Pet 1:3-5.

**Blessed be the LORD**, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken his steadfast love and his faithfulness toward my master. As for me, the LORD has led me in the way to the house of my master's kinsmen. (Gen 24:27)

Then the women said to Naomi, “**Blessed be the LORD**, who has not left you this day without a redeemer, and may his name be renowned in Israel!” (Ruth 4:14)

And David said to Abigail, “**Blessed be the LORD**, the God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me!” (1 Sam 25:32)

And he bowed before the king with his face to the earth and said, “**Blessed be the LORD** your God, who has delivered up the men who raised their hand against my lord the king.” (2 Sam 18:28)

And the king also said, “**Blessed be the LORD**, the God of Israel, who has granted someone to sit on my throne this day, my own eyes seeing it.” (1 Kings 1:48)

**Blessed be the LORD**, the God of our fathers, who put such a thing as this into the heart of the king, to beautify the house of the LORD that is in Jerusalem. (Ezra 7:27)

Andrew Lincoln expounds on the subject:

In the OT the earliest form of *berakah* occurred when an individual responded simply to an act of God’s deliverance or provision (e.g., Gen 14:20; 24:27) . . . later it became associated with the cult and was used in Israel’s corporate worship (e.g., Solomon’s prayer at the dedication of the temple begins and ends with the *berakah* formula in 1 Kgs 8:15, 56), and . . . a further stage of development is evidenced by the use of the *berakah* to conclude the books of the Psalter (Pss 41:13; 72:18, 19; 89:52; 106:48). Such eulogies remained dominant in Jewish worship and can be found in the Qumran literature [Dead Sea Scrolls] . . . in Zechariah’s prayer of Luke 1:68-75, and in rabbinic Judaism where they were the most characteristic formulae for prayer.<sup>343</sup>

Thus, Paul draws on a long Jewish tradition of offering praise to God in the form of a benediction. Blessing God, along with recognizing that we have been blessed by God, are perhaps the most central elements of the Christian faith. On this idea in Ephesians 1:3, Eugene Peterson writes the following:

Two variations on “bless” festoon first God and then us: the adjective “blessed” characterizes God, who blesses as he himself is blessed; the noun “blessing” comprehensively designates our experience of being blessed by God. What God *does* comes out of who God *is*. And what we receive from God is who God is. . . . And God is what he gives. We don’t second-guess God . . . We don’t presume to tell God how to be God. When we worship God, we let God be God. There is more to be said and prayed and sung, doubted and questioned, of course. And this “more” has been and will continue to be said and prayed and sung, doubted and questioned. But the first verb, *bless*, is map and compass for finding our way through the country.<sup>344</sup>

Blessed be, blessed us, spiritual blessing. “Bless” accumulates resonance and nuance as the story of creation and salvation is told across the centuries: God blessing Abraham; David and Zechariah blessing God; Mary identified as blessed; Jesus blessing the children; children praying a blessing

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<sup>343</sup> Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1990), 10.

<sup>344</sup> Eugene Peterson, *Practice Resurrection: A Conversation on Growing Up in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 57.

over a meal; the unthinking reflex *gesundheit*, “bless you,” at a sneeze; parents blessing their children; pastors and priests dismissing their congregations with a blessing. Everybody says it, and many do it. The word permeates our language and experience. We can’t get away from it.<sup>345</sup>

### **Structure and Theme**

With the difficult grammar and the amount of ground Paul covers topically in this benediction, there are multiple ways to think about the structure and theme of the passage: “Although there have been many efforts to determine the form and structure of the paragraph, no general agreement has been reached.”<sup>346</sup> However, we can make some general observations. On the structure, Thielman writes the following:

Paul’s benediction in Eph. 1:3-14 is unusual because of the combination of its length, its sustained benedictory focus, and its complex series of dependent clauses. The benedictions at the beginning of other letters are no more than a brief phrase or sentence, but Paul’s benediction, although one sentence, comprises 202 words. This makes it longer by far than the New Testament’s other epistolary benedictions: 2 Cor. 1:3-4 and 1 Pet. 1:3-5 weigh in at 44 and 53 words respectively.<sup>347</sup>

The passage therefore combines repetition of structural features and themes with small structural inconsistencies. This combination seems most likely if Paul dictated the passage extemporaneously but with some prior structure in mind before doing so.<sup>348</sup>

### **Outline of Passage**

Commentators generally break the passage down in similar ways, with minor variations. Below are a few examples. Frank Thielman again:

- Blessing God Who Has Blessed His People in Christ (1:3-14)
- A. Praise to God for His Grace in Making Believers His People (1:3-6)
- B. Praise to God for His Grace in Redemption and Revelation (1:7-10)
- C. Praise to God for Making His People Heirs and Giving Them Hope in Christ (1:11-12)
- D. Praise to God for the Conversion and Future Salvation of Paul’s Readers (1:13-14)<sup>349</sup>

Peter O’Brien:

1. Praise to God for Every Spiritual Blessing, 1:3
2. Praise for Election and Adoption, 1:4-6
3. Praise for Redemption and the Forgiveness of Sins, 1:7-8
4. Praise for the Mystery — God’s Plan to Sum Up All Things in Christ, 1:9-10
5. Praise for the Assurance of the Believers’ Heritage, 1:11-14<sup>350</sup>

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<sup>345</sup> Ibid., 57-58.

<sup>346</sup> O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 90.

<sup>347</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 39.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>349</sup> Ibid., vii.

<sup>350</sup> Ibid., vi.

Clinton Arnold:

- Praise to God for His Remarkable Plan of Redemption (1:3-14)
  - A. Praise to God! (A Summary of the Section) (1:3)
  - B. Because He Chose and Predestined Us (1:4-6)
  - C. Because He Forgave Our Sins and Revealed His Plan to us (1:7-10)
  - D. Because He Chose and Predestined Us (1:11-12)
  - E. Because He Sealed Us with His Spirit (1:13-14)<sup>351</sup>

Beyond these general outlines, a couple of themes are worth singling out. First, the idea of being “in Christ.” Second, the way the passage reflects the work of the *triune* God.

**“In Christ”**

First, union with Christ. As mentioned in the earlier Docent brief on the subject, the phrase “in Christ” or a variation of it (e.g., “in him”) saturates this chapter. Thomas Schreiner writes, “The diversity of expressions to describe being in Christ in this one long sentence (Eph 1:3-14) is astonishing, and the sheer repetition of the formula indicates that it is crucial in Pauline thought.”<sup>352</sup> In 1:3-14 the phrase or a variation of it is found in 1:3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13. The structure of Ephesians 1:3-14 can even be broken down according to the “in him/Christ” phrases. Below is an adaptation of Thielman’s method for structuring the passage.<sup>353</sup>

Section	Opening	Closing
1:3-6	“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . who has blessed us <i>in Christ</i> .”	“. . . with which he has blessed us in the <i>in the Beloved</i> .”
1:7-10	“ <i>In him/whom</i> we have redemption”	“. . . all things in heaven and earth <i>in him</i> .”
1:11-12	“ <i>In whom</i> also we have been made heirs”	“. . . the first to hope <i>in Christ</i> .”
1:13-14	“ <i>In whom</i> also you . . . believed”	“. . . for the praise of his glory.”

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<sup>351</sup> Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 73.

<sup>352</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2001), 156.

<sup>353</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 43.

The final section (1:13-14) is the only one that does not end with a variation of “in Christ,” probably because “for the praise of his glory” serves as a final conclusion of praise to God, like a bookend with “Blessed be God” at the beginning.

From this section alone, then, we see several things about believers that take place “in Christ.” In Christ we are blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places (1:3) and chosen before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him (1:4). We are blessed with his grace (1:6) and have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses (1:7). We have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to God’s purpose (1:11), and, finally, we have been sealed with the Holy Spirit (1:13).

### **Trinitarian Character**

Another theme that is often noted is the Trinitarian character of the passage. Paul moves from the Father choosing, to Christ accomplishing redemption, to the Spirit sealing believers, all of which orbits around the idea of being “in him/Christ.” On this, Lincoln writes,

The trinitarian pattern of thought is reflected in God the Father, as the origin of every blessing and the one who chooses his people, Christ, as the beloved Son in and through whom the blessings are mediated and the one to whom redemption both on the personal and on the cosmic level is most closely related, and the Spirit, as stamping his character on the blessings (they are “spiritual,” v 3) and as being the one who marks God’s ownership and serves as the guarantee of the fulfillment of his purpose.<sup>354</sup>

### **Breakdown of Passage**

#### **Verses 3**

Verse 3 stands like a heading over the passage.<sup>355</sup> *Blessed* be the God . . . who *blessed* us with every spiritual *blessing*. Paul then goes on to recount those blessings in detail. As Thielman writes,

Paul begins the first section of the benediction with a statement that follows the traditional pattern for the opening of a benedictory prayer. God, he says, is praised because of the blessings he has given to his people. These blessings are both spiritual, since they are the gifts of the Spirit, and heavenly, because they exist in a dimension of existence that stands outside everyday experience (v. 3).<sup>356</sup>

#### **Verses 4-6**

Following this opening statement, then, verses 4-6 list the blessings God’s people have received, all of which center on the main verbal idea, “he chose us.” So, these blessings include being chosen in Christ before the beginning of the world to be holy and blameless before him (v. 4), being predestined for adoption as his children in Christ (v. 5), freely receiving his grace that he lavishes upon us (v. 6).

He *chose* us

Having predestined us for adoption

According to the good pleasure of his will

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<sup>354</sup> Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 43.

<sup>355</sup> O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 93.

<sup>356</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 45.

To the praise of his grace

Which he bestowed on us freely

### Verses 7-10

The next verses begin by focusing on the blessing of “redemption,” which Paul strongly associates with “forgiveness of trespasses” (v. 7). Additionally, “The central section (1:7-10) of this text emphasizes incorporation into Christ by beginning and ending with ‘in him’ [*en hō . . . en autō*], which thus forms an inclusio.”<sup>357</sup> Thielman sums it up well:

The second main part of the benediction praises God for two further blessings he has lavished on his people. First, Paul praises God for the specific way in which he freely granted grace to his people in the Beloved (cf. v. 6b). He did this through a rescue effort not unlike the redemption of his people from slavery in Egypt and his restoration of them to the land after the Babylonian exile. In this case, however, the redemption was not rescue from literal slavery or exile, but rescue from transgressions. . . . Second, Paul praises God because he showed his abundant grace to his people by revealing to them “the mystery of his will” (v. 9). God planned to do this in Christ and took pleasure in doing it. . . . The mystery itself is God’s arrangement of “the times” in order to sum up all things, whether heavenly or earthly, in Christ. When Christ’s work is complete, the unfolding of history will make sense.<sup>358</sup>

### Verses 11-12

This set of verses “begins the fourth major section of this passage and corresponds significantly in vocabulary and content with the second major section (1:4-6). Paul here uses a different word for choosing [*klēroō*] and expresses it in the passive voice while maintaining his use of the first person plural.”<sup>359</sup> Paul also “advances the thought of the benediction,” taking “the thought that believers are God’s chosen people and adopted children a step further than he had in verses 4-5: as God’s children they are also his heirs.”<sup>360</sup>

Paul’s use of the word *proēlpikotas* (ESV: “we who were the first to hope”), along with his switch from the first person “we,” in this verse to the second person, “you (all),” in verse 13, have led to some difficulties in determining what exactly he is saying. Some believe verse 12 refers to Jewish believers (the “first to hope in Christ”) and verse 13 switches to Gentiles, especially when the rest of the letter is considered (e.g., 2:11-22).<sup>361</sup> But others believe this makes little sense in light of the sustained focus on the glory of salvation for all believers in this passage. In this case the word “first to hope” might mean “hope beforehand,” with various explanations given for “beforehand,” such as before the final consummation of Christ’s return,<sup>362</sup> or that the word may not mean “before” at all and may simply be an intensification of the word for hope.<sup>363</sup> In the end, it does seem like introducing a Jew/Gentile element

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<sup>357</sup> Arnold, *Ephesians*, 84-85.

<sup>358</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 56.

<sup>359</sup> Arnold, *Ephesians*, 89.

<sup>360</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 71

<sup>361</sup> O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 116-17, makes a plausible case for this.

<sup>362</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 76.

<sup>363</sup> Arnold, *Ephesians*, 91. The preposition *pro*, “before,” is attached to the verb *elpizō*, “to hope,” but Arnold argues that it could just be a way of intensifying the word “hope,” rather than saying “hope before.”

here adds some confusion to Paul's overall point. It may be that he refers to himself and fellow workers with the word "we," or it may just be a rhetorical move into which we shouldn't read too much.<sup>364</sup>

### **Verse 13-14**

The "final section of the benediction turns directly to Paul's readers to remind them of their conversion and especially of the gift of the Holy Spirit that God gave to them at that time. When they heard and believed the gospel, Paul says, God sealed them by means of the Holy Spirit. The final verses direct attention to the work of the Holy Spirit. He did this for two reasons. First, the Holy Spirit's seal protects them from the wrath that God will one day pour out on the wicked. . . . Second, and more positively, the gift of the Holy Spirit also serves as a down payment on the inheritance that he will give to the remnant he has saved from his wrath."<sup>365</sup>

### **General Comment on Ephesians 1:3-14**

#### ***Andrew Lincoln***

A bare summary of the contents does not begin to indicate the impact of the language of this passage or the intricate interweaving of its themes. In one sense the language is exalted and extravagant and yet, in another, the very repetition of phrases reveals its poverty and inadequacy to do justice to its subject—salvation on the grandest scale and broadest canvas. The flow of thought spans past, present, and future, and its reflection on God's activity can be seen to have a trinitarian content. The blessings of salvation are related to the pretemporal ("before the foundation of the world," v. 4), to the past (what God has done in Christ, v 3, 7; and the believer's past appropriation of this, vv 13, 14), to the present (the current enjoyment of redemption and forgiveness, v 7), to the future (the believer's inheritance which coincides with God's complete possession of his people, v 14), and to the overlap between the present and the future (as this is reflected in the summing up of all things in Christ, v 10, and the experience of the Spirit as a guarantee, v 14).<sup>366</sup>

This introductory *berakah* makes use of a liturgical style, but not simply to address God in a hymn; it takes up traditional formulations, but not simply to instruct. Rather, in reminder of God's blessings of salvation in Christ and in praise of God, it functions in such a way as to appeal to the recipients' experience of these blessings and to stimulate them to participate in the grateful praise of God it has inaugurated. Recalling God's blessings in Christ is meant to lead to gratitude and praise. In fact, the whole long sentence functions as a paean of praise into which its readers are invited. For this writer the purpose of the existence of the eschatological people of God is the praise of his grace and glory. As they confess with abandon that to God belongs all the glory, God's people find their fulfillment. It is of the essence of grace to culminate in thanksgiving and of the essence of their relationship as God's sons and daughters to bless their Father constantly for having blessed them so richly in Christ.<sup>367</sup>

#### ***Frank Thielman***

Paul often follows the greeting of his letters with a brief "prayer report" in which he describes how he thanks God for his readers in prayer (1 Thess. 1:2-3:13; 2 Thess. 1:3-12; 1 Cor. 1:4-9; Phil. 1:3-8; Rom. 1:8; Col. 1:3-8; Philem. 4-5; 2 Tim. 1:3; cf. 1 Tim. 1:12-17) and how he intercedes with God on their

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<sup>364</sup> For a good, thorough treatment of the subject, see Harold Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 231-33.

<sup>365</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 77.

<sup>366</sup> Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 43.

<sup>367</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

behalf (Phil. 1:9-11; Col. 1:9-11; Philem. 6-7; cf. Rom. 1:9-10). . . . In a way unique among his canonical letters, in Ephesians Paul not only records a thanksgiving (1:15-16) and intercessory (1:17-23) prayer report but also, before it, a lengthy benediction that blesses God for the blessings he has given to all believers, and especially to Paul's Gentile readers.<sup>368</sup>

The practical purpose for including such a benedictory prayer in this letter becomes clear at its conclusion, where Paul turns specifically to all who read it or hear it read and, on the basis of what God has done for them, draws them into his expression of praise. If we can take 3:13 to mean that Paul's readers were discouraged, Paul may have written this benediction to remind them of all that God has done for them in Christ and of the important place that they, as the church, occupy in God's historical purposes.<sup>369</sup>

### ***Clinton E. Arnold***

Paul begins his letter with an introductory eulogy or *berakah*, that is, an ascription of praise to God for who he is and what he has done. Second Corinthians is the only other letter that he begins this way (2 Cor 1:3-7), following a pattern of blessing God that is very Jewish in style. . . . Paul's blessing of God is unusually long – one sentence containing 202 words. . . . Paul weaves this together into a beautiful, artistic, and smooth-flowing declaration of praise to God for his indescribable work on our behalf. It is expressed with emotion and is designed to profoundly move all who hear it or read it.<sup>370</sup>

Because of the poetic qualities of this passage, some interpreters have wondered if Paul has included and modified a hymn from the worship and liturgy of the early church. The vast majority of scholars, however, doubt this supposition not only because of the highly speculative nature of such a conclusion, but also because the passage functions so well as an introduction to many of the themes that Paul will develop in the letter. These include themes such as the meaning of incorporation into Christ, the role of the Holy Spirit, love, grace, the meaning of redemption, salvation, the sovereign plan of God, the mystery, the power of God, the spiritual realm (i.e., “the heavenlies”), and Christ's lordship over spiritual powers. Paul has skillfully created this eulogy to honor his God and to introduce what he will address in a worshipful way.<sup>371</sup>

### ***Harold Hoehner***

The eulogy of Eph 1:3-14 is somewhat unique in that its roots are in the OT and in keeping with the Jewish-Hellenistic style, and yet its content goes beyond them. On the one hand, it has been criticized as a grammatically cumbersome sentence of 202 words, but, on the other hand, it has been praised for its fullness of words, liturgical majesty, and perceptible rhythm, and these verses which seem to defy structure are described as “a kaleidoscope of dazzling lights and shifting colours.” The attempt to precisely decipher the divisions as a liturgical hymn has proven impossible. Though the grammatical structure is at times difficult to determine, all this is understandable when considering the context of praise and prayer. . . .<sup>372</sup>

This eulogy shows development, for one sees that the refrain “to the praise of his glory” (vv. 6, 12, 14) is given after discussing each person of the Trinity in the order of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Also, there is progression from a pronouncement of praise to God (v. 3), to a description of God's great plan and action (vv. 4-12), and finally to its application to the believers at Ephesus (vv. 13-14). Therefore, the

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<sup>368</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 37.

<sup>369</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>370</sup> Arnold, *Ephesians*, 72.

<sup>371</sup> *Ibid.*, 72-73.

<sup>372</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 159.

abundance of descriptive words of God’s purpose, plan, and action in a long complicated sentence is entirely fitting within the scope of a eulogy. . . . Finally, though it is Paul’s praise of God’s goodness to him, it also serves as a model to encourage the Ephesian believers to offer praise to God, for believers then and now need to acknowledge the many blessings bestowed by him.<sup>373</sup>

### ***Eugene Peterson***

The 201 words beginning with “blessed” (1:3) and ending with “glory” (v. 14) is a single sentence in Paul’s Greek. One scholar, E. Nordon, called it “the most monstrous sentence conglomeration . . . I have ever met in the Greek language.” But the eminent scholar, notwithstanding his erudition, had a tin ear. Christians who hear or read this sentence in the company of a worshiping congregation are likely to dismiss the fussy grammarian’s outrage as a whimpering whine. Who can resist this marvelous, tumbling cataract of poetry that introduces us to the vast and intricate complexities of this world in which we live? Not many. Paul is playful, extravagant, and totally engaging as he tells us what is going on in this God-created, Christ-saved, Spirit-blessed world in to which we have been born and are now growing up.<sup>374</sup>

All is gift. “Grace is everywhere.” God in Christ is actively doing for and in us everything involved in the practice of resurrection. So what is there left for us to do? Receive. That is our primary response if we are to find ourselves no longer lost in the cosmos but at home in it. For the most part, receptivity is a learned response. Receive the gift.<sup>375</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The benediction of Ephesians 1:3-14 is lavish both in the way it praises God and in the way it revels in the gifts of God, richly bestowed upon us in Christ. The title, “I Am Blessed,” is entirely appropriate for this passage, as Paul goes to great lengths to describe the immeasurable and infinite blessings that believers have received in Christ, all simply because of God’s good pleasure. The passage opens the book of Ephesians with a bang—literally, a rich explosion of descriptive words and phrases that extol the grace of God in Christ. They prepare the audience for what is to come in the rest of the book and stir our souls to join in the exaltation of God for his blessings, quickening within us a desire to walk more and more in his ways.

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<sup>373</sup> Ibid.

<sup>374</sup> Peterson, *Resurrection*, 54.

<sup>375</sup> Ibid., 68.

## *I AM APPRECIATED / Ephesians 1:15 - 23*

### **Introduction**

The typical Christian response when others succeed is sometimes hard to distinguish from that of the world. But in the opening of his letter to the Ephesians, Paul gives an excellent example of appreciation toward those who have “succeeded” in the faith. Paul’s acknowledgment of the spiritual success of the Ephesians prompts thankfulness, which then prompts a gracious prayer on behalf of the people. In what follows, we will look at Paul’s greeting and message in Ephesians 1:15–23, highlight other places in Paul’s letters where he shows a similar attitude of appreciation, and discuss the appreciation of the believer in light of Jesus’ sacrifice.

### **Paul’s Appreciation in Ephesians**

#### ***Ephesians 1:15-16***

Paul’s thankfulness for the Ephesians is found primarily in the 1:15-16: “*For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.*” The first question to ask is *why* Paul appreciates the Ephesians. Why does he “not cease to give thanks” for them? From the text, the answer to this question is pretty simple: his thankfulness comes from what he sees in their lives. The church at Ephesus showed a strong faith in Jesus, which led to a great love for all the saints (v. 15). They had an active faith that expressed itself in love for each other and toward all the saints in the area.<sup>376</sup> Because of this, Paul appreciated them greatly and was moved to offer a prayer to God on their behalf.

Below are a few comments from scholars on the text:

#### *Frank Thielman*

“In the first part of his thanksgiving and intercessory prayer report, Paul tells his readers that what he has heard about them has led him to unceasing thanksgiving for them whenever he remembers them in prayer. He has heard that they have placed their faith in the gospel and that they are therefore ‘in the Lord Jesus’ . . . . In particular, he is grateful to hear this because, as he will explain later, God has entrusted him with the special responsibility of proclaiming to the Gentiles that they have been included in the people of God through the gospel (3:2-13). The report of his Gentile readers’ faith in the Lord Jesus and of their working out of this faith in love for their fellow believers is therefore appropriate cause for many prayers of thanksgiving (v. 16).”<sup>377</sup>

#### *Harold Hoehner*

“Having completed the magnificent eulogy [of verses 1–14], Paul prays for the Ephesians. It could be called the prayer for those who have everything because the believers have every spiritual benefit for their spiritual welfare . . . Paul’s desire is for the Ephesian believers to deepen their relationship with the God who has enriched them with every spiritual benefit and to experience those benefits in a deeper way.”<sup>378</sup>

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<sup>376</sup> Harold Hoehner, *Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 249.

<sup>377</sup> Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 91.

<sup>378</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 247.

*Ernest Best*

“In most Pauline letters a thanksgiving report and intercession follow the address; Ephesians instead begins with a eulogy (1.3-14). A eulogy, unlike a thanksgiving, is praise of God without direct reference to those before, or on behalf of whom, it is offered; initial intercessions in letters relate directly to the condition of the recipients. Because of its nature intercession would not then flow naturally out of eulogy; hence the brief thanksgiving report creating a suitable transition.”

*Klyne Snodgrass*

“This is the only Pauline letter to combine both a doxology and a thanksgiving-intercession. Paul’s petition for the continuing work of God in his readers grows out of his thanks for what God has already accomplished in them.”<sup>379</sup>

### ***The Church at Ephesus***

The church at Ephesus was the only one in which Paul spent a large portion of his time in ministry. Acts 18:24–19:41 records Paul’s extended stay in the city with the fledgling church. It is pretty clear that the church at Ephesus was special in Paul’s heart:

You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there . . . Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears. And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified (Acts 20:18–22, 31–32).

Paul gave this prolonged speech to the elders of the church at Ephesus right before his departure for Jerusalem (Acts. 20:17). He understood that he would probably not return from his trip (v. 25), so he wanted to encourage the Ephesian elders and remind them of both his own work among them and their faithful response to the Gospel. The love and appreciation they all shared with each other is pictured movingly in the scene right before Paul boards the ship to leave them:

And there was much weeping on the part of all; they embraced Paul and kissed him, being sorrowful most of all because of the word he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. (Acts 20:37-38)

It is this sense of thankfulness that Paul expresses in his letter to the Ephesians. The church’s faithful response to the teaching and exhortation of Paul brought about genuine gratitude toward both the people and toward Jesus who enabled them to live as they did. This was not a begrudging appreciation. Just the opposite. When Paul heard and saw of the Ephesians’ continued faithfulness toward Jesus and their dedication toward serving him, his response was thankfulness. In a world where fame, reputation, envy, resentment, and hatred, are the norm, Paul responds with joy and thankfulness in the face of the Ephesian church’s success in faith, love, and ministry.

And the Ephesians did indeed have great success, as we see in Jesus’ words to them in his letter to the church recorded in John’s Revelation:

I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to

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<sup>379</sup> Klyne Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 70.

be false. I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary. But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. (Rev 2:1–5)

The faithful dedication that Paul saw in the Ephesian church set the standard for the congregation as it continued through the age. When Jesus himself sends this letter, it is a commendation for endurance in the faith and faithfulness to the Gospel. The one thing that Jesus does correct them on is their lack of good works as the years progressed. Whether these works flagged while Paul was still ministering, it is difficult to say. However, it is worth noting that their behavior and success is the standard to which the church will be held throughout the ages.

In the face of this, Paul's appreciation for the Ephesian church in Ephesians 1:15–16 is the result of their successful endurance in the faith. In this passage, then, Paul's thankfulness wells up into a prayer for the Ephesians. Not only a prayer of thankfulness, though that was a large part of it, but a prayer that they would continue in their faithfulness and exceed it with greater works still. The love that comes from God and spills over into appreciation of others moves us to an increasing love and affection, which naturally results in prayers to God for those whom we love in the faith. That is what we see here.

### **Paul's Appreciation in the Other Epistles**

All of Paul's letters are saturated with the idea of thankfulness and appreciation. There is a strong sense of affection in everything he writes for the people to whom he is writing. Because of the grace and mercy he had received and continued to receive from God, he lived in a continual state of thankfulness for what God was doing. This kind of gratitude spills over in love and appreciation for our brothers and sisters who have also participated in this grace. Almost every letter of Paul's begins with a form of thanksgiving.

#### ***Thanksgiving Formulas***

Paul's thanksgivings were related to the common form of letter-writing of his day. They "can be seen as modifications of the Hellenistic letter form which often stated that the writer 'gives thanks to the gods' or 'makes continual mention of you before the gods' and then provided reasons for the writer's gratitude."<sup>380</sup> However, they "do not simply reflect Hellenistic epistolary style . . . they reflect also early Christian liturgical style which in turn had its roots in Jewish worship."<sup>381</sup> Paul also injected his thanksgivings with much theological and pastoral content—they were in no way formulaic. Peter O'Brien offers a couple of helpful insights on the subject:

Introductory thanksgivings appear in nine of Paul's letters . . . addressed to a variety of Christian readers (the thanksgiving in the letter to Philemon is with reference to an individual—a colleague of Paul). . . . These paragraphs, which open with a statement of thanksgiving to God, have an epistolary function: that is, they introduce and present the main themes of their letters, setting the tone, atmosphere, etc. Most of them have a didactic function so that either by fresh teaching or through a recall to instruction previously given the apostle sets forth theological matters he considers to be important (cf. especially Col. 1:9-14). A paraenetic or exhortatory purpose also features in several of the introductory thanksgiving periods. . . . Further, Paul's opening thanksgiving periods, particularly the thanksgivings and petitions contained within them, give evidence of the apostle's deep pastoral and apostolic concern for the readers, sometimes for an

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<sup>380</sup> Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1990), 48, who references P. Schubert, *Form and Function of the Pauline Thanksgivings* (Berlin: A. Töpelmann, 1939), 158-79.

<sup>381</sup> Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 48.

individual (cf. Phlm. 3-6), but on most occasions for congregations (cf. Phil. 1:3-11 and even 1 Cor. 1:4-9).<sup>382</sup>

The grounds for Paul's thanksgivings were manifold. Frequently the early Christian triad of faith, love and hope (with some variations: 1 Thess. 1:2, 3; 2 Thess. 1:3; Col. 1:4; Phlm. 5; cf. Rom. 1:8; Eph. 1:15) was set forth as the *immediate* basis for the expression of thanks. This might appear to place an undue stress on the "achievements" of the readers as though they sprang from their own inherent resources. But to take this line is to misunderstand Paul's statements, for on closer examination we note that these were graces given in Christ Jesus. Furthermore, the prior activity of God is regularly seen as the *final* ground for thanksgiving.<sup>383</sup>

Below are some examples from his letters:

*Romans 1:8-10* First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world. For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you.

*1 Corinthians 1:4* I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus.

*Philippians 1:3-5* I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

*Colossians 1:3-5* We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven.

*2 Thessalonians 1:3* We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing.<sup>384</sup>

*2 Timothy 1:3-4* I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience, as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. As I remember your tears, I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy.

*Philemon 4-5* I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers, because I hear of your love and of the faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints.

### ***Appreciation in 1 Thessalonians***

Paul's thankfulness for believers in 1 Thessalonians is worth singling out. The letter contains a thanksgiving formula like Paul's other letters:

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<sup>382</sup> Peter T. O'Brien, "Thanksgiving Within the Structure of Pauline Theology," in *Pauline Studies*, ed. Donald A. Hagner and Murray J. Harris (Exeter, UK: Paternoster, 1980), 55-56.

<sup>383</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>384</sup> Also see later in the letter: "But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth" (2 Thess 2:13).

We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. (1:2-3)

But elsewhere in the letter Paul overflows with even more affection and thanksgiving for this church.

But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us. (2:7-8)

And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers. (2:13)

But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face, because we wanted to come to you--I, Paul, again and again--but Satan hindered us. For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? For you are our glory and joy. (2:17-20)

But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love and reported that you always remember us kindly and long to see us, as we long to see you-- for this reason, brothers, in all our distress and affliction we have been comforted about you through your faith. For now we live, if you are standing fast in the Lord. For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God, as we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith? Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. (3:6-13)

Notice especially how in 3:6-13 Paul moves from joy and thankfulness for the Thessalonians to a rich prayer on their behalf, just like we see in Ephesians 1:15-23. Paul's love and thanksgiving for the Thessalonians is a beautiful picture of how the love of God in Christ breaks into the believer's heart through the work of the Spirit and overflows to others with whom we share in the blessing of the Gospel.

### ***Romans 12***

If we also look at Romans, we find another extended treatment of the matter of others-appreciation. Romans 12 is well-known for its first verses, but the remainder of the chapter is a strong exhortation to live in love and appreciation for one another:

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. **For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.** For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. . . . Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. **Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.** Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in

prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. **Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly.** Never be wise in your own sight. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. (Rom 12:1-5, 9-18)

Within the context of the healthy fellowship and function of the family of God, Paul's instructions for behavior expand his model for appreciation. Believers are not to think more highly of themselves than they ought, and they are not to be prideful toward one another. In addition, Paul exhorts believers to live in affection with each other and to strive to outdo each other in honoring each other. This is quite contrary to the ancient (and modern) context that believers often find themselves in. Instead of reacting in envy and jealousy toward those who succeed or express more faith, believers are to appreciate each other and show honor. Douglas Moo writes:

As Paul recognizes elsewhere (see esp. Phil. 2:2–4), the biggest barrier to unity is pride. Therefore, Paul next warns us about “thinking exalted things,” that is, “thinking too highly of ourselves.” Our overly exalted opinion of ourselves, leading us to think that we are always right and others wrong and that our opinions matter more than others, often prevents the church from exhibiting the unity to which God calls her.<sup>385</sup>

In the same way, appreciation is shown for others in joining them in their celebrations and their sadness. In this way, every believer is called to appreciate one another and their unique gifts and experiences. As Paul's example in Ephesians shows, that appreciation should prompt continued prayer for each other that each would continue in faithfulness and the truth of the Gospel.

### ***Philippians 2:1-8***

Another well-known teaching of Paul on the idea of others-appreciation occurs in Philippians 2:

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. **Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.** Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (2:1-8)

Here Paul exhorts the believers in Philippi to count others more significant than themselves. This has profound implications for how the church is to operate—reciprocally demonstrating appreciation for others in the pattern of Jesus himself. Jesus, who had every right to demand exaltation, instead made himself the lowest of the low in order that he may serve God and those he came to save.

### **Jesus' Example of Appreciation**

There is, perhaps, no greater example of underserved appreciation as that experienced by the world in light of Jesus' sacrifice. Paul makes this point apparent in Romans 5:7–8:

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<sup>385</sup> Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 783.

For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

The point of the passage is clear enough, but interpreters debate what Paul means by a “righteous person” and a “good person.” An interesting and plausible explanation has been put forth by Andrew Clarke regarding the term translated “good” in verse 7, which is *agathos* in Greek. He suggests the term refers to a special class in the ancient Roman social structure. The *agathos* was a wealthy man who, because of his generosity toward the government and toward private causes, was considered a benefactor. In fact, Clarke argues that the word would better be translated “benefactor” instead of “good person.”<sup>386</sup> Clarke describes this role in the Roman world:

The power of the wealthy was such that a high proportion of society was immediately dependent upon them. Influential men would have large staffs of slaves, whose whole livelihoods would be secured by their masters. A freedman would be under legal obligation and social pressure to continue to attend his master in business or politics long after being given liberty. Many freedmen might be dependent on the social élite for their daily finance. A young man starting out in public life would owe his initial reputation to a senior patron whose advice and support had been received.<sup>387</sup>

The logic, then, is that no one would die for a law-abiding citizen (v. 7a), but perhaps someone would die for a benefactor, who had gone out of his way to provide for an up-and-coming citizen. That citizen would owe all that he is and all that he has to his benefactor, and thus would be far more willing to sacrifice his life for the man who had literally given him his life.

The contrast in Romans 5:8, then, is shocking. Beginning, “But God shows his love (*agapē*) for us,” Paul’s words reverse the normal thinking. *Agapē* love that would sacrifice life is understandable coming from a lesser toward a greater who had provided for him. But there is none greater than God himself, and yet he shows that same kind of love toward humanity. But then the statement continues: “in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” This statement flips the whole argument of verse 7 on its head. It is rare that a man sacrifice his life out of love for a benefactor who had given him everything—even if that man owed his benefactor his very life! Yet God demonstrates love toward *sinners*, not benefactors, in that Jesus died on *sinners*’ behalf. It makes no logical sense—but that is the extent of Jesus’ love for his people.

Jesus’ appreciation for his people is not grounded in anything they do—it is grounded solely in the fact that God loves them. Believers can know that they are appreciated by Jesus himself, not because of their own merits or achievements, but because Jesus himself loves them. In the same way, we believers are to follow Jesus’ example (Phil. 2:1–13) and appreciate one another on the basis of Christ’s love.

### **Conclusion**

After the example of Jesus Christ, who loved us when we were undeserving and “appreciated” us for what he could make us, we too must love and appreciate our brothers and sisters in Christ. Paul demonstrates this in the opening of his letter to the Ephesians, and he makes it clear throughout his other writings that harmony among believers is found when each honors and appreciates the other. This appreciation is not based on anything the other person has or has not done. It is unmerited, just like Jesus’ love and

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<sup>386</sup> Andrew D. Clarke, “The Good and the Just in Romans 5:7,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 41 (1990): 137.

<sup>387</sup> *Ibid.*

appreciation toward us. Nor is it begrudged in envy or jealousy. Instead, we are thankful for others because of who they are in Jesus, and according to the faith and love that are in them by grace.

# *I AM SAVED / Ephesians 2:1 - 10*

## **Introduction**

Ephesians 2:1-10 is one of the most remarkable passages in all of Scripture. In one sense it is a simple summary of the gospel message: you were dead in sin, living in it, and headed toward final judgment, and God saved you. In another sense, you could mine its riches forever. It is “one of the clearest, most expressive, and most loved descriptions of salvation in the New Testament.”<sup>388</sup> What we are interested in is how the passage paints a picture of this salvation. What does it mean to be “saved” according to Ephesians 2:1-10? After a little context, we will answer this question by answering three other questions: We are saved *from what* exactly? *By whom*? *To what and why*?

## **Defining “Salvation” and Context**

The concept of being “saved” in the NT is described using several different forms of the same root word. Paul often uses the verb *sōzō* (“I save”) and the nouns *sōter* (“savior”) and *sōteria* (“salvation”) to discuss the idea. In general, the word conveys the idea of deliverance. Leon Morris writes,

It may be used of the healing of disease, of safety in travel and of preservation in times of peril. It may apply to people or to things. . . . But the term is also used for deliverance from sin and for the ultimate deliverance when the saved enter bliss with Christ at the end of the age. In the Pauline writings the important thing is deliverance from sin and from the consequences of sin, though it is much more common for Paul to speak simply of salvation than to say what people are saved from.<sup>389</sup>

To discover what Paul means, it is usually best to look at each context. In our context, the verb “save” is used in both 2:5 and 2:8, but the whole passage is really a discussion of God’s deliverance and salvation. The text comes on the heels of Paul’s long benediction to God in 1:3-14, which is then followed by his thanksgiving and prayer for the Ephesians in 1:15-23. Within that set of verses Paul talks about the power of God toward believers, the same power he “worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come” (1:20-21). Now he takes a step back and reminds them what they once were before moving to how the grace of God has delivered them by means of Christ’s victory over every authority and dominion.

## **Structure of Passage**

Most commentators break this passage down into three parts: (1) verses 1-3, (2) verses 4-7, (3) verses 8-10. Verses 1-7 are one long sentence, and the main verbs do not come until vv. 5-6, with “God” being the subject and “you” (resumed in v. 4 as “us”) being the object. As Harold Hoehner puts it, “The main assertion of this section is that God has made sinners alive, raised them up, and seated them with Christ. All other clauses in these verses are subordinate to this main assertion.”<sup>390</sup> Verses 8-10 follow, where Paul expands on the idea of grace mentioned at the end of v. 7. Below is another way to think about it:

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<sup>388</sup> Klyne Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 93.

<sup>389</sup> Leon Morris, “Salvation,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1993), 858.

<sup>390</sup> Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 306.

2:1-3 → And YOU (were dead in transgressions and sins, in which you walked according to the course of the world, living in the passions of the flesh)  
2:4-7 → But GOD made us alive together with Christ, raised us up, seated us with him  
2:8-10 → All this was grace!

Peter O'Brien writes,

The paragraph consists of two sentences in the original: vv. 1-7 and vv. 8-10. The subject of the sentence ('God') and the main verb ('made alive') are not mentioned until vv. 4 and 5. Accordingly, the first sentence (vv. 1-7) falls into two parts . . . vv. 1-3 and the contrasting statement of vv. 4-7. This syntactical division of the paragraph reflects a threefold division in relation to its content: (a) vv. 1-3 describe the sinful condition of the readers' past and of the rest of humanity, (b) vv. 4-7 speak of the great love and mercy of God, who made the readers alive with Christ, and (c) vv. 8-10 summarize the nature of this salvation which God has effected.<sup>391</sup>

Klyne Snodgrass breaks it down according to "three movements":

- A. The former way of life in sins (2:1-3)
- B. God's merciful salvation in Christ and its purpose (2:4-7)
- C. Further explanation of salvation by grace (2:8-10)

While all of these ways are helpful for understanding the correct structuring of the passage, in what follows we will break it down a little differently. Each of the questions in which we are interested (mentioned above in the Introduction), can be answered by working our way through the verses of this passage. So we will break the passage down according to these. Since answers to some of the questions come within the same verse, it will not be as pretty as the outlines above. So before we get started, below is a way of looking at it that keeps the text intact but also adds our questions in the relevant places:

**From what?** <sup>1</sup> And you were dead in the trespasses and sins <sup>2</sup> in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— <sup>3</sup> among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

**By whom?** <sup>4</sup> But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—

**To what and why?** [re-visit v. 5, "made us alive together"] <sup>6</sup> and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

**By whom?** <sup>8</sup> For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup> not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

**To what and why?** <sup>10</sup> For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Each section below is titled with the question, then followed up with the answer from the text. The first question concerns what it is that believers are saved from.

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<sup>391</sup> Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 154.

### From What Are We Saved?

**Answer:** “And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience -- among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind” (2:1-3).

Paul has already said how the power to which we have access is the very power that God “worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come” (2:20-21). The idea of Christ as victor over the forces of evil continues into this passage. As one scholar writes, Paul “announces the exaltation of Christ to cosmic lordship and then delineates his triumphs over the powers that rule the present fallen age.”<sup>392</sup> This is something we sometimes miss in American evangelicalism. Of course, we know that Christ offers us forgiveness. We hear this often. But what we sometimes fail to understand is that our sins are not simply isolated “bad things” that we do. They are not just wrong choices we make. They are part of a much more sinister cosmic order. As Russell Moore puts it, “The danger we face presently isn’t cognitive but primal. . . . We’re wrestling against the cosmic powers (Eph. 6:12), grappling with an animal-like spirit intent on devouring us (1 Pet. 5:8).”<sup>393</sup> We see this more clearly as we break the passage down.

**First**, Paul says, “You were dead in your trespasses and sins.” Death is first and foremost the penalty for sin. Because of sin death entered the world (e.g., Gen 2:16-17; 3:3-4; Deut 30:19; Rom 1:32; 5:12-14, 18-21) and spread to all men (Rom 5:12).<sup>394</sup> Death is a separation from and removal of life. Since all life originates in God, death is a separation from God and the fundamental characteristic of the life of the unbeliever. “Before they believed the gospel, Paul’s readers experienced a living death in the vicious way of life they pursued (4:17-19; 5:3-8, 11, 12, 16; cf. Rom. 1:18-32; Col. 1:21).”<sup>395</sup> So the Ephesians were “dead men walking” because of their “trespasses and sins.” The word for “trespass” or “transgression” (Greek *paraptōma*) indicates a violation of a standard, and its imagery points to someone taking a false step and losing their footing (see also Eph 1:7; 2:5; Rom 4:25; 5:15; Col 2:13).<sup>396</sup> Sin (*hamartia*) is also the departure from God’s standards. The double reference here, “trespasses and sins,” may be redundant for style purposes, which is common in Ephesians, or it could echo the OT (e.g., Psa 19:12-13).<sup>397</sup>

**Second**, these sins were those “in which formerly you walked according to the course of this world.” The word for “walk” (Greek *peripateō*) is a favorite of Paul’s, especially in Ephesians (see 2:2, 10; 4:1, 17;

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<sup>392</sup> Timothy G. Gombis, “Ephesians 2 as a Narrative of Divine Warfare,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 26 (2004): 418.

<sup>393</sup> Russell D. Moore, *Tempted and Tried: Temptation and the Triumph of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 22-23.

<sup>394</sup> See Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 121.

<sup>395</sup> *Ibid.*, 122. He continues, “The impending outpouring of God’s eschatological wrath on the final day also hung over their heads like the sword of Damocles.” The [sword of Damocles](#) is a good image for the wrath of God to come.

<sup>396</sup> Walter Bauer, Frederick William Danker, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilber Gingrich, eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. [BDAG] (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 770.

<sup>397</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 122.

5:2, 8, 15) and also Colossians (see Col 1:10; 2:6; 3:7; 4:5). When Paul moves from the idea of sins of the Ephesians to the “course of this world,” he shows that “their plight was even deeper than anything their own sin could have produced.”<sup>398</sup>

It is a powerful mode of existence characterized by rebellion against God . . . something like Paul’s personification of sin in Rom. 5:12-8:3. It is the ‘Course’ that a world in rebellion against God takes. Prior to their conversion, Paul’s readers were at its mercy.<sup>399</sup>

This connects to other similar ideas in the NT. For example,

Who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from *the present evil age*, according to the will of our God and Father. (Gal 1:4)

Do not be conformed to *this world*, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Rom 12:2)

In their case the *god of this world* has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. (2 Cor 4:4)

We know that we are from God, and *the whole world* lies in the power of the *evil one* (1 John 5:19)

*Third*, they were also “according to the prince of the power of the air,” who is the “spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience.” The phrase “prince of the power of the air” refers to Satan. The word “air” is a foreign idea to us but it would not have been at the time. Thielman explains,

In ancient Aristotelian cosmology, the [*aēr*] was the region below the moon and above the earth . . . and in much ancient thinking, it was also the habitation of spiritual powers. . . . For Paul, the ‘air’ was probably part of the ‘heavenly places’ and the location, within them, of ‘every name that is named’ [1:21]. These names signified the inimical spiritual powers over whom God had given Christ the victory when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand (1:20-21; cf. 6:12). Christ’s place in the heavens is high above them (1:21; 4:10), and they are beneath his feet (1:22). Before they believed the gospel, Paul’s readers lived according to the norms of the Ruler of these evil beings, and in Ephesians, this Ruler could only be ‘the devil’ (4:27; 6:11-12).<sup>400</sup>

Satan is the “prince” or “ruler” (*archonta*) of the “power” or “authority” (*exousias*) of the realm where the spiritual forces arrayed against God dwell. In Luke 4:6, the devil tells Jesus he will give him all his “authority” (same Greek word, *exousia*) if he will worship him. Satan has authority over the spiritual forces that play out their diabolical schemes in and through humanity and the kingdoms of the world. “Although the ruler of this world has been defeated (cf. 1:20-22), he is not surrendering without a struggle and without still making his powerful influence felt.”<sup>401</sup>

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<sup>398</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>399</sup> Ibid.

<sup>400</sup> Ibid., 123-24.

<sup>401</sup> Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1990), 97.

*Fourth*, this “prince” either *is* or *rules through*—a difficult decision in Greek—the “spirit now at work in the sons of disobedience.” The form of the phrase “sons of disobedience” is Hebrew in nature and found in other places in the NT (e.g., Mark 3:17; Luke 10:6; Acts 4:36).<sup>402</sup> Here it denotes “men and women whose lives are characterized by disobedience,” which would include a rejection of the Gospel but also a general disregard for God and his will (see also Eph 5:6).<sup>403</sup> These people are those “among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.” Thus, “A spiritual force is powerfully at work . . . in these people, and the Ruler of the realm of the air, in which God’s spiritual enemies are active, also presides over this spiritual force, which influences the behavior of those in rebellion against God.”<sup>404</sup>

Notice that this way of life was in one sense unavoidable for us. It is who we were “by nature” (Greek *phusei*). The word *phusis* in Greek refers to a “condition or circumstance as determined by birth.”<sup>405</sup> Paul uses it here “to emphasize that although unbelieving human beings are culpable for their sinful cravings, desires, and thoughts (vv. 1-3a), they have chosen this path inevitably, in agreement with the state into which they were born.”<sup>406</sup> Like the phrase “sons of disobedience,” the form of the phrase “children of wrath” is Hebrew in nature, and it means “worthy to receive divine judgment.”<sup>407</sup>

So, to go back to our original question, we see that the believer is saved *from* a whole host of things. We are saved from death first and foremost. This is the original penalty for our sin and the primary characteristic of every area of our existence before Christ. We are saved from our “trespasses and sins” and from walking in them, like we used to do. When we did this we were going right along with the normal course of the world, from which we are also saved. The course of the world is ruled by the devil, the prince of the demonic spiritual places, the “air.” We are saved from his clutches. We are saved from the way he exercises his rule in the hearts of man through the lusts and desires of our flesh, stringing us along as the grand puppeteer in a horrific drama of evil, death, and chaos that plays out daily right before our eyes. When this was us, we were living according to the nature of this fallen world, which lies under the wrath of God. We played our role and like everyone else we were children of wrath. Until God broke in.

### **By Whom?**

**Answer:** “*But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ--by grace you have been saved . . . For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast*” (2:4-5, 8-9).

The answer to the question of who it is that saved us is pretty simple: God and his grace. We see these ideas both in verses 4-5 and 8-9. The theme of these verses is unmistakably clear: the mercy, love, and grace of God. “Using four groups of words, the apostle shows that the origins of God’s saving initiative

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<sup>402</sup> Ernest Best, *Ephesians*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998), 206.

<sup>403</sup> Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 97.

<sup>404</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 124-25.

<sup>405</sup> BDAG, 1069.

<sup>406</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 127.

<sup>407</sup> O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 162. He points out the Hebrew phrase “a son of death” in 2 Sam 12:5, which is usually translated along the lines of “he deserves to die” (162 n. 37).

are to be found in his *mercy* (v. 4), his *great love* (v. 4), his *rich grace* (vv. 5, 7, and 8), and his *kindness* to us in Christ Jesus (v. 7). The whole paragraph emphasizes that he acted on our behalf simply because of his own gracious and merciful character.<sup>408</sup> The grace of God is a theme that runs throughout Ephesians (see 1:2, 6-7; 2:5, 7-8; 3:2, 7-8; 4:7, 29; 6:24), as is the love of God (see 1:6; 2:4; 3:17, 19; 5:1-2, 25). There are also OT connections, as Yahweh is frequently described as a God of love and mercy, as in Exodus 34:6: “The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, ‘The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.’”

The theme of grace (Greek *charis*) is mentioned briefly in verse 5 as almost a parenthetical comment, which is why it is often either in parentheses or set off by dashes in English translations. Paul uses the word again at the end of verse 7 (“immeasurable riches of his grace”), which leads him to re-visit the idea of verse 5 and expound on the theme of grace in verses 8-9. The point of these verses is simply to fill out the grace idea more. To emphasize that this is all a gift, and that there is nothing to earn and no reason to boast. Here Paul touches on a theme that is more prominent in his discussion on works of the law versus faith in Romans and Galatians.

The point of all of this for us is to say that salvation originates in the love, grace, mercy, and kindness of God. It is all of him and his goodness toward us. That is the note that Paul sounds loud and clear in this passage.

### **To What and Why?**

**Answer:** *God “made us alive together with Christ . . . and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. . . . For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (2:5, 6-7, 10)*

There are a few answers in these texts to the question of why God saved us and what he saved us to. First, we have the three main verbs of vv. 1-7. After Paul tells us what we were saved from in vv. 1-3, he says that God “made us alive together with Christ,” he “raised us up with him,” and he “seated us with him in the heavenly places.” Each verb in Greek has the prefix *sūn*, “with,” attached to it: “made alive *with*,” “raised us *with*,” “seated us *with*.” All of these happen “with” Christ and speak of his resurrection from the dead and his exaltation at the right hand of God. “What God has accomplished in Christ he has also accomplished for believers.”<sup>409</sup> The verbs describe the glorious victory that believers share in as they are in Christ.

Second, in verse 7, the phrase, “so that” (Greek *hina*), gives the *reason* that God did these things for us in Christ. He wanted to “show forth” his the immeasurable wealth of grace that he has towards us. All this is to the “praise of his glorious grace,” as he says in 1:6. John Piper writes, “All the works of God culminate in the praises of His redeemed people. . . . This praise is the consummation of our own joy in God.”<sup>410</sup> We receive grace upon grace and joy upon joy, and this inspires deep praise from us to the Father for his mercy for all eternity. Thielman summarizes,

In 2:4-7 Paul paints a bright portrait of God’s grace that stands in dramatic contrast to the dark landscape of human sin in 2:1-3. By giving believers life with Christ, raising them with Christ, and seating them with Christ in his place of victory, God has demonstrated the overwhelmingly

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<sup>408</sup> O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 164.

<sup>409</sup> O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 166-67.

<sup>410</sup> John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2003), 50.

merciful, loving, and gracious nature of his character. This demonstration of his character was not something that happened as a side effect of his gracious saving work, but was the very purpose for which he did this work. He rescued those who are in Christ from the domination of the world, the devil, and the flesh so that he might demonstrate forever the overwhelmingly gracious nature of his character.<sup>411</sup>

Last, as Paul expounds on the concept of God's grace in verses 8-10, he ends the whole section by talking about how we are God's workmanship. We are saved *for* good works. Of course, the verse is still about grace, not works per se. "It is grace all the way."<sup>412</sup> We are *his* workmanship, *created* in Christ Jesus for good works, which *God* prepared beforehand. The word for "workmanship" here is *poiēma* and is used elsewhere in the NT only in Romans 1:20, though it has connections to other words in the Bible used for the idea of "work" or "something created/made." The word is related to the verb *poieō*, "I make," and is often found in creation contexts in the Greek translation of the OT (for example, see Psa 92:4; 143:5).<sup>413</sup> In Romans 1:20, God's "eternal power and divine nature" are perceived in creation, in the "things that have been made" (*poiēmasin*, from *poiēma*). Both in that passage and here the context is the creation of God. We are saved in order that we might be the new creation of God, his workmanship, to be transformed into people who live in righteousness and holiness before him.

### **Scholarly Comment on Ephesians 2:1-10**

#### ***Frank Thielman***

"In 2:1-10 Paul shows his readers how the mighty power of God, demonstrated in the resurrection and victorious enthronement of his Messiah, affects them individually. Paul has just said that God gave Christ, in his capacity as victor over the inimical heavenly powers, to the church, and now he wants to make especially clear to his readers that, since they have believed the gospel, they have experienced personally the effects of this victory. . . . The passage shows how, in personal terms, the great power of God, exhibited in the resurrection and enthronement of Christ, took Paul's readers from their own disobedient nature (vv. 1-3) into a position of victory over these forces (vv. 4-7). It describes how they moved from being objects of God's justified wrath against those who disobey him (v. 3) to products of God's re-creative handiwork (v. 10), from walking in trespasses and sins (vv. 1-2) to walking in the good works that God created them to do (v. 10). This movement has happened by their union with the living, risen, and enthroned Christ (vv. 5-6). It came to them as an entirely free gift (v. 5), received by faith (vv. 8-9), and as the result of God's richly merciful and loving character (v. 4)." (118)

#### ***Peter O'Brien***

"Paul has prayed that his Christian readers might know the greatness of God's power towards them (1:17-19), and then praised God for exercising that same mighty power in raising Christ from the dead and exalting him to be head over all things for the church (vv. 20-23). He now reminds them of the mighty change that had been effected in their lives: they were spiritually dead (2:1-3), but out of his great kindness and mercy God has raised and exalted them with Christ (vv. 4-7). . . . One of the striking features of Ephesians 2 is the number of vivid contrasts between believers' previous condition outside of Christ and their current privileged experience of salvation. Those who were 'dead in trespasses and sins' (v. 1) have now been 'made alive' (v. 5). Following 'the ways of this world' and being under the lordship of the 'ruler of the kingdom of the air' (v. 2) stands in stark contrast to being in a relationship to Christ and seated with him in the heavenly realms (vv. 5, 6). God's wrath (v. 3) is balanced with his

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<sup>411</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 139-40.

<sup>412</sup> Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 116.

<sup>413</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

mercy, love, grace, and kindness (vv. 4, 5, 7), while the readers' former condition as children of wrath (v. 3) is paralleled with being saved by grace (vv. 5, 8).<sup>414</sup>

### ***Harold Hoehner***

“In Ephesians 1, “Paul prayed that believers would know God intimately and personally, and realize what is the hope of his calling, his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his mighty power toward them. By raising and seating Christ, God exerted this power in Christ, subjected the cosmic powers under his feet, and gave him as head to the church and thus head over all believers. In chapters 2 and 3 Paul explains the execution of this eternal plan by showing how God makes sinners into saints and builds them into the church, the body of Christ. In 2:1-10 Paul states how sinners, who deserve nothing but God's wrath, become trophies of his grace.”<sup>415</sup>

### ***Klyne Snodgrass***

“The number of oppositions in this passage is striking: living in transgressions and sins versus living in good works prepared by God; this world versus the heavenly realms; death versus life; sinful nature (lit., ‘flesh’) versus union with Christ; wrath versus mercy and salvation; under the ‘ruler’ versus seated with Christ; by nature versus by grace, not from works versus through faith. Most of the major themes of Paul's salvation theology are present in 2:1-10.”<sup>416</sup>

### ***Andrew Lincoln***

“In the thanksgiving period the writer had told his readers that his prayer for them was that they might know the surpassing greatness of God's power toward them as believers. Now he plays his own part in helping them to gain such knowledge by reminding them how God's power has affected their lives and what an immense change it has wrought. His reminder takes much of its force from the parallel he draws between the supreme demonstration of God's power in the resurrection and exaltation of Christ (1:19-21) and his activity on behalf of believers. *He wants them to realize that just as Christ was physically dead but God raised and exalted him, so they were spiritually dead but God raised and exalted them with Christ*” (emphasis added).<sup>417</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Ephesians 2:1-10 describes how believers are saved in a very clear and summary fashion. They are saved from the forces of evil in the heavenly realms, governed as these are by the prince of the power of the air. They are saved from the desires and lusts that ravage the souls of those who follow the course of this world, unknowingly obeying their dark master. This salvation comes through the sheer grace, love, mercy of God. There is no place whatsoever for human works or boasting. God is the one who works. He loves them, saves them, brings them to life, raises them, and seats them with Christ in his resurrection and exaltation. This brings within us a new creation, a transformation, a bearing of fruit, and a walking in holiness. All this is done to show forth the kindness of God in Christ for all eternity, which we will drink in and praise forever.

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<sup>414</sup> O'Brien, *Ephesians*, 153, 155.

<sup>415</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 305.

<sup>416</sup> Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 93.

<sup>417</sup> Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 116.

# *I AM RECONCILED* / *Ephesians 2:11-22*

## **Introduction**

In Ephesians 2:11-22 Paul shifts from the glories of salvation (2:1-10) to focusing on the church as a unified household, where God dwells by his Spirit. He turns to the inclusion of the Gentiles—who were outside of Israel and the covenants God had made with Israel to bless and redeem the world—in God’s plan of redemption through the work of Christ. The passage has both a vertical and horizontal dynamic. It speaks to the reconciliation between humanity and God, and it also speaks to the reconciliation between Jews and Gentiles, and, by extension, reconciliation between men and women from all times, cultures, and races. In what follows we will look both at Paul’s general theme of reconciliation as well as his use of the idea in Ephesians 2:11-22.

## **Reconciliation**

The idea of “reconciliation” is expressed by Paul in a few different ways. There is more than one word used for the idea, but they are all connected to the root word, *allassō*, “to change, exchange.” Stanley Porter writes, “The Greek terms for reconciliation derive from words for exchange, in which by extension enmity is exchanged for peaceful relations.”<sup>418</sup> For example, in Romans 1:25, when Paul says that men “*exchanged* the truth about God for a lie,” the word for “exchange” is the similar word *metallassō* (*meta* + *allassō*). When Paul talks about reconciliation itself, though, he uses the verbs *katallassō* and *apokatallassō*, or the noun *katallagē*. Here are the dictionary definitions:

- katallassō*      The “exchange of hostility for a friendly relationship, *reconcile*”<sup>419</sup>; found in Rom 5:10; 1 Cor 5:18-20.
- apokatallassō*    To “reconcile”; basically the same as *katallassō*, with the addition of the prepositional prefix *apo*, which may be for intensification.<sup>420</sup> Found in Eph 2:16; Col 1:20, 22, and never found prior to Paul in Greek literature, which means Paul may have coined the term.<sup>421</sup>
- katallagē*        The “reestablishment of an interrupted or broken relationship, *reconciliation*.”<sup>422</sup>

There are really four central places in Paul where we see the theological idea of reconciliation. Two of them use *katallassō*, and the other two use *apokatallassō*. The first set is Romans 5:10-11 and 2 Corinthians 5:18-20, which use *katallassō* and the noun *katallagē*:

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<sup>418</sup> Stanely E. Porter, “Peace, Reconciliation,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1993), 695.

<sup>419</sup> Walter Bauer, Frederick William Danker, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilber Gingrich, eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. [BDAG] (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 521.

<sup>420</sup> Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 382; Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 171.

<sup>421</sup> Friedrich Büchsel, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 1, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 258.

<sup>422</sup> BDAG, 521.

For if while we were enemies we were **reconciled** to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are **reconciled**, shall we be saved by his life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received **reconciliation**. (Rom 5:10-11)

All this is from God, who through Christ **reconciled** us to himself and gave us the ministry of **reconciliation**; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of **reconciliation**. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be **reconciled** to God. (2 Cor 5:18-20)

The other places include our present passage, Ephesians 2:14-16, and Colossians 1:19-22, where the verb *apokatallassō* is used:<sup>423</sup>

For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might **reconcile** us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. (Eph 2:14-16)

For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to **reconcile** to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now **reconciled** in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him. (Col 1:19-22)

Below are a few explanations from scholars on the subject. Porter writes,

Reconciliation is the Pauline concept in which enmity between God and humanity, or between human groups, is overcome and peaceful relations restored on the basis of the work of Christ . . . . This concept refers to an objective state of peace, not simply a feeling of peacefulness. Although the strictly secular usage is found in 1 Corinthians 7:11, 15, where Paul speaks of peace being restored to a married couple in the case where one is a believer and the other is not, most of his usage of these terms is distinctively theological.<sup>424</sup>

He also adds that the word *apokatallassō* in Ephesians 2:16 and Colossians 1:20-22 is, as mentioned above, an “emphatically prefixed form of the verb (*katallassō*) used in 2 Corinthians 5:18-21 and Romans 5:8-11.”<sup>425</sup> Frank Thielman states the following on the subject:

‘Reconciliation’ between God and human beings is a distinctly Pauline concept within the NT and appears in two theologically weighty passages in the undisputed letters: 2 Cor. 5:18-20 and Rom. 5:10-11 (cf. Rom. 11:15). In these passages, God always takes the initiative in reconciliation, although he does so through Christ, and specifically through his death. This does not mean that people have no responsibility in reconciliation, however, for God gives to Paul a ministry of reconciliation, and that ministry involves calling people to ‘be reconciled to God’ (2 Cor. 5:20 NRSV . . . ). Just as with the everyday use of ‘reconciliation’ (1 Cor. 7:11), the theological use of

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<sup>423</sup> Another connection between these two passages is the theme of “peace” being made.

<sup>424</sup> Porter, “Peace, Reconciliation,” 695.

<sup>425</sup> *Ibid.*, 697.

the term assumes a breach in relationship, an enmity (Rom. 5:1, 8, 10), which needs to be healed. In the undisputed letters, the enmity originates in human rebellion against God, and this rebellion has called forth God's wrath (Rom. 1:18-3:19; 5:9 . . .).

The concept in Colossians (1:20, 22) and Ephesians (only here in 2:16) is basically the same but with three distinctions. First, both letters use the unique compounded verb [*apokatallassō*] rather than the usual terms [*katallassō*, reconcile] and [*katallagē*, reconciliation]. This variation probably only intensifies the word rather than changing its meaning. Second, in both letters reconciliation comes through Christ's death, but Christ, rather than God himself, is the reconciler. Third, whereas in the undisputed letters and Ephesians, God reconciles people to himself, in Colossians he reconciles the entire cosmos [*ta panta*, all things] to himself (1:20).

Last, Peter O'Brien writes,

The earliest attested usage of [*apokatallassō*], an emphatically prefixed form of the verb [*katallassō*], is in Col. 1:20-22 and Eph. 2:16. Although [*katallassō*] was available to the apostle . . . perhaps in the light of his "discussion of the work of Christ it was felt that a particular intensification of the action was called for."<sup>426</sup>

Although the notion of reconciliation turns up in Paul's major letters (Rom. 5:10, 11; 11:15; 2 Cor. 5:18-20), here an unusual compound verb meaning to 'reconcile' appears (cf. Col. 1:20, 22). Generally the ground of reconciliation lies in God's gracious initiating activity (at Rom. 5:8 the basis is the love of God, while Col. 1:20 points to the divine good pleasure; cf. 2 Cor. 5:18). In Ephesians 2:16 several distinctive features stand out: first, it is Christ, rather than God, who does the reconciling. This stress on Christ's action, as noted above, is consistent with the emphasis in vv. 14-18 on his being the central figure. God is the one with whom those at enmity are reconciled. The two groups now rightly related are Jews and Gentiles (*both of them*), and this has occurred *in one body*, which is a reference to the church rather than the physical crucified body of Christ (or indeed to both).<sup>427</sup>

### Context

This particular passage in Ephesians deals with reconciliation largely within the context of Jews and Gentiles being united together in Christ:

The dispute in the early church about the admission of Gentile Christians as full and equal members with Jewish Christians had lost its virulence by the time of Ephesians; though the case no longer needed to be argued, it still continued to echo, brought to the fore from time to time by the vast numerical superiority of Gentiles in an area such as Asia Minor and the smaller numerical superiority of Jews to Christians. If Jews were God's chosen people and Gentiles were not, and if Gentile Christians were not Jews and yet the elect of God (1.4f), what were they? Did they form a new group distinct from Gentiles and also from both Jews and Jewish Christians and, if so, how should that group be characterised? If Jews and Gentiles are equal in Christ, do Gentile Christians take over some or all of the privileges and responsibilities of Jews? There are the kind of questions which lie behind 2.11-22.<sup>428</sup>

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<sup>426</sup> Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 201 n. 189.

<sup>427</sup> Ibid., 201-02.

<sup>428</sup> Ernest Best, *Ephesians*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998), 235.

### **Breakdown of Passage**

Most commentators break Ephesians 2:11-22 down into three parts: (1) vv. 11-13, (2) vv. 14-18, and (3) vv. 19-22.<sup>429</sup>

#### ***Ephesians 2:11-13***

In verses 11-13, the focus is on what the Gentiles once were and the solution God has provided. First he addresses them as “Gentiles in the flesh,” noting how they are called the “uncircumcision” by the “circumcision.” There is an ethnic tension highlighted here. Jews highly valued circumcision as a mark of Jewishness and of who was “in.” Gentiles were “out.” Thielman observes, “The note of ethnic tension Paul sounds here prepared for the divine solution to this tension in the next section (vv. 14-15).”<sup>430</sup> Paul urges these uncircumcised Gentiles to “remember” that “formerly” (Greek *pote*) they had five strikes against them: (1) they were “apart from Christ” (*chōris Christou*), (2) “alienated from the citizenship of Israel,” (3) “strangers to the covenants of promise,” (4) “having no hope,” and, last, (5) “without God in the world.” This paints a pretty dark picture of what these people were to God before he intervened. Much like what we saw in Ephesians 2:1-10, the problem is stated first, before Paul moves to God’s answer in Christ.

Paul begins verse 13 with the phrase, “but now” (*nuni de*). The phrase “provides the hinge on which the two parts of 2:11-13 swing” and in the NT is “distinctive of the Pauline Epistles and is used to describe a shift in circumstances [e.g., Rom 15:23; 2 Cor 8:10-11] or in a line of thought [e.g., 1 Cor 12:17-18; Rom 7:15-17],” often marking the “dramatic change that accompanies the movement from the period prior to the gospel’s coming to the period of the gospel’s presence (Rom. 3:21), or of the change that comes to people when they move from unbelief to faith [e.g., Rom 6:21-22; Col 1:21-22; Phlm 11].”<sup>431</sup> So, these same Gentiles who “formerly/once” (*pote* again) were “far off” (see Isa 57:19) are *now* brought “near” by the blood of Christ.

#### ***Ephesians 2:14-18***

In verses 14-18, a change occurs. Paul picks up the last word of verse 13, “Christ,” and runs with it. The text switches from a focus on Gentiles and turns to Christ himself, before switching back in verse 19 to the Ephesians (“So then *you*”). The first sentence of verse 14 stands essentially as a heading for the whole section: “For he himself is our peace.” It begins with the personal pronoun, “he” (Greek *autos*), which is an unusual placement and shows that Paul is squarely emphasizing Christ. He goes on to list three things Christ has done in the way of making peace: (1) “made us both one,” referring to Jews and Gentiles, (2) “broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility,” and (3) “nullified the law of commandments expressed in ordinances.” The precise meaning and references in these verses are much-discussed, but the basic idea is that part of the problem with the law was that its regulations became a means of keeping Gentiles out of God’s gracious promises. One of the things that Christ’s death accomplished was to break down this barrier that had kept the nations from participating in God’s salvation and covenant. Christ brought the Mosaic law to an end as a governing authority for the people of God and replaced it with the new covenant.<sup>432</sup>

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<sup>429</sup> E.g., Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 351; O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 185-221.

<sup>430</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 151.

<sup>431</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>432</sup> See O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 199; Douglas J. Moo, “The Law of Christ as the Fulfillment of the Law of Moses: A Modified Lutheran View,” in *Five Views on Law and Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 367, who states that the Mosaic law “has been ‘rendered powerless,’ that is, ceases to stand as an immediate authority for God’s people.”

Paul gives two reasons *why* Christ did this. First, at the end of verse 15, “in order that [Greek *hina*, denoting purpose] he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace.” In Christ, cultural distinctions no longer hold primary place in defining humans. Identity in Christ transcends ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic roles (Gal 3:28). Second, in verse 16—and this is most critical for the present focus of the brief—Christ did it that he “might *reconcile* [*apokatallaxē*] us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.” While the focus of the passage has been the “horizontal” idea of peace being made between Jews and Gentiles in Christ, here the “vertical” element comes into focus, as both Jews and Gentiles are said to be reconciled *to God*. “Up to this point the focus has been on peace on the horizontal level, between Jews and Gentiles, but now this is combined with a vertical perspective as the notion of a reconciliation of both Jews and Gentiles to God is introduced.”<sup>433</sup> The hostility that was killed by the cross was between God and humanity, and this hostility is integrally related to the hostility that exists between Jews and Gentiles (and, by extension, between other human groups). As they are reconciled to God, both are made into “one new man” (v. 15) through the cross. The one new humanity is both reconciled to God and created anew in Christ—Jews and Gentiles together—in the same salvation event of the cross.

O’Brien states it well:

This reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles in *one body* is parallel to Christ’s creating “in himself one new person” (v. 15b). The reconciliation of *both* with God introduces a new element, and the presupposition is that not only Gentiles but *also Israel* were alienated from God because of sin. From the context of vv. 11-13 it is clear that the Gentile readers’ separation from Israel’s Messiah and their exclusion from the community of God’s people signified an alienation from the covenants which promised the messianic salvation, and from God himself. But even the elect nation Israel, which was the recipient and custodian of God’s gracious covenant promises, had not as a whole appropriated these promises for itself. . . . Jews and Gentiles alike, for all their differences, were at enmity with one another and alienated from God; hence the desperate need for this twofold reconciliation, which Paul triumphantly affirms has been effected through the death of Christ.<sup>434</sup>

Verses 17-18, then, connect to the previous three in part through the continuing theme of “peace.” Verse 17 alludes to Isaiah 52:7 and 57:19—both of which talk about peace being proclaimed—and verse 18 is then connected grammatically to verse 17 through the word “for” (*hoti*). Thus, in verse 17 Paul “now summarizes the dual theme of peace between Jews and Gentiles and peace between humanity and God with a skillfully crafted allusion to Isa. 52:7a and 57:19.”<sup>435</sup> Christ “preached peace” to those far and near, and the ground of this preaching is the access to the Father in the one Spirit that came through Christ (2:18).

### ***Ephesians 2:19-22***

In verse 19, the focus shifts a bit again, off of what Christ has *done* and onto what the Ephesians *are* in him. Paul begins, “So then” (*Ara oun*), which basically means, “As a result of all that I just said, here are the implications.” The result is that they are “no longer strangers and aliens.” So everything that they were formerly (*pote*, see vv. 11-12), they are “no longer” (*ouketi*). We have now come full circle from the desperate situation of the Gentiles mentioned in 2:12. Now they are “fellow citizens with the saints” and members of the “household of God,” which is founded on the apostles, prophets, and Christ himself. They are being built into holy temple in the Lord by the Spirit, a dwelling place for God himself.

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<sup>433</sup> Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1990), 144.

<sup>434</sup> O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 202-03

<sup>435</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 173.

### **Commentary on Ephesians 2:11-22**

#### ***Peter T. O'Brien***

“This paragraph provides one of the most wonderful descriptions of peace and reconciliation within the Pauline letters. Here both the horizontal and vertical dimensions to this central salvation blessing are treated within the framework of God’s saving plan. Further, the centrepiece of this comprehensive reconciliation, and the fundamental theological undergirding of the whole letter, is to be found in vv. 14-18, where believers ‘come near’ to God and to one another (Gentiles and Jews) through the saving death of the Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>436</sup>

“Within the context of Ephesians as a whole, 2:11-22 stands parallel to the preceding paragraph. In 2:1-10 Paul has reminded his Gentile Christian readers of the dramatic change that God had effected in raising them from death to new life in Christ. Here in the latter passage the ‘once-now’ schema appears again (vv. 11-13, 19), this time, however, providing a contrast in more specific terms: the readers’ past is expressed in relation to Israel’s previous privileged position in the saving plan of God, while the present is cast in terms of their being brought near to God ‘through the blood of Christ’ and to one another (Gentile and Jewish believers) in him. Both vv. 1-10 and 11-22 follow directly from 1:15-23, where Paul prayed that his readers might have a greater appreciation of the power of God that had been exercised on their behalf.”<sup>437</sup>

#### ***Harold Hoehner***

“Individual sinners have obtained the gracious gift of salvation on the basis of God’s grace by faith. That is not the end. They are not left alone but are united with other believers into a corporate unity. In 2:11-22 Paul discusses this union of redeemed Jews and Gentiles in the church, Christ’s body (cf. 1:22-33). This forms the basis of the discussion for the rest of the epistle. . . . The dominate theme of this epistle is love, and certainly no union can be truly successful unless love is its basis and mode of operation. Ephesians 2:11-22 divides into three sections: the statement of the union (vv. 11-13), the explanation of the union of believing Jews and Gentiles into one ‘new humanity’ (vv. 14-18), and the consequences of that union (vv. 19-22).”<sup>438</sup>

#### ***Frank Thielman***

“In short, the primary orientation of 2:1-10 is vertical, and the primary orientation of 2:11-22 is horizontal. . . . The focus of 2:1-10 is God’s powerful work through Christ’s resurrection and ascension to orient the individual human believer away from the world, the devil, and the flesh and toward the Creator. The focus of 2:11-22 is the social alienation between Israel and the Gentiles and Christ’s role in solving this problem through his death, which set aside the Mosaic law, with its tendency to divide Jews from Gentiles. Although the death of Christ also overcomes the hostility between God and humanity, this element of the passage serves the passage’s more prominent theme of the peace that now exists between Jews and Gentiles. By overcoming the hostility between God and all human beings, Christ’s death breaks down the wall of hostility between Jews and Gentiles.”<sup>439</sup>

#### ***Andrew T. Lincoln***

“Christ is now said to have made Jews and Gentiles one by demolishing the dividing wall and source of hostility between them, that is, by abolishing the law and all its regulations, and to have accomplished this

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<sup>436</sup> O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 182.

<sup>437</sup> Ibid., 183.

<sup>438</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 351.

<sup>439</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 148.

through his death. That death not only terminated the old order dominated by the law but introduced in its place a new creation, a corporate new humanity ('one new person') which is embraced in his own person. Two aspects of Christ's reconciling work are now set forth. On the horizontal level, he has made peace between the two old enemies, Jews and Gentiles, and reconciled them in the one body of the Church. At the same time, on the vertical level, he has reconciled both groups to God through his death on the cross, indicating, in a way which the opening verses did not, that there is a fundamental sense in which Israel too was alienated from God. The writer is now able to introduce the OT citation [Isa 57:19] . . . ; he combines it creatively with Isa 52:7 to give a Christological interpretation, as Christ's work on the cross is seen as his proclamation of peace with God to both the Gentile readers and the Jews. The elaboration on Christ's work concludes with a statement encapsulating the results of Christ's peacemaking in terms of the access he has provided to the Father for both Jews and Gentiles through the one Spirit."<sup>440</sup>

### ***Klyne Snodgrass***

Snodgrass writes that "the relevance of this passage for Christian living and for the church is enormous"<sup>441</sup> and then he offers ten ways to think about application of this text:

Remember your identity: "Paul asks that we remember the life-determining change Christ has brought in us—that is, the radical movement from being dead in sins to life in Christ, from being excluded to being included, for this movement is still at work in our lives every day."<sup>442</sup>

A warning for Christians: "Application of this text occurs in humility and repentance . . . How can we keep privilege, obedience, and righteous action from bringing division, disdain, and name-calling? . . . Privilege should lead to thanksgiving, not arrogance. Once again a sense of grace is the key. Grace excludes pride and extends itself to others in need."<sup>443</sup>

We belong: "Throughout life, most of us have some sense of not belonging, and we feel unaccepted and inferior. . . . This text says we *do* belong. Christ brought us home to God. We live in God's house as members of his family, and at the same time we are a house in which God lives (2:19-22)."<sup>444</sup>

The barriers are down; Christians live with God: "Peace, access, nearness, and reconciliation all emphasize that the barriers between God and us have been removed."<sup>445</sup>

The barriers are down; Christians are joined: "The attitude of this world is best expressed in the phrase, 'You're different from me, and I resent you for that'<sup>446</sup> . . . The markers that define us must give way to the *one* determining marker that says who we are—Christ himself. The other markers may be real, but they neither define us nor divide us from other people in Christ. All

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<sup>440</sup> Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 160.

<sup>441</sup> Klyne Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 147.

<sup>442</sup> Ibid.

<sup>443</sup> Ibid., 148-49.

<sup>444</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>445</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>446</sup> Ibid., 150, citing Tom Wright, *Bringing the Church to the World* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1992), 25.

people stand with the same value before God, and we belong to the same family with other believers.”<sup>447</sup>

United, not uniform: “Unity in Christ does not negate differences, cultural uniqueness, or the value of culture.”<sup>448</sup>

The church is a peace institute: “[The text] says, ‘He is *our* peace.’ A church is a group of people who know this and embody peace in anticipation of that day when God establishes peace in all his creation.”<sup>449</sup>

Christians are a corporate group: “People do relate to God as individuals, but the focus is corporate. . . . The gospel needs to be presented in such a way that people realize its *sociological* dimensions.”<sup>450</sup>

The church is centered on Christ: “Communities can exist for a variety of reasons, but the Christian church exists only because of Christ and his purposes. Christianity is a religion centered on a person.”<sup>451</sup>

The church is the people: “Neither physical structures nor denominations are necessary to have a church. The people are the stones that make up this building in which God dwells.”<sup>452</sup>

### **Conclusion**

In Ephesians 2:11-22 Paul encourages his Gentile Ephesian audience that they are, indeed, fellow members in the household of God. Though they once stood outside of the promises of redemption, Christ has brought them near through his work on the cross. In the passage, Paul emphasizes the theme of reconciliation, found several other places in his letters. In this text, we read that both Jews and Gentiles have been reconciled *to God* and now make up a new humanity. Both groups needed reconciliation because of sin, and God has provided it in Jesus. This vertical reconciliation to God means that horizontal reconciliation between Jews and Gentiles has now also been made complete. A new humanity has been re-created in Christ, to which all believers belong, no matter the culture or race from which they come.

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<sup>447</sup> Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 150.

<sup>448</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>449</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>450</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>451</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>452</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

# *I AM AFFLICTED* / *Ephesians 3:1-13*

## **Introduction**

An overlooked but highly significant aspect of being “in Christ” is suffering and affliction. Paul’s own life, as we read about it in Acts and the Epistles, demonstrates this reality: those in Christ will suffer with Christ. In the Pauline corpus, the teaching on suffering makes it clear that suffering for the sake of Christ is part of the Christian life. Its main purpose is to help followers of Jesus further identify with their Savior. It is also the means God uses to test the believer’s faith, proving it to be true and lasting. The following will examine the New Testament teaching on suffering in general, and Paul’s teaching in particular.

## **Origins of the Word for “Affliction”**

The word “affliction” in Ephesians 3:13 is the most common word for “suffering” in the New Testament: *thlipsis*, which quite literally means “affliction, oppression or harassment.”<sup>453</sup> Its verbal form is *thlibō* and can mean “press upon, crowd” (e.g., Mark 3:9) or “make narrow” (e.g., Matt 7:14).<sup>454</sup> The meaning “to afflict” or “affliction,” then, is a figurative extension of the more literal idea of “squashing” or “pressing” something. Much the same as the English “oppressed,” the concept of *thlipsis* is that of being pressed by the negative circumstances of life.

## **In the OT and Israel**

In the Septuagint, the use of *thlipsis* is very widespread and covers a range of meanings. It can refer to the internal or external affliction of a person—internal in the sense of mental anxiety or distress; external in the sense of oppression from some greater person, authority or force.<sup>455</sup> The theological significance is especially important here because it shapes the theological significance of the word in the New Testament. Schlier notes,

This term which is so common and which has so many senses in the LXX acquires its theological significance from the fact that it predominantly denotes the oppression and affliction of the people of Israel or of the righteous who represent Israel. . . . Israel does in fact constantly experience [*thlipsis*] in its history, and it is aware that this [*thlipsis*] is significant in the history of salvation.<sup>456</sup>

Notable occurrences of the word in the OT:

And the people believed; and when they heard that the LORD had visited the people of Israel and that he had seen their **affliction**, they bowed their heads and worshiped. (Exo 4:31)

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<sup>453</sup> Heinrich Schlier, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 139.

<sup>454</sup> Walter Bauer, Frederick William Danker, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. [BDAG] (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 457

<sup>455</sup> Schlier, 141.

<sup>456</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

But from there you will seek the LORD your God and you will find him, if you search after him with all your heart and with all your soul. When you are in **tribulation**, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, you will return to the LORD your God and obey his voice. (Deut 4:29)

O LORD, in **distress** they sought you; they poured out a whispered prayer when your discipline was upon them. (Isa 26:16)

I will return again to my place, until they acknowledge their guilt and seek my face, and in their **distress** earnestly seek me. (Hos 5:15)

At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of **trouble**, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book. (Dan 12:1)

In the OT, then, *thlipsis* appears to be the affliction of Israel by other nations, redemption from which demonstrates God's authority and grace. It also serves as God's disciplinary tool for restoring rebellious Israel to repentance. Finally, the OT concept of affliction also applies to a future, eschatological time of trouble through which the people of God will be preserved by the grace of God.

### In the New Testament

The thread of the suffering of the people of God is an important aspect of salvation history that carries from the Old Testament into the New Testament in the suffering of Jesus both in his life and death on the cross. It also becomes an important theological theme in the lives of the apostles and of the church as a whole.

In the New Testament, those who experience *thlipsis* are always members of the church, often represented by the apostles in particular.<sup>457</sup> As Schlier comments, "The constant tribulation of Israel in the OT has become the necessary tribulation of the Church in the NT."<sup>458</sup> There is a sense in which the term *thlipsis* comes to stand for that necessary part of Christ's suffering of which the church must also take part. In order that the members of the church identify with Christ, they must also identify with his sufferings. Paul makes this point explicit in Romans 8:16-17: "The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs--heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, **provided we suffer with him** in order that we may also be glorified with him." Identification with Jesus means suffering with him.

Thus, the suffering that the church as a whole and members in particular experience is part and parcel of being "in Christ." In his earthly ministry, Jesus began the suffering service to which the church has since been called. In John, Jesus tells his disciples,

I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have **tribulation**. But take heart; I have overcome the world. (John 16:33)

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<sup>457</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>458</sup> Ibid.

The term is used extensively in the NT, and is most common in Paul's writings. Outside of Paul there a couple of things to note. First, in the Parable of the Sower, affliction is cited as a primary cause of some falling away from the Gospel.

As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when **tribulation** or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. (Matt 13:20-21)

And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when **tribulation** or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away. (Mark 4:17)

Those who do not endure through the suffering and persecution they receive because of the Gospel have no share in the promises of the Gospel. To be identified in Christ is to suffer. Jesus' teaching in the Parable of the Sower seems to say that only those who endure the suffering are truly his. Paul and his fellow missionaries say this as well in Acts:

Strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many **tribulations** we must enter the kingdom of God. (Acts 14:22)

The term is used sometimes to refer to those specific trials or tribulations leveled at the church by outside persecutors. Jesus anticipates these sufferings because the world hated him, so too would the world hate Jesus' disciples (John 15:18–19). On this point, also cf. Acts 11:19:

Now those who were scattered because of the **persecution** [*thlipsis*] that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews.

At the same time, the word can also simply refer to the trials of life that oppress those vulnerable to them: Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their **affliction**, and to keep oneself unstained from the world. (James 1:27)

Finally, the NT uses the term to refer to the eschatological suffering of the world before the return of Jesus Christ.

And he said to me, "These are the ones coming out of the great **tribulation**. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." (Rev 7:14)

### In Paul: Colossians

In the Pauline literature, the concept of suffering takes on deeper dimensions. It is the proving grounds for those who endure (Rom. 5:3–4), and it is the eschatological suffering of the unrighteous world (Rom. 2:9). Paul further develops the concept by linking suffering directly to identification with Christ. There is perhaps no more clear example of this than Colossians 1:24:

"Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's **afflictions** [*thlipsis*] for the sake of his body, that is, the church."

This singular verse has been the subject of debate, particularly concerned with understanding the phrase "filling up what is lacking in Christ's sufferings." Jerry Sumney describes the four main interpretive options scholars have debated:

1. Christ's sufferings may be supplemented from the treasury of merit earned by saints and martyrs.

2. There is a distinction between suffering as a sacrifice for sin and suffering for edification.
3. The passage illustrates the mystical union between Christ and Christians.
4. These sufferings of Paul are part of the messianic woes that must be fulfilled before the *parousia*.<sup>459</sup>

Steven Spivey adopts this list and explains further:

1. The sufferings that Paul endures for the sake of the church and to complete what “is lacking in Christ's afflictions” are intended to complete the redemption made possible through the death of Christ. This view argues that the death of Christ was in some way deficient in providing salvation for humanity.
2. The sufferings spoken of in Colossians 1:24 refer to the suffering Paul endures in the course of completing the apostolic mission. For the sake of the Colossians these sufferings are intended to edify and challenge the church to faithfulness in its context. Examples of the sufferings alluded to here are listed in the sarcastic response to the “super apostles” in 2 Corinthians 11:23-29.
3. Paul's sufferings are to be understood in the context of a “mystical union” between Paul and Christ. Such a union also characterizes the relationship between Paul and the churches, as well as the relationship between Christ and the churches/individual believer.
4. The sufferings, which complete the afflictions of Christ, are understood in light of the “messianic woes” which were expected to accompany the last days. In this view, Paul's sufferings are sometimes seen as vicarious (but not redemptive), lessening the measure of suffering to be endured by the churches.<sup>460</sup>

Of these four options, the first view of a treasury of merit was what gave rise to the exaltation of the Saints in Roman Catholic theology. Their interpretation was that Paul's sufferings were on behalf of the Colossian Christians; Jesus' sufferings were insufficient to gain enough merit for the church, so the Saints were under obligation to supplement that merit with their own sufferings.<sup>461</sup> Because this view calls into question the complete sufficiency of the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus Christ, it has largely been abandoned.<sup>462</sup>

View 3 posits a mystical union between Christ and his church that is so tightly woven one could say his own sufferings are indeed the literal sufferings of Christ.<sup>463</sup> While this idea is appealing in light of the “in Christ” identity of Pauline literature, it is not without its own difficulties. Like the first view, it also suffers from the same kind of “lessening” of Christ's sufferings. If union with Christ means the believer

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<sup>459</sup> Jerry L. Sumney, “I Fill Up What Is Lacking in the Afflictions of Christ”: Paul's Vicarious Suffering in Colossians,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 68 (2006): 665.

<sup>460</sup> Steven W. Spivey, “Colossians 1:24 and the Suffering Church,” *Journal Of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 4 (2011): 44.

<sup>461</sup> Sumney, 666.

<sup>462</sup> Cf. Spivey, 44 n. 4 for further clarification on the particulars leading up to the abandonment of this view.

<sup>463</sup> Sumney, 667.

can make up what is lacking in Christ's sufferings, it still assumes that Jesus' sufferings were incomplete. Hence, this view has also been largely discarded.<sup>464</sup>

Of the remaining two views, there has been much debate. Whether the sufferings of Christ refer to a future eschatological era in which Jesus' suffering will be made complete, or whether they refer to the example Paul provides to the church is debated. View 4 argues that there is a sum total amount of suffering that must be fulfilled by the church before the return of Christ. What Paul discusses, then, is that he himself shoulders a larger burden of those sufferings *on behalf of* the Colossians so that they needn't suffer more.<sup>465</sup> There are obvious problems with this view, as well, such as the lack of any biblical evidence of a "sum total amount of suffering."

The final remaining view holds the sufferings of Christ to be those sufferings characterized by identification with Christ.<sup>466</sup> The afflictions that Christ endured are not completely filled up in Paul's life in Colossians 1:24, and thus Paul states that he will continue to suffer until they are.

There is much to commend this final view, as it most simply answers the question and agrees most closely with other Pauline teaching on the matter of suffering. To each is allotted a certain amount of suffering like that of Christ. Each must endure this suffering simply because he has been identified in Christ. Believers are to be like their Savior, and suffering is no exception to this calling.

### **In Paul: Ephesians**

In the conclusion to his defense of his ministry in Ephesians 3:1–13, Paul makes the statement that his "sufferings" or "afflictions" (Greek *thlipseis*) have been on behalf of the Ephesian people for their glory. In line with his discussion of suffering elsewhere (see above), Paul explains that suffering is part of being in the service of Christ. All believers should anticipate suffering (cf. Rom. 8:17), and Paul, who considered himself least of all saints (Eph. 3:8) rightly suffered immensely for Christ (see Acts 9:15–16).

Thus, Paul establishes the same archetype for suffering that Jesus himself did. Just as Jesus suffered in the service of his Father, so, too, did Paul suffer in the service of Jesus Christ. In the same way, all believers should anticipate suffering in the pattern of Jesus and his apostles. As the apostle Peter says, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you" (1 Pet 4:12).

Concerning the "glory" achieved through Paul's suffering in Ephesians 3:13, much has been written. However, the most commonly held perspective is simply that Paul's suffering came as the result of his efforts in the evangelism of the Gentiles—of whom the Ephesian were part. In the sense that his efforts brought the Ephesians the chance to share in eternal glory, his sufferings were for their glory.<sup>467</sup>

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<sup>464</sup> Cf. Andrew C. Perriman, "The Pattern of Christ's Sufferings: Colossians 1:24 and Philippians 3:10-11," *Tyndale Bulletin* 42 (1991): 63 for a fuller discussion of the weaknesses of this view.

<sup>465</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>466</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>467</sup> George Harry Packwood Thompson, "Ephesians 3:13 and 2 Timothy 2:10 in the Light of Colossians 1:24," *Expository Times* 71 (1960): 188; see also Harold Hoehner, *Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic Publishing, 2002), 469.

### In Paul: Elsewhere

Elsewhere we see Paul developing the same concept of suffering as part of the Christian identity and its attendant glory:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall **tribulation**, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? (Rom. 8:35)

Rejoice in hope, be patient in **tribulation**, be constant in prayer. (Rom. 12:12)

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our **affliction**, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any **affliction**, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. If we are **afflicted**, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. (2 Cor. 1:3-6)

In these verses, Paul makes the point that affliction itself cannot separate believers from their identity in Christ, and that they should patiently endure like Christ. Affliction also gives believers a means by which they can comfort others who have been afflicted in the same way. Thus, affliction produces comfort, and that comfort produces endurance, and that endurance produces salvation.

He continues:

For this light momentary **affliction** is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, (2 Cor. 4:17)

For in a severe test of **affliction**, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. (2 Cor. 8:2)

Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the **afflictions** that you are enduring. (2 Thess. 1:4)

Paul makes it perfectly clear that afflictions endured will give over to glory—and the testimony of those who endure gives strength and encouragement to all the believers.

### Scholarly Commentary

The following are excerpts from various commentaries and theologies that discuss the concept of suffering, particularly as developed in Paul's letter to the Ephesians, as well as in the broader NT.

#### **Harold Hoehner**

In this way Paul was suffering tribulations because of his ministry among Gentiles, including the Ephesians. Paul's willingness to suffer on their behalf is confirmed in a letter written in this same time period of Roman imprisonment where he states that he was willing to be poured out as a drink offering for the faith of the recipients (Phil 2:17). In this spirit Paul cautions Ephesian believers not to lose heart. . . . It might seem unusual to take glory in another's suffering. This, however, has a similarity in Christ's death. One does not specifically glory because of Christ's suffering but rather glories because his death made possible the honor of being a new creature in Christ. In the present context, the point is that if

Paul had never carried out his ministry of the mystery to the Ephesians, he would not have been in prison and the Ephesians would never have been introduced to Christ.<sup>468</sup>

### **Frank Thielman**

When Paul speaks of suffering for others in other contexts, he has in mind the trouble, both physical and emotional, that he has endured in the course of his faithfulness to his commission to preach the gospel among the Gentiles. This faithfulness in the midst of suffering has brought life to those who have believed his proclamation (2 Cor. 4:7–12; cf. 1 Thess. 2:2, 9; 2 Cor. 2:14–16; Phil. 1:12–13; Col. 1:24). By the time Paul wrote Ephesians, many in his audience would have had no personal contact with him, but Paul considered himself an apostle to all Gentile Christians, even those whom he had never met (Rom. 1:11–15; 11:13; 15:14–16). Despite his physical and personal distance from his readers, his suffering was for them. Paul’s comment here, then, is close in meaning to Col. 1:24, where he refers to his sufferings on behalf of his readers in Colossae as suffering for the whole body of Christ, which is the church, and as a participation in the suffering of Christ himself.<sup>469</sup>

### **Andrew T. Lincoln**

The possible cause of discouragement for the readers [of Ephesians] is Paul’s sufferings on their behalf. Since it is unlikely that readers no known personally to Paul would actually need reassurance for their own faith because the apostle is suffering or had suffered, the request of this verse serves, rather, as an apologetic device to show how even Paul’s sufferings and martyrdom are no cause for shame, but fit the magnificent scope of his apostolic ministry that has just been set forth [in the chapter]. . . . Suffering, particularly apostolic suffering, is a significant topic in Paul’s letters, and [*thlipsis*] is the term he most frequently uses in this connection.<sup>470</sup>

### **Clinton E. Arnold**

Suffering can accomplish God’s purposes. One illustrious example of this is Paul’s circumstances as he writes this letter. In spite of suffering the constraints, pain, and indignities of his Roman imprisonment, Paul is confident of a far greater good that can come from it. Consequently he urges the readers not to lose heart by his sufferings. Paul has a transcendent perspective on his suffering, seeing himself not as a prisoner of Rome, but as a “prisoner of Christ Jesus.” He also sees his suffering as hastening the coming of Christ, which will lead to their experience of future glory.<sup>471</sup>

### **Ernest Best**

In 2 Cor 1.6 Paul’s sufferings are for the encouragement and salvation of his readers, in 4.12 they bring life to them, and in 12.15 his life is spent on behalf of their lives. We might then have expected [him] to write here “which are for your strengthening” or even “for your salvation”. Instead he refers to glory. This is a variant of the theme, for the “life” in question is not physical or psychic life but eternal life, the life which is associated with glory (1.18; Col 1.27). In Rom 8.17f; 2 Cor 4.17 Paul connects his suffering to his own glory. All this suggests that the connection of his suffering with the glory of others is within the range of his thought.<sup>472</sup>

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<sup>468</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 469.

<sup>469</sup> Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 221–22.

<sup>470</sup> Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1990), 191.

<sup>471</sup> Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, ed. Clinton E. Arnold (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 203.

<sup>472</sup> Ernest Best, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 332.

### **Thomas R. Schreiner**

Peter comforts suffering believers, reminding them that they participate in Christ's sufferings, and that their sufferings, as in the case of Christ, are a prelude to glory (1 Pet. 4:13). The suffering that believers encounter is (or should be) because of their allegiance to Christ. Those who suffer for Christ's name are blessed. To suffer as a Christian is not a matter of shame but rather represents an opportunity to glorify God (1 Pet. 4:16), and in this instance such suffering is in accordance with God's will (1 Pet. 4:19). The association between the sufferings of Christ and the sufferings of believers harkens back to the Jesus tradition (e.g., Matt. 5:10–12). The opposition that Jesus experienced in his life is now meted out to his followers. When believers suffer, however, God's Spirit rests on them (1 Pet. 4:14). . . . Jesus as the Spirit-anointed Messiah pours out the same Spirit on his disciples, and their endowment with the Spirit is particularly evident when they suffer.<sup>473</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Paul's use of the term "affliction" in Ephesians 3:13 carries great theological weight. He refers not only to those things he suffers by being in prison (his present location), but to the whole history of the persecution leveled against him because of his service to Christ. This affliction he anticipated and welcomed, knowing that as a follower of Christ he would be called to suffer like Christ.

As Paul develops the concept further in his other writings, and as the concept of affliction and suffering is illustrated in the rest of the NT, it truly is something that every believer should anticipate. We should not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon us to test us, as though it were an unexpected, strange thing (1 Pet 4:12). For those of us found "in Christ," our identity is entirely wrapped up in the person and experience of the Savior. Part of that experience was suffering, and so every believer who finds himself "in Christ" will also suffer.

This suffering is not an optional choice for the spiritual "elite," and neither is it only for those living in countries with oppressive governments. It is the lot of every believer. It can come externally through persecution by peers, overseers, family, friends, and strangers. It can come naturally through suffering health issues, catastrophe, or accidents. It can occur internally as a saddened or disheartened response to external events. Sometimes we limit suffering to the big things, like overt persecution, catastrophic natural disasters, life-changing physical illness, or the death of a loved one. Certainly those things meet the requirement. But as believers living in a fallen world that is in the throes of a cosmic battle between God and Satan, we experience smaller sufferings on a daily basis. Even the fact that we face temptation daily is a form of suffering, because it is not the way it was meant to be. Regardless of the nature of the suffering or affliction, it is the lot of all who are in Christ. The sooner we recognize this, the sooner we will run to our only hope in suffering: the kindness, mercy, and peace of Christ.

Indeed, our ultimate hope lies in the fact that our suffering is not arbitrary. As the author of Hebrews says, "It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? . . . For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it." (Heb 12:7, 11). And as Paul points out in Ephesians 3:13, suffering leads to the glory of those who suffer and that of those who are built up by the suffering. Just as each person who is in Christ must share in his suffering, so too will each share in Christ's glory (Rom. 8:17). The great hope of the return of Christ is joining him in his triumphant glory—but that can only be gained by first joining him in his suffering.

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<sup>473</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 497–98.

# *I AM HEARD / Ephesians 3:14 - 21*

## **Introduction**

Paul has already prayed once for the Ephesians in 1:15-23. There he prayed that God would give them “a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him” and that they would have the eyes of their hearts enlightened to know the hope to which they were called. Here in 3:14-21 he prays that they would be strengthened in their inner being through the Spirit, that Christ would dwell in their hearts through faith, that they would be rooted and grounded in love, that they would be able to know and comprehend the depths of Christ and his love, and, finally, that they would be “filled with all the fullness of God.” He caps off his prayer with a doxology of praise to God and a final “Amen” in verse 21.

The passage is transitional in the book of Ephesians as Paul concludes the “indicative” chapters of 1-3 before moving into the “imperative” chapters of 4-6. In other words, Paul has told the Ephesians who they are in Christ in chapters 1-3, which he closes off with the prayer and doxology of our present passage, before moving on in chapters 4-6 to who God is calling them to become more and more in Christ. “The prayer and doxology of chapter 3 function in an important preparatory way for the subsequent admonitions to love in the second half of the letter.”<sup>474</sup>

Commentators often refer to this passage as a “prayer report” instead of a prayer. Frank Thielman writes, “Unlike the benediction in 1:3-14 and the doxology in 3:20-21, this is, precisely speaking, a prayer report rather than an actual prayer (cf. 1:15-23). Paul describes how he prays when he bows his knees before the Father on their behalf.”<sup>475</sup> Still, we probably shouldn’t press this too far. Paul says, “I bow my knees . . . that [Greek *hina*],” and then fills in the blanks with the content of his prayer. Thielman continues, “The rush of the section’s eighty-six words and the ambiguity of the syntax reveal that this is more than a ‘report.’ It is also an actual prayer for the readers.”<sup>476</sup> So the passage still feels like a prayer, even if Paul is not as explicit about it as in 1:15-23. He does “report” his prayer, but he is clearly praying to the Father at the same time. In what follows, we will look at this prayer in more detail.

## **Breakdown of Passage**

### **Structure**

The basic structure of the passage includes Paul’s announcement of his bowing before the Father (vv. 14-15), followed by his petitions on behalf of the Ephesians (vv. 16-19), and his conclusion with a magnificent doxology (vv. 20-21). Below are three different ways scholars structure the passage:

*Clinton Arnold*

A Second Prayer of Intercession (3:14-21)

A. The Address to the Father (3:14-15)

B. A Request for Power and Love (3:16-17)

C. A Request for an Increasing Awareness of God’s Power and Love (3:18-19a)

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<sup>474</sup> Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 270.

<sup>475</sup> Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 226. Timothy Gombis calls it a “report of his prayer” (“Ephesians 3:2-13: Pointless Digression, or Epitome of the Triumph of God in Christ?” *Westminster Theological Journal* 66 [2004]: 313).

<sup>476</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 226.

### D. Doxology (3:20-21)<sup>477</sup>

*Frank Thielman*

Paul Prays for His Readers' Inner Strength and Praises the God Who Can Give It (3:14-21)

A. Paul Prays for His Readers' Inner Strength (3:14-19)

B. Paul Praises the God Who is Able to Strengthen His Readers (3:20-21)<sup>478</sup>

*Harold Hoehner*

Prayer for Strengthened Love (3:14-21)

1. The Approach to Prayer (3:14-15)

2. The Appeal in Prayer (3:16-19)

a. Petition Stated: To Be Strengthened in the Inner Person (3:16-17a)

b. Purpose Stated: To Comprehend Christ's Love and to Be Filled with God's Fullness (3:17b-19)

3. The Ascription of Praise (3:20-21)<sup>479</sup>

Beyond these outlines, below are some comments from scholars on how this passage breaks down and functions. Hoehner writes,

This passage can be divided into three parts. First, homage to God is declared (vv. 14-15). Second, his prayer for the Ephesians is expressed, namely, that they might genuinely know and experience Christ's love and consequently demonstrate it toward each other (vv. 16-19). Third, praise to God is given, ascribing to him glory throughout all generations (vv. 20-21).<sup>480</sup>

Thielman puts it this way:

The whole section (3:14-21) consists of two long sentences, one of eighty-six words (vv. 14-19) and one of thirty-seven words (vv. 20-21). Both sentences are characterized by a peculiar combination of structure and looseness. The intercessory prayer report (vv. 14-19) contains an introduction (vv. 14-15) and three purpose clauses (vv. 16-17, 18-19a, and 19b). . . . The doxology follows the same pattern: it has a standard liturgical structure, but it revises and expands this structure in crucial ways to accent the themes that have consumed Paul's attention in the letter so far. He becomes so redundant and expansive that he seems to be grasping to express the ineffable.<sup>481</sup>

### Verses 14-15 – Opening

Moving into specifics of the passage, Paul begins his prayer in verse 14. He uses the phrase *toutou charin*, "for this reason," which is the same phrase he used at the beginning of 3:1. There, however, Paul breaks at the word "Gentiles" to go into more detail about the mystery of his gospel to the Gentiles. The phrase "for this reason" (*toutou charin*) likely points back to both 3:2-13 as well as what has come before in chapter 2. Peter O'Brien writes,

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<sup>477</sup> Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 205.

<sup>478</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, viii.

<sup>479</sup> Harold Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 471-92.

<sup>480</sup> *Ibid.*, 471.

<sup>481</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 224.

The opening words of v. 14, *For this reason*, take up the same expression at v. 1, where Paul was about to lay his concerns for his Gentile readers before God in prayer. However, he broke off almost immediately in order to give an account of his ministry to them and their distinctive place within the mystery of God that had been revealed to him. Now he completes the sentence of v. 1 and reports the content of his intercession for them (vv. 14-19), which has been enriched by all that has been said in the so-called digression of 3:2-13.<sup>482</sup>

Likewise, Andrew Lincoln says that in 3:1 the phrase had signaled Paul's "intention of continuing to express his concern for his readers before God, having set out for them their privileges as a result of what God had done for them in Christ," but now it is "inevitably colored by the digression of 3:2-13, with its statement of the readers' debt to Paul, containing further reminders of their part in the Church and the Church's part in God's cosmic plan."<sup>483</sup>

After these opening words, Paul continues by describing his posture before God the Father. The word here for "bow" is *kamptō*, which means literally "to bend or incline some part of the body."<sup>484</sup> Thielman writes,

The normal posture for prayer in antiquity, whether among Jews, Greeks, or Romans, was standing, although occasionally people knelt to pray. Kneeling to request something from a powerful superior was common (2 Kings 1:13; 1 Chron. 29:20; Mark 1:40; Matt. 17:14; 20:20; cf. Isa. 45:23; Phil. 2:10; Rom. 14:11), and this apparently made kneeling, on occasion, an appropriate posture before God in prayer [e.g., Psa 95:6; 1 Chr 29:20; 2 Chr 29:29; Acts 21:5]. People sometimes knelt when uttering emotionally charged prayers [e.g., Ezra 9:5; Luke 5:8; 22:41; Acts 7:60], and the reference to kneeling here adds to the pathos that is already present in the references to Paul's imprisonment and sufferings (3:1, 13). Paul's prayers for his readers are deeply heartfelt.<sup>485</sup>

Paul goes on to call God "Father" and describes him as the one "from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named." The word for "family" is *patria*, which is close to the Greek word for "father," *patēr*. The word "stands for a group derived from a single ancestor and its use in the LXX can denote a family, one's father's house, a clan, a tribe, or even a nation. . . . It is best taken here in Ephesians as referring to every family or family group."<sup>486</sup> The idea of every family "in heaven" points to classes of spiritual beings—angels, whether fallen or not. "For this writer all such spirit powers, even the rebellious ones, owe their origin to God."<sup>487</sup> The families on earth "speaks of family groupings" and thus points to the "basic structures of human relationships which owe their existence to him."<sup>488</sup> All this points to God as

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<sup>482</sup> O'Brien, *Ephesians*, 253.

<sup>483</sup> Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1990), 201.

<sup>484</sup> Walter Bauer, Frederick William Danker, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilber Gingrich, eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. [BDAG] (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 507.

<sup>485</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 227.

<sup>486</sup> Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 202.

<sup>487</sup> Ibid.

<sup>488</sup> O'Brien, *Ephesians*, 256.

Father of all things: “To extol God the Father as father of all family groupings in heaven and on earth is to set his fatherhood in the context of creation and of the cosmos.”<sup>489</sup>

### Verses 16-19 – Petition

Paul goes on to give the details of the prayer he prays. The grammar and structure here is a bit ambiguous, which may point to the feeling and spontaneity Paul puts into his prayer. Still, the prayer can be broken up in a logical manner. Paul says in verses 14-15 that he bows his knees, which is another way of saying that he prays. Verses 16-19, then, fill in the rest. In other words, what does Paul pray? Answer:

1. That (Greek *hina*) . . . (vv. 16-17)
2. That (*hina*) . . . (vv. 18-19a)
3. That (*hina*) . . . (v. 19b)<sup>490</sup>

We can expand this further:

1. *That* he might give to you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner man, (that) Christ might dwell through faith in your hearts, being rooted and grounded in love (vv. 16-17)
2. *That* you might have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge (vv. 18-19a)
3. *That* you might be filled with all the fullness of God (v. 19b)

It should be noted again, however, that the syntax of these verses is not entirely clear. Not everyone completely agrees that it breaks down in the way described above. Thielman, for example, does not view the prayer as having three parallel petitions but rather sees the verses as building upon each other, with the third and final petition (v. 19b) providing the “climactic purpose toward which the rest of the prayer has been moving.”<sup>491</sup>

Two things within these petitions themselves deserve a special mention. First, in verse 16, on being strengthened in the “inner man” (*esō anthrōpon*), we can compare to the only other places in the NT that use the same language:

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our *inner self* is being renewed day by day. (2 Cor 4:16)

For I delight in the law of God, in my *inner being*, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. (Rom 7:22-23)

This “inner man” is the “interior life of the person, which God, by his Spirit, can strengthen with divine power.”<sup>492</sup> Second, there have been many views on what Paul means in verse 18 with the phrase, “the breadth and length and height and depth” (*to platos kai mēkos kai hypsos kai bathos*). These have included the power of God, the wisdom of God, the love of Christ, the mystery of God’s plan, the new

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<sup>489</sup> Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 203.

<sup>490</sup> Outline adapted from Arnold, *Ephesians*, 207.

<sup>491</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 237-38.

<sup>492</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.

temple, the new Jerusalem, and the four arms of the cross, which embrace all the world.<sup>493</sup> However, in view of Paul mentioning the love of Christ in his very next breath, it seems almost certain that in large part he is referring to Christ's love.<sup>494</sup> John Calvin was impatient with other views, writing that Paul refers to "nothing other than the love of Christ, of which he speaks afterwards."<sup>495</sup> Still, other views are not impossible. For example, Arnold argues that it refers to God's power.<sup>496</sup> Thielman believes it refers to the "vastness of divine love" but that "in the background of this language lies Paul's concern with God's administrative plan, his mystery, and his complex wisdom (vv. 9-10)."<sup>497</sup> So there are other solid views available. But it is difficult to avoid the fact that in large measure the love of Christ must be in view.

### **Verses 20-21 – Doxology**

Paul caps his prayer off with a doxology, a "beautiful ascription of praise to God."<sup>498</sup> O'Brien writes,

The doxology at the end of Paul's prayer concludes the first half of the letter on the same note with which it began in the introductory eulogy (1:3-14), namely, in praise of God for his mighty salvation, initiated in eternity, carried into effect in Christ, and intended to redound to the praise of God's glorious grace for all eternity. Paul wants his readers to have a theological perspective on God's mighty saving purposes.<sup>499</sup>

Paul then brings to a close his entire prayer and doxology, as well as the first three chapters of Ephesians, with a final "Amen" (*amēn*) in verse 21. Thus, we move now out of specifics to more general comment from scholars on the passage as a whole before concluding.

### **Scholarly Comment**

#### **Harold Hoehner**

This is Paul's second prayer in Ephesians. His first prayer (1:15-21) for the believers in Ephesus was for them to know God intimately so that they might know the following three things: first, referring to the past, that they might be acquainted with the hope of his calling; second, referring to the future, that they will understand the wealth of God's gracious inheritance; and finally, referring to the present, that they would know the surpassing greatness of his power toward them.<sup>500</sup>

In the present context (3:14-21), the focus of his prayer is that the Ephesians might know Christ's strengthened love which surpasses all knowledge. Just prior to this, Paul had developed the doctrine of the mystery of the church where Jewish and Gentile believers are positionally "one new person" (2:15), the body of Christ. He now prays that they may be united experientially in Christ's love. . . . Hence, Paul's first prayer (1:15-23) for believers was to know God intimately and experience his power, and his

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<sup>493</sup> Arnold, *Ephesians*, 215-16.

<sup>494</sup> So Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 488; O'Brien, *Ephesians*, 263.

<sup>495</sup> John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians*, trans. T. H. L. Parker, Calvin's Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 168-69, quoted in Thielman, *Ephesians*, 236.

<sup>496</sup> Arnold, *Ephesians*, 216-17.

<sup>497</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 236.

<sup>498</sup> Arnold, *Ephesians*, 219.

<sup>499</sup> O'Brien, *Ephesians*, 269.

<sup>500</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 471.

second prayer (3:14-21) is for believers to know the power of Christ's love and to experience Christ's love for one another.<sup>501</sup>

### **Frank Thielman**

Paul is now ready to launch a second intercessory prayer report, whose burden is similar to the first report. He wants his readers to know that he prays for God to strengthen them in the inner human being so that Christ might dwell in their hearts and they might become strong enough to grasp the vast dimensions of Christ's love for them. The ultimate goal of this prayer is that his readers might "be filled up to all the fullness of God" (3:19b), that is, that they might be all God has created them as individuals (2:10) and as the church (2:15) to be.<sup>502</sup>

Paul next brings the entire first half of the letter to a close with an elaborate ascription of praise to God. This doxology incorporates some of the most important themes of his intercessory prayers (3:20-21). The God who is at work in Paul and his readers is powerful enough to do more than they can even imagine. Eternal glory is his, precisely in the place where his powerful work is evident (the church) and in the person through whom he has so lavishly blessed the church (Christ Jesus).<sup>503</sup>

### **Peter T. O'Brien**

What Paul does here, namely, intercede for his readers, naturally flows out of his ministry — indeed, it is part of what it means to serve them as Gentiles. Here is a servant of the gospel whose ministry involves a profound commitment to intercession for the ultimate maturity of his readers.<sup>504</sup>

Both the intercessory prayer and the doxology hark back to earlier themes of the letter. In particular, they contain a number of parallels to the praise and prayer of chapter 1. In a sense, 3:14-21 could be considered a further application of the ideas developed in the earlier prayer: petition is offered to the Father (1:17; 3:14-15); it is for the Spirit (1:17; 3:16); there is a concern for knowledge and fullness (1:18-19; 3:18-19); a linking of knowledge and power (1:19; 3:19); and, finally, praise and glory are offered to God (cf. 1:6, 12, 14; 3:21). At the same time, Paul's intercession and doxology provide a transition from the "theology" of chapters 1-3 to the "paraenesis" that follows in chapters 4-6.<sup>505</sup>

### **Clinton E. Arnold**

This is Paul's second intercessory prayer report in the letter. This one differs from the first in that it ends with a stirring doxology, which also serves as a fitting conclusion to the contents of the first half of the letter. . . . This prayer also has significant continuity with the first prayer (1:15-23) in that they both contain requests for God to reveal the vastness of his power to the readers. This prayer goes beyond the first, however, by appealing to God to actually impart his power to the readers. This second prayer also picks up on the theme of the love of God and seeks divine revelation into the magnitude of Christ's love; Paul prays that his readers will experience such love in a way that will provide a firm foundation for their lives.

This prayer also prepares the way for what follows in the rest of the letter. Paul's request for divine enabling power is precisely what the readers will need so they can live in accordance with the many ethical demands of the letter (chs. 4 – 6) — not only in terms of getting rid of unhealthy, sinful practices,

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<sup>501</sup> Ibid.

<sup>502</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 224.

<sup>503</sup> Ibid.

<sup>504</sup> O'Brien, *Ephesians*, 253.

<sup>505</sup> Ibid., 254.

but also in displaying the virtues commended. He especially appeals to us to exercise love in the same unselfish and self-giving way that Christ showed love (5:1-2).

The supernatural empowerment is also essential because of the supernaturally powerful opposition that believers face (4:27; 6:10-20). Paul's additional petition that Christ may extend his reign in their lives (3:17) is particularly relevant for summarizing this transforming work that Christ undertakes within every member of the church and within the church as a corporate community (4:11-16 and 4:17-24).<sup>506</sup>

### **Andrew T. Lincoln**

Adopting an attitude of deep reverence and fervent entreaty, [Paul] makes three major requests, with a subsidiary one between the first and second. As he begins the intercessory prayer-report, however, he first extols God the Father as the Creator and Lord of all family groupings in the cosmos and then, as he launches into the first request, reminds himself and his readers that this God's giving in response to supplication is in accord with the inexhaustible wealth of his glory, that is, of his radiance and power active on behalf of humanity.<sup>507</sup>

The major requests of the intercessory prayer-report can be seen as reflecting what the writer believes to be major needs of the churches to which he writes. His concern for their strengthening . . . suggests some weakness or vacillation on their part . . . He wants to see instead vigorous Christians who are effective because of their quality of inner strength derived from the energizing of God's Spirit. His concern for their being rooted and grounded in love and for their knowledge of Christ's love suggests a lack of appreciation, on the part of the readers, of the significance of what is central to the gospel, resulting in an instability and in an insufficient sense of their identity and security. The writer wants to see, instead, Christians who in the company of fellow believers know themselves, because they know the all-encompassing love of Christ and have therefore been accepted and affirmed at the heart of reality.<sup>508</sup>

The first part of the letter ends on the same note with which it had begun—a note of worship and praise of the God who is not only the initiator of salvation but also its final goal. The writer's major concerns in this half of the letter have been taken up into this prayer and praise. Just as the opening eulogy was meant to draw his readers into appreciation of a theological perspective that could be a vital inspiration to them, so also the closing doxology is intended to function in this fashion.<sup>509</sup>

### **Eugene Peterson**

Prayer is the cradle language of the church. This is our mother tongue. So it is both natural and fitting that Paul's "churchiest" letter be articulated in the language of prayer. Paul has opened with an extensive, explosive (!) volley of prayer: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ . . ." (Eph. 1:3-14). He goes on to address his readers, but after only a single sentence he is again praying: "I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation . . ." (1:17-23).

Now, at the transitional center of the letter, Paul is at it once more, on his knees, praying before the Father (3:14-21). In a couple of pages we will find him concluding his letter by urging his readers (us!) to enter into what he has been praying and writing by praying it all themselves: "Pray in the Spirit at all times. . . . Pray also for me. . . . Pray that I may declare [the mystery of the gospel] boldly . . ." (6:18-20).

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<sup>506</sup> Arnold, *Ephesians*, 204.

<sup>507</sup> Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 218.

<sup>508</sup> *Ibid.*, 219.

<sup>509</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.

Paul prays. Even when the prayers are not explicit, the language is prayerful. Paul lives his prayers. He is praying even when he doesn't know he is praying. He begins by laying a foundation in a prayer of blessing and then goes on to pray for those to whom he writing. Now here, at the center of the letter, we come upon this strategically placed prayer that keeps the letter centered in prayer. At the end of the letter, Paul's admonition to pray will keep the church praying — not discussing church, not talking about prayer, but praying. Church begins in prayer, stays centered in prayer, and ends up praying.<sup>510</sup>

### **Conclusion**

In Ephesians 3:14-21, Paul brings an end to the first half of the book of Ephesians with a stirring prayer to God the Father on behalf of the Ephesians and crowns it with a beautiful doxology in praise of God. While there is a liturgical feel to Paul's words, there is spontaneity and depth of feeling to it as well. As one scholar writes,

The intercessory prayer report and the doxology, therefore, are not mere repetitions of traditional forms, and they certainly are not scholarly literary productions. They are heartfelt prayers and examples of exactly the kind of “boldness and confident access” that believers have through faith, as Paul has just mentioned in 3:12. God is Paul's Father, and so Paul can speak as freely as any son would speak with a father in whose love he has confidence.<sup>511</sup>

Paul speaks freely with the Father, drawing us to into a relational world where we have access to the only God, who loves us and gave his Son for us. Paul prays that we might enter into that love more deeply. That we would know and taste and experience the breadth and length and height and depth of the grace of God in Christ. For Paul, the gospel is a mystery that has been revealed to him, which he has been commissioned to preach. But the depths of the riches of God are eternal. We will never come to the end of them. There is always more to know, more to understand, and more to experience. Paul prays for just that. That we would be able to comprehend and more fully plunge ourselves into this grace, mercy, and love. He knows that only by doing this do we have any hope of becoming the people God is making us into, the kind of people he will go on to describe in the rest of the book of Ephesians. “Nothing short of an experience of the generous love of Christ, which roots and grounds them in love, will enable [the Ephesians] to walk in the love to which he will exhort them.”<sup>512</sup> We must know that God is there, that he hears us, that he loves us, and that he is with us. It is through this relationship that we receive his divine power to enter into the depths, to taste and see that the Lord is good, and to “be filled with all the fullness of God.”

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<sup>510</sup> Eugene Peterson, *Practice Resurrection: A Conversation on Growing Up in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 148.

<sup>511</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 225.

<sup>512</sup> Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 220-21.

## *I AM GIFTED* / *Ephesians 4:1-16*

### **Introduction**

A primary theme in Ephesians is unity within the people of God, as well as the implications for unified growth that comes from being a part of Christ's body. Chapter 4 demonstrates this clearly. Here, Paul's primary message is that the body is fully united in Christ and must operate that way. The key to the success of this bodily growth lies in the gifts that Christ gave to the church. These are for the express purpose of fostering growth and maturity in the body of Christ.

### **Transition in Ephesians**

Between Ephesians 3 and 4 is a hinge. We are moving from the indicative now into the imperative: "We are at a transition point in Ephesians, moving from an exuberant exploration of who God is and the way he works to a detailed account of who we are and the way we work."<sup>513</sup> Chapter four of Ephesians begins with the important preposition οὖν (*oun*) which is commonly translated "therefore" (cf. ESV, NASB, CSB, NET). It implies not only a transition in thought, but also that the content to follow is the natural, logical conclusion to everything that has preceded. Essentially, Paul's point is that everything he has related to the Ephesians thus far—the hope of being in Christ, the status before Christ, the unity of Jew and Gentile, and the mystery of the Gospel—moves toward application.

It is not as though there is an insurmountable wall between the end of Ephesians 3 and the beginning of Ephesians 4: "'Therefore' is a hinge word. But the transition is not abrupt. It is not as if we can separate the being of God from being human and treat them separately."<sup>514</sup> We must never separate "doing"—whether ours or God's—from "being." They are organically connected. Still, there is a readily discernible shift in Paul's focus at this point. In practical terms, we have now come to the "so what" of the letter of Ephesians.

L. Thomas Strong states,

Beginning in chapter 4, Paul answered the "so what" question by explaining in a practical manner the relevance of his previously discussed doctrine to the individual lives of those who were a part of the new humanity or church. The challenge facing the New Testament church as the result of the application of this doctrine was great. Though the unity found in Christ would affect individual lives, this same unity would have a profound impact upon the church as the collective body of Christ, a group of diverse individuals. Therefore, Paul directed his thoughts to applying the doctrines to the individual and to the community.<sup>515</sup>

Isam Ballenger puts it this way:

One might also say that the writer moves from the immanent trinity to the economic trinity, from God as worshipped to God as working, from the question of what God means to us to the question of what we mean to God, from believing in the Trinity to participating in the Trinity, from the fullness of God to being filled with the fullness of God (3:19), from the mission of God

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<sup>513</sup> Eugene Peterson, *Practice Resurrection: A Conversation on Growing Up in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 166.

<sup>514</sup> Ibid.

<sup>515</sup> L. Thomas Strong, "An Essential Unity (Eph 4:1-16)," *Theological Educator* 54 (1996): 67-8.

to the mission of the church. Of course, the movement between these thoughts must not be held rigidly, for they are closely interrelated. Nevertheless, the epistle arrangement may offer a structure for the contemporary preacher.<sup>516</sup>

The “so what” of our text is rather simple: “I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called” (4:1). Having already described the wonders of Christ’s completed work and the effects that it has on the church, Paul now exhorts his audience to live differently. The remainder of the book will be dedicated to unpacking just what this lifestyle looks like. But prior to developing the responsibility of the Ephesians in particular, Paul addresses some primary issues in general. The first of these is the *means* by which one will live out the implications of the Gospel: by the power of the Spirit.

### **Structure**

A brief word on structure. Ephesians 4:1-16 can be broken into two sections: verses 1-6 and verses 7-16. The first section focuses on unity in the body of Christ, while the second focuses on the gifts given to each member of the body for the purpose of maturity. Ernest Best structures the passage in the following manner:

- Unity and Diversity (4.1-16)
  - A. Unity (4.1-6)
  - B. Unity and Growth of the Church (4.7-16)<sup>517</sup>

Frank Thielman’s outline looks like this:

- The Growth of the Church toward Unity and Maturity (4:1-16)
  - A. Christian Unity and Its Theological Basis (4:1-6)
  - B. The Gifts of the Victorious Christ Cultivate the Body’s Maturity (4:7-16)<sup>518</sup>

### **The Spirit of Unity (4:1-6)**

Moving now into our first section, verses 1-6 focus on the unity of the church. We could even break it down further, with the first three verses being more of a general exhortation grounded in what has come before in the first three chapters of Ephesians. Then, at the end of verse 3, Paul specifically mentions unity, which naturally flows into verses 4-6 and the “sevenfold confession of the unifying realities of the faith, which provide a strong motivation for the appeal to unity.”<sup>519</sup>

Thielman writes,

In the first subsection (vv. 1-6) Paul launches a series of general but practical ethical admonitions based on the understanding of the church that he has developed in chapters 1-3. Paul’s readers have been called to be a new, unified people, the initial stage of God’s new creation (v. 1). Although the scope of this vision spans the universe, it is accomplished through the cultivation of

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<sup>516</sup> Isam Ballenger, “Ephesians 4:1–16,” *Interpretation* 51 (1997): 292.

<sup>517</sup> Ernest Best, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 356-57, 373.

<sup>518</sup> Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), viii.

<sup>519</sup> Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 273-74.

such mundane qualities as humility, patience, and lovingly putting up with the foibles of others (v. 2).<sup>520</sup>

Thus, chapter 4 begins with an exhortation to the whole community of faith in Ephesus to live in a way that reflects their salvation—indeed, everything that Paul has described in the previous three chapters. This is achieved by the “bond of the Spirit” that lies within each individual that makes up the unified body of Christ. The role of the Holy Spirit is central to Paul’s message to the Ephesians, and forms the core of his teaching on transformed lives (cf. 1:13; 2:22; 4:3–4; 4:30; 5:18–19; 6:17–18). Importantly, Paul makes the point that the Holy Spirit is “in all” in the sense that the same Spirit permeates and unifies believers together in the church. One author put it this way: “‘Church’ does not mean the sum of individuals who have a private relationship with Christ and a private inspiration of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>521</sup> Instead, it is the sum of pieces of a whole that are united through the superintending power and vision of the Holy Spirit. Until the Ephesians (and believers today) grasp this concept, the empowerment of the “gifts of the Spirit” will remain unused and ineffective.

### **Spiritual Gifts: Diversity in Unity (4:7-16)**

#### **Overview**

In the next section, Paul moves from the unity of the body of Christ to the different gifts Christ has given to those who make up his body. Peter O’Brien writes, “The opening words of v. 7, ‘*But to each one of us*’, which begin a new paragraph on the overall theme of unity, introduce the motif of diversity in Christ’s distribution of grace to each individual believer.”<sup>522</sup> He continues,

At first sight it might seem that this diversity is at odds with the overarching unity of which the apostle has just spoken. But the diversity contributes to the unity of the body, since Christ’s giving different gifts to each is for the purpose of enriching the whole, so that all are prepared for full maturity when they meet their Lord (v. 13).<sup>523</sup>

On this section Thielman writes,

In the second subsection (vv. 7-16) Paul continues to lay the theological foundation for the church’s practical efforts at unity. Whereas the first subsection had reached its climax with an affirmation of the unity and pervasive presence of God (v. 6), this second subsection grounds the unity of the church in the work of Christ. It skillfully uses the number “one,” so prominent in 4:4-6, to shift the thought from the unity of the church and God to the importance of “each one” of God’s people in moving the church toward this unity. In the first part of this section, Paul appeals to a heavily modified form of [Psalm 68:18] to support the idea that the very Christ whose ascent to heaven and descent to hades shows him to be victorious over the inimical spiritual powers of the cosmos is the Christ who has given gifts to each believer for building up the church. The gifts of some are intended for the equipping of others to do the work of ministry, but in each case Christ has measured out the appropriate amount of “grace” for the “activity” assigned to each believer. As each believer lovingly supplies the body with what it needs to grow,

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<sup>520</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 246.

<sup>521</sup> Eric G. Jay, *The Church, Its Changing Image Through Twenty Centuries* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1978), 26.

<sup>522</sup> O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 286.

<sup>523</sup> *Ibid.*

it matures into the “man” God intended it to be. This “man,” as it turns out, is Christ himself, who fills the whole universe.<sup>524</sup>

### **Re-Interpretation of Psalm 68:18**

While we cannot go into an overly detailed examination of Paul’s use of Psalm 68:18 in verses 8-10, suffice it to say that here Paul changes the Greek translation of the OT to suit his purposes. In the OT, the psalm speaks of Yahweh, saying, “You ascended on high, leading a host of captives in your train and receiving gifts among men, even among the rebellious, that the LORD God may dwell there.” Here in Paul, though, Jesus *gives* gifts to men. It must be remembered that Paul and others in his day could use Scripture more fluidly than modern interpreters would be comfortable with, but this in no way implies the diminishing of its authority for him. And nowhere do Paul’s interpretations contradict the original meaning of the texts. Indeed, Thielman writes that “a good case can be made that although Paul’s changes to the Greek text of Scripture are dramatic, they are consistent with the overall theological direction of Ps. 68.”<sup>525</sup> Paul sees Jesus as the ultimate fulfillment of this text about Yahweh’s victory over his enemies.

On Christ’s ascent and descent, Thielman writes,

After his resurrection, Christ both descended into the regions of the dead and ascended to a position above all the heavens. As with Ps. 139:8, the reference to a descent below the earth and an ascent above the heavens is a way of emphasizing the reach of God to every corner of the universe (cf. Jer. 23:24; Jon. 2:2-9; Rom. 10:6-7). In this case, the reach is that of Christ, and its purpose is the defeat and captivity of all the malevolent powers of the universe (v. 8).<sup>526</sup>

Thus, Jesus is the ultimate triumph of God over all his enemies, both in heaven and earth. Jesus’ cross not only atoned for our sins, but was also the decisive blow against all the forces of evil arrayed against God and his divine reign. Jesus was victorious, and in the wake of his victory he scatters his gifts to his people, so that they may continue his work of building and maturing his people, bringing to fruition his victory against the gates of hell.

### **Jesus Christ: The Giver of Gifts**

The remainder of chapter 4 focuses on Jesus as the subject. It is his church he is building, and it is his gifts that enable the church to be built. Two things become readily apparent in verses 7–8. First, the gifts that Jesus gives are gifts of grace. John Vooyoys speaks to this:

Since Christ is the giver of the spiritual gifts and spiritual functions, there is no place for human pride, as if the gifts were self-generated or in some way earned. Similarly there is no place for envy since Christ has gifted all and that in various and different ways.<sup>527</sup>

Thomas Strong also elaborates:

The risen Christ gives this grace according to his own discretion and wisdom; therefore, as members fulfill the ministries which they have been given, they make possible and enhance the

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<sup>524</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 247.

<sup>525</sup> *Ibid.*, 267-68.

<sup>526</sup> *Ibid.*, 271-72.

<sup>527</sup> John Vooyoys, “No Clergy or Laity: All Christians Are Ministers in the Body of Christ, Ephesians 4:11–13,” *Direction* 20 (1991): 88.

unity of the church. Since these gifts are from Christ based upon his wisdom, each individual member of the community has an inherent responsibility to use these gifts.<sup>528</sup>

The matter is simply this: Those that Christ redeemed were “captives” led by Christ into freedom through his salvific acts. These captives were given grace upon grace in that they were gifted for service along with their freedom. As such, each member of the church must recognize that they were a) a captive set free and b) given a gift and responsibility to the body. It is the very nature of grace that requires obedience flowing out of love (Luke 7:47).

The question remains concerning the purpose for the gifts that Christ has given. It is clear that each member of the church is given a portion of grace manifest in some sort of gift (v. 7b). Verse 11 introduces specific person-gifts that depart slightly from the issue in verse seven. Here, Paul designates groups the Christ gave: the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. There is disagreement on whether these are all different groups, or whether some are the same. For example, the apostles and prophets could be apostle-prophets, and, likewise, the pastors and teachers could be pastor-teachers. There may be three, four, or five categories of people here. For our purposes, the question that has to be asked is this: What is the relationship between these specific “office gifts” and the general gifting of the earlier verse? This question has been the subject of many scholarly debates which will be here briefly outlined.

### **Are All or Only Some Ministers?**

The crux of the discussion of gifting is whether or not the tri-part formula of verse 12 refers only to the work of the gifted offices or if it has multiple subjects.

Office-gifts only: *And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, 1) to equip the saints, 2) for works of service, and 3) for the building up of the body of Christ.*

In this view, those who were gifted with the offices of the church are the ones responsible for the three-part work of ministry. The laymen exist to be ministered *to* and the offices exist to do the ministering. This is the oldest translation (cf. the Latin Vulgate and KJV), but does pose a few problems.<sup>529</sup> Firstly, the parallelism often cited in defense of this translation is broken by the use of different introductory prepositions for each phrase. In the first, the Greek *pros* is used, and in the following two phrases *eis* is used. The natural translation of this preposition chain is that the two *eis* phrases are the result or goal of the first *pros* phrase. Secondly, the context of the chapter is the work of the whole body of Christ in unity for its own growth. To limit the work of that growth to a select few in the gifted offices contradicts the message of the passage as a whole.

Lay-ministry: *And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers to equip the saints for 1) works of the ministry, and for 2) the building up of the body of Christ.*

This translation is the favored in most modern translations (ESV, NASB, NET, HCSB) and by most commentators. The purpose of the office gifts is to equip the saints for the work of the ministry and for church growth. The ones doing the “heavy lifting” are the laypeople each of which was given a special gift in accordance with verse 7. If this is the case, then the body at large cannot rely on the “equippers” to accomplish the task of the church. It is a job shared by the whole body and has as its goal the building up of the entire church.

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<sup>528</sup> Strong, “An Essential Unity,” 70.

<sup>529</sup> For a thorough defense of this translation and its implications, see T. David Gordon, “‘Equipping’ Ministry in Ephesians 4?” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37 (1994): 69–78.

Richard Strauss puts it this way:

But unity does not necessarily mean sameness. The parts in the body of Christ are not all identical to each other. The genius of this body is the wide variety that exists among its members and the great diversity of spiritual gifts they possess. This is unity in diversity. The Lord Jesus in His sovereign grace gives to every member the ability to make a unique and profitable contribution to the whole (v. 7). Furthermore He provides gifted leaders to help the other members develop their gifts, thus better equipping them for meaningful service (vv. 11-12). As they all use the abilities God has given them, the body of Christ is built up.<sup>530</sup>

The conclusion one may draw from this passage is this: Every member of the body of Christ is called to live in unity with all other members. The church is not an assembly of self-sufficient individuals convening to discuss their similar experiences. Instead, it is an organism that grows as each part performs the task allotted to it. These gifts are the supernatural grace of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit that enable individuals to contribute to the growth of the whole body. The ultimate goal of this growth is Christ-likeness not only in the individual participants but in the whole body itself. Additionally, the leaders of the church (i.e. the equippers) are responsible for developing each of the other members of the body to use their particular gift in the building up of the whole church. Christ-likeness comes not solely from the teaching, preaching, and ministry of the leaders—it is the result of the unified work of the whole body.

### **General Scholarly Comment**

We move now into some general observations from commentators on the whole of Ephesians 4:1-16 before concluding.

#### **Frank Thielman**

Paul opens chapters 4-6, the second major part of his letter, with a paragraph whose focus on unity links the two major parts together. In chapters 1-3 he has explained that his readers play an important part in God's plan to sum up everything in heaven and on earth in Christ (1:10). The unity of the church across ethnic lines (2:11-22) accomplishes two critical elements of this plan. First, it restores the original unity of God's creation: in Christ, Jews and Gentiles form "one new human being" (2:15). Second, it reveals the complex beauty of God's wisdom to the inimical spiritual powers of the universe (3:10).

This "one new human being," however, is not yet complete. When Paul changes the metaphor to that of a temple, he explains that his readers are part of a divine dwelling place that is currently under construction . . . . In the second half of the letter, Paul will show his readers in practical ways how they can live in unity with one another and therefore fulfill the role that God has assigned them in the universe. In 4:1-16 Paul introduces these practical admonitions.<sup>531</sup>

#### **Peter T. O'Brien**

At the conclusion of his petitionary prayer and doxology, which round out the first three chapters of Ephesians, Paul begins his lengthy paraclesis ("admonition") which extends from 4:1 to 6:20, in other words, almost to the end of the letter. The beginning of the ethical admonition is signaled by the clause beginning with *I urge you*, together with the introductory *therefore* (cf. 1 Thess. 4:1; Rom. 12:1), which follows a fairly fixed pattern, and here serves to mark a transition from the doctrinal material of chapters 1-3 to the practical instruction of chapters 4-6. . . .

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<sup>530</sup> Richard Strauss, "Like Christ: An Exposition of Ephesians 4:13," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 143 (1986): 261.

<sup>531</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 246.

In terms of structure of thought, the passage falls into two main parts. The first (vv. 1-6) begins with the exhortation to the readers to live worthily of their calling, an exhortation which is based on the first half of the letter and which soon focusses on the appeal to keep the unity of the Spirit (vv. 1-3). V. 1 is the “topic sentence” for the rest of the epistle, with the subsequent exhortations being an amplification of what is involved in walking worthily of their calling, as they do so in love and maintain the unity of the Spirit. This leads on to a sevenfold assertion of the fundamental realities of the faith, which provide the basis for the preceding admonitions. The essential issues of chapters 1-3, such as the readers’ calling, the prayer for love, the people of God as one body in the Spirit, and the Trinitarian basis of everything, are picked up in this short paragraph of vv. 1-6.

The beginning of the second half of the section (vv. 7-16) is clearly marked by *but to each one of us* (v. 7), as Paul introduces the note of diversity. This diversity is not at variance with the overarching unity, nor is it at the cost of unity. The purpose of the ascended Christ’s giving various gifts to the church, particularly the gifts of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers, is to build the whole body so as to enable it to attain maturity and unity (v. 13), a unity in which there is an integral role for the individual (v. 16). The various ministries are intended to equip the whole body for “ministry”, so that it might “grow up” into a healthy (mature) body, with Christ as the head and the whole of it drawing its life from him as it grows into his likeness (vv. 12-16).<sup>532</sup>

### **Andrew T. Lincoln**

This passage stands at the fore of the second, explicitly paraenetic half of the letter. As v 1 indicates, its ethical exhortation is based on the first half’s thanksgiving for and reminder of the readers’ calling, a calling which has at its heart membership of the one body of Christ, the Church. In this opening to the letter’s second half, through a mixture of direct exhortation and theological assertion, the writer appeals to his readers to play their part in enabling the Church to attain to the unity and maturity which rightly belong to it. The appeal stresses the part all members must play and the necessity of love if they are to function in harmony, but it singles out in particular the vital role of the ministers of the word in bringing about unity and maturity.<sup>533</sup>

4:1-16 consists of two main section—vv 1-6 and vv 7-16. The first section is a call to unity. . . . The second section of the passage, vv 7-16, indicates how the diversity of Christ’s giving of grace, and particularly his gifts of various ministers of the word, is meant to contribute to the unity and maturity of the Church. In developing this point, the writer cites and expounds Ps 68:18 in the light of what he wants to say about Christ and the Church . . . . To each individual who belongs to the Church Christ has given grace in various proportions. This notion of giving sets the direction for the rest of the passage, as first it is supported by Scripture, next the identity of the giver is underlined, and then the nature and purposes of the gifts are set out. Ps 68:18, which may well have had associations with Moses and the giving of the law, is now seen to speak of Christ’s triumphant ascent, which results not in receiving, as in the original, but in giving gifts.<sup>534</sup>

Although the Church is at the forefront of the writer’s thought in this passage, it should again be clear that ecclesiology has not swallowed up Christology. Christ remains the one Lord of the one Church (v 5), who from his exalted position of cosmic Lordship gives both grace to individuals and ministers of the word to the Church. The Church is his fullness (v 13) and his body (v 12) and as its head Christ is both its beginning and its end, the source and the goal of its growth (vv 15, 16). In this way we see again that for the writer to the Ephesians the Church could never be thought of simply as a new religious cult or social

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<sup>532</sup> O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 272-73.

<sup>533</sup> Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1990), 264.

<sup>534</sup> *Ibid.*, 264-65.

grouping, and that its real character could only be appreciated when it was contemplated from the perspective of its relationship to its Lord.<sup>535</sup>

### **Ernest Best**

[The author of Ephesians] sets out here to treat the unity of the church and the manner in which it is both built up and preserved through the activity of its office-bearers and members. 4.4-6 shows unity as already existing and perfect, and 4.7-16 shows how it is to be continued and matured.<sup>536</sup>

4.1-6 contains three brief sections: v. 1 reminds us again that Paul is a prisoner and employs one of his favourite phrases for introducing ethical instruction; vv. 2, 3 set out in a general way how readers are to respond if the unity of the church is to be preserved; vv. 4-6 pick up the theme of unity, providing a series of declarations in each of which unity is stressed through the use of the word “one” and God’s total government through the use of “all”.<sup>537</sup>

[In v. 7, the word *de*] signifies the beginning of a new section, a turn in the argument, but is not necessarily strongly adversative (cf 3.20; 5.3; 6.21) it provides a “transitional contrast” . . . . We move from the stress on unity (vv. 4-6) to diversity in vv. 7-10, but unity returns as the prevailing theme in vv. 11-16. . . . “One” was the term echoing through vv. 4-6; v. 7 continues it with “each one” (cf v. 16) and in this way links together unity and diversity. But the “one” of v. 7 also introduces a new turn of thought in setting out the diversity as deriving from the variety of gifts among the members of the church. This variety is not that of natural talent, educational attainment or cultural variation, but has its source in Christ the giver of the gifts of vv. 7, 8, 11. Members do not bring with them the gifts which [the author] has in mind when they enter the church, but on entering receive them. These gifts are not given for self-promotion, but for the building up the church in unity.<sup>538</sup>

### **Conclusion**

In Ephesians 4, Paul makes a shift from declaration to exhortation, from indicative to imperative. These ideas are not placed in air-tight compartments, fully partitioned off from one another. At the same time, Paul’s “Therefore” followed by “I urge” show us that he has taken up his first three chapters and now plans to put hands and feet on them. After a general exhortation to live worthily of this grace-centered, glory-filled calling that he has described in chapters 1-3, he turns to unity in the body of Christ. The idea of unity leads to the idea of diversity. In Christ there is a beautiful tension of the many within the one. With the Trinity as our ultimate model, we live in unity with each other in Christ, yet also bring our own distinctive gifts, which Christ himself has given to us for the good of his people. While the passage has several exegetical question marks looming over it, such as Paul’s curious use of Psalm 68:18 and what exactly he has in mind in describing the different giftings and/or offices of the church, his overall point can be made out relatively simply. We are one people with many differences, but, rather than hinder each other, these differences are to complement one another. They are meant to sharpen each other. Where we are weak, another is strong. If we live in humility and with grace, as Paul calls us to here, this is an enormous blessing. Our gifts and distinctions from each other are the means for maturity. Others fill up what we are lacking, and we fill up what others are lacking. As we share these things in love with one another, we all move together toward maturity. We *grow up* together in Christ.

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<sup>535</sup> Ibid., 268.

<sup>536</sup> Best, *Ephesians*, 356.

<sup>537</sup> Ibid., 357.

<sup>538</sup> Ibid., 375.

## *I AM NEW / Ephesians 4:17-24*

### **Introduction**

The book of Ephesians is full of apparent contradictions: the dead live, the outsider becomes family, division becomes unity. Now in Ephesians 4:17–24, the old becomes new. The transformation in these verses flows out of the work of Jesus that Paul has already explained (especially as we saw in Eph 2:1–10). Paul’s audience in Ephesus is left with a choice: do I live like I did in the past and continue in the “old self” or do I embrace what Jesus has taught me and put on my “new self”? For Paul there is no question: we put on the new self. In 4:17–24 he describes why and how.

### **Call to “Walk”**

Ephesians 4:17 begins the second of five sections that outline the believer’s “walk.” This is Paul’s way of describing a life-choice that is always before the believer concerning how he or she will live and act.<sup>539</sup> Each section of Ephesians that begins with the idea of “walking” illustrates this:

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to **walk** in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called (4:1).

Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer **walk** as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds (4:17).

And **walk** in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God (5:2).

For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. **Walk** as children of the light (5:8).

Look carefully then how you **walk**, not as unwise but as wise (5:15).

Having established the importance of unity for the Ephesian church (Eph 2:11–4:16), Paul now resumes the exhortation he began in Ephesians 4:1—a call to walk worthy of one’s calling. The term “walk” (Greek, *peripateō*) when used in the Septuagint refers almost exclusively to a “righteous walk” or the “life in the sight of God.”<sup>540</sup> Georg Bertram writes,

In all these references [in the Old Testament] there is a hint of the contrast between light and darkness in the ethical sense. . . . Since there is no orientation to a goal, the terms are particularly well adapted to indicate the sphere of life in which the life of the righteous or the ungodly is lived.<sup>541</sup>

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<sup>539</sup> Harold Hoehner, *Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic Publishing, 2002), 581.

<sup>540</sup> Georg Bertram, “*πατεω* and Compounds in the LXX,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967), 941.

<sup>541</sup> *Ibid.*, 943.

In the New Testament, Paul uses this term in a specific sense. For him, “walk” refers not simply to the physical act of walking around, but to the progress of life as it regards morality (or the lack thereof).<sup>542</sup> Below are a few examples of Paul’s use of “walk”.<sup>543</sup>

We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. (Rom. 6:4)

In order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. (Rom. 8:4)

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. (Gal. 5:16)

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience. (Eph. 2:1–2)

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (Eph. 2:10)

Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. (Phil. 3:17–18)

So as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. (Col. 1:10)

Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him. (Col 2:6)

For you know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory. (1 Thess. 2:11–12)

Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more. (1Thess. 4:1)

In each of these situations, Paul’s primary concern is with the lifestyle of the believers to whom he is speaking. Ephesians is no different. Paul has already hinted at the theme of “walking” earlier in Ephesians: the believer is no longer dead and walking in sin (2:1); and he is saved by grace through faith to walk in good works (2:10). It is this transformation (death to life) that Paul is most concerned with in 4:17–24. His goal is to explain just what it means to walk in “newness of life” as opposed to the old ways.

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<sup>542</sup> Heinrich Seesemann, “πατεω and Compounds in the NT,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967), 944–45.

<sup>543</sup> The complete list is as follows: Rom. 6:4; 8:4; 13:13; 14:15; 1 Cor. 3:3; 7:17; 2 Cor. 4:2; 5:7; 10:2–3; 12:18; Gal. 5:16; Eph. 2:2, 10; 4:1, 17; 5:2, 8, 15; Phil. 3:17–18; Col. 1:10; 2:6; 3:7; 4:5; 1 Thess. 2:12; 4:1, 12; 2 Thess. 3:6, 11.

### **Ethnic Transformation**

As a brief side note, it's important to note here that Paul's call to the Gentiles to no longer walk as Gentiles is important. He is not calling the Gentiles to live like Jews—Paul spends quite a bit of time in his other letters combating those who would do just that (e.g., see Gal. 2:11–21). Instead, Paul calls both Jews and Gentiles into a new kind of ethnicity—an identity in Christ.<sup>544</sup> The Jew no longer finds his identity in his election as an ethnic Jew distinguished from all other nations. He finds his identity in Jesus Christ. In the same way, the Gentile is not to find his identity in Gentile or pagan culture—he shares the same new identity in Christ.<sup>545</sup> Paul's message of unity is a *transformation* of identity (Eph 2:11–22). This is not the squashing together of a bunch of ethnicities. Instead, we now participate in an identity that *transcends* all ethnic or cultural loyalties. It is a demotion of any kind of ethnic loyalty to a place that comes second to our new “ethnicity” as a Christ-follower.<sup>546</sup>

The temptation the Gentiles faced when they embraced a Gospel that did not require them to become Jews was to remain in their old lives as Gentiles. Paul's exhortation in Ephesians 4:17–24 is that this kind of thinking is simply wrong. The Gospel is a call to a transformation of identity, and this new identity—this “new ethnicity”—is what our passage is talking about. And it is characterized by a purposeful walk of holiness.

### **The Futility of the “Old Life”**

Ephesians 4:17–19 explains the “old ways” of Gentile behavior. Paul exhorts the Ephesians to diligently fight in order to avoid falling back into this old pattern of life. Because they are now Christ-followers, God demands a change—a change in “walk.” The old ways in which they walked are primarily characterized by Paul's phrase “futility of the mind.” In chapter 2, Paul spoke of the Gentile's past as walking dead in sin (Eph. 2:1). Here, the idea of futility of the mind is very similar. The word “futility” (Greek, *mataiotēti*) is the same word used in the LXX translation of Ecclesiastes. The constant refrain of Ecclesiastes is that all is “vanity” or worthless. What may seem to have value ultimately proves to be worthless, empty and vain. This is the sense of the word as Paul uses it here in Ephesians. Hoehner concludes that the Gentiles are unable to achieve the goal of understanding God's revelation. The Gentiles' minds may have the goal of understanding and knowing God, but they have become darkened and futile in the attempt.<sup>547</sup> Just as the dead man is incapable of life in chapter 2, so the Gentiles' old life is incapable of relating to God. As Thielman puts it, “The worshipful acknowledgment of the one God is foundational to all useful knowledge. Without this foundation, Gentile knowledge about how to live one's life is deeply flawed.”<sup>548</sup>

This same idea appears in the early chapters of Romans, where Paul argues extensively for the complete depravity of humanity. The similarities between the description of the Gentiles' state in Romans 1 and that in Ephesians 4 are striking:

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<sup>544</sup> Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1990), 277.

<sup>545</sup> On the conflict within the church over ethnic identity versus identity in Christ, see Ernest Best, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 417.

<sup>546</sup> Cf. Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 296.

<sup>547</sup> Hoehner, 584. See also Best, 418–19.

<sup>548</sup> Thielman, 297.

### Romans 1:21–24

For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became **futile in their thinking**,

and their foolish **hearts were darkened**.

Claiming to be wise, **they became fools**, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

Therefore God **gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity**, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves.

### Ephesians 4:17–19

Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the **futility of their minds**.

They are **darkened in their understanding**,

alienated from the life of God because of **the ignorance that is in them**, due to their hardness of heart.

They have become callous and have **given themselves up to sensuality**, greedy to practice **every kind of impurity**.

Thus, the futility of the mind described in Ephesians 4 is connected to the same depravity Paul describes in Romans 1.<sup>549</sup> It is voluntary forsaking God and his standards for the worship of idols and self-gratification. The Gentiles still wanted to gain what God offers—his gifts—but only on their own terms, through their own mediums of idolatry, perverse sensuality, and self-exaltation.

This is the “futility of the mind.” In order to live the new life, the Ephesians were to stop walking in the empty ways listed above and start walking in holiness. This is a daily, intentional decision. Hoehner summarizes verses 17–19: “The hardness of their hearts toward God caused their ignorance. Their ignorance concerning God and his will caused them to be alienated from the life of God. Their alienation caused their minds to be darkened, and their darkened minds caused them to walk in the futility of mind.”<sup>550</sup> Paul’s point to the Ephesians is to stop hardening their heart, and to start living in holiness. In verse 19, Paul only briefly develops the ways that Gentiles walk in hardness of heart: “They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.” But this list certainly evokes the much longer list of sin in Romans 1:21-32:

For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God’s decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

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<sup>549</sup> Hoehner, 584.

<sup>550</sup> Hoener, 588–89.

The point of each section, whether long or short, is that the Gentiles willfully engage in the basest of sins. They make the conscious decision to forsake the ways of God for the ways of darkest sin, and as such alienate themselves from God's life (Eph 4:18).

### **Additional Scholarly Input on the "Old Life"**

#### ***Don Stewart***

"Paul suggested only one explanation for a continued carnal lifestyle. To live like the world while claiming to be 'in Christ' constituted an admission that the individual either had not received Christ or had not listened very carefully to what Christ taught. Jesus has vested each genuine believer with himself, according to Paul. Thus each believer has been vested with 'the truth.' The redeemed have been claimed by the truth, to the extent that each has adopted a manner of life (*anastrophēn*, conversation) uniquely different from that of the world.<sup>7</sup> This manner of life is the inevitable outgrowth of the new nature which indwells every believer."<sup>551</sup>

#### ***Eugene Klug***

"This describes the frame of mind of the man who has allowed full play to his desires and who thinks that these lusts are the most important thing in the world and who looks on others as persons to be exploited for his own ends and gratification. This is quite different from 'the Freudian notion that man sickens, not from sin but from excessive conscientiousness.' We are only now coming again to see how correct the Pauline view of man is and how inadequate, not to say injurious, those views on sin are which consider sin merely a weakness in man, or a necessary stage in man's passing from unconscious to conscious moral freedom, or some vestigial ignorance."<sup>552</sup>

#### ***James Hyde***

"Because this form of alienation [from God] is caused by conditions within human control, people are therefore held accountable. Paul's words in Romans 1:18 say that those who are wedded to their lusts and who demonstrate no restraint in excessive life styles are consumed by their addictions. Such ignorance and hardness of heart result in evil behavior. The writer of Ephesians exhorts those who are alienated to renew their minds and change their conduct. 'In Christ,' those who are far off are brought near to God (Ephesians 2:13). Christ also breaks down the partitions that divide us from one another (Ephesians 2:14). He reconciled the alienation we experience because of our ignorance and hard-heartedness."<sup>553</sup>

### **The Hope of the New Life**

After Paul warns the Ephesians against walking in their old, Gentile ways, he turns to discussing the *new* life in which they should walk. He does not get into specifics of behavior right away, however. Instead, he first engages the idea of identity—the transformation of the Ephesians from "Gentile" to "Christian" is the foundation for their new life. Thus, verses 20–24 are Paul's instructions concerning the new identity of the Ephesian believers.

Before examining these instructions, though, we need to make one final note about the importance of "walking." Just as Paul argued forcefully in verses 17–19 for the complete depravity of the previous lives of the Gentiles, Paul will now argue just as strongly for the absolute necessity of living a transformed life. However, Paul makes it clear that this transformed life involves a very real responsibility for the believer.

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<sup>551</sup> Don H. Stewart, "The New Community in the Purpose of God (Eph 4:17-5:21)," *Theological Educator* 54 (1996): 78.

<sup>552</sup> Eugene F. A. Klug, "Will of God in the Life of a Christian," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 33 (1962): 457.

<sup>553</sup> James A. Hyde, "Ephesians 4:17-24," *Review & Expositor* 89 (1992): 405.

The believer must put off the old self (v. 22) and, with it, all the evil practices mentioned in verses 17–19. It is impossible for a believer, called by God to a life of holiness in the new identity in Christ, to claim that new identity while still living a life of blatant sin. Paul makes this explicit later in chapter 5: “For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.”<sup>554</sup> Paul’s point is simply, if we have our identity in Christ, we are new—we need to live out our identity in Christ, which means new actions.

Paul’s first admonition to the Ephesians is that the old, Gentile way of living is not the way that they learned Christ. This seems a little odd—how does somebody “learn Christ”? What Paul is doing here is using the phrase in much the same way the Jews of his day spoke of Torah. The Jews were dedicated to continually studying and learning Torah. For Paul, the believer was dedicated to continually studying and learning *Jesus*.<sup>555</sup> Lincoln puts it this way: “Since Christians believed that Christ was a living person whose presence was mediated by the proclamation and teaching about him, learning Christ involved not only learning about, but also being shaped by, the risen Christ who was the source of a new way of life as well as of a new relationship with God.”<sup>556</sup> Therefore, the best way to know how to live the “new life” is to look to Jesus who modeled that same life in perfection. Hoehner goes further and says that the believer does not simply learn *about* Jesus but must learn to know Jesus in a personal, relational way.<sup>557</sup>

The continued statement “assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus,” (v. 21) continues the idea of learning Jesus. But this has a slightly different perspective—one of receiving instruction from those who had been with Jesus. Paul has in mind the time he spent relating the gospel of Jesus’ life and death to the Ephesians some six years earlier.<sup>558</sup> So not only is knowing Jesus personally absolutely critical for living the new life, learning and absorbing his life and teaching (and learning from others who have done this) is equally important.

As Paul continues, he makes the odd statement “as the truth is in Jesus” (v. 21b). The exact meaning is debated, but the point is clear. Jesus is the embodiment of truth—the very thing that the Ephesians were blinded to when they lived as Gentiles in darkness. Being in Christ means having a new identity, but it also means having complete access to all God’s revelation.<sup>559</sup>

The last verses of our discussion admonish the believer to put off the old self that was characterized by the Gentile way of living from verses 17–19, and to put on the new way of living as taught in the person and life of Jesus Christ. The “putting off” of the old nature should be understood as a complete disavowal of the past ways of living. The sin and corruption that characterized the Ephesians before they became believers should not be allowed to creep up in their lives. This is not to say we never have to fight against sin, or that we will never be tempted as we put on the new self. What it does mean, though, is that we

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<sup>554</sup> Eph. 5:5.

<sup>555</sup> Interestingly, the personal noun “Jesus” as the object of “learn” is not that unprecedented in light of the Jewish understanding of Torah. For the Jews, Torah itself was considered a viable, living thing. When gathered together to meet for synagogue prayer, it was necessary that ten men be present to make the gathering official. Should those men lack, and there be only nine present, the rabbi could count the Torah scroll as the divine presence of God making up the full ten men required.

<sup>556</sup> Lincoln, 280.

<sup>557</sup> Hoehner, 594.

<sup>558</sup> *Ibid.*, 595.

<sup>559</sup> Hoehner, 597. See also Lincoln, 281, and Thielman, 302.

should never go back to the intentional, self-gratifying, and self-indulgent ways of living that were so contrary to God's character that they brought death. Lincoln describes this well:

Whereas both Rom 6:6 and Col 3:9 assert that the definitive break with the old person has been made in the past, Ephesians extends the tension between the indicative and the imperative to the notion of putting off the old person. Putting off the old person has already taken place through baptism, which transferred believers to the new order. This injunction is not an exhortation to believers to repeat that event but to continue to live out its significance by giving up on that old person that they no longer are.<sup>560</sup>

So the conclusion of Paul's exhortation in living the new life is simply this: live the new life. The Ephesians knew what was expected of them—they had been taught of Jesus' life and character, and they had a relationship with him. This was to impact how they lived, borne out in righteousness and holiness.

In verse 24, Paul likens the new self to what God originally intended in the Garden of Eden. By using the language "created after the likeness of God," Paul evokes not only the idea of complete re-creation but moves on to explain just what that likeness should portray. The new self has been made like God. So much like God that the Ephesian believers should show forth God's righteousness and holiness. The new creation means new behavior—a theme that by now sounded like a broken record to the Ephesian readers. Being righteous like God meant acting rightly toward fellow humanity, just as the second of the Great Commandments tells us to love our neighbor. Additionally, the new creation expresses God's holiness which is nothing less than right standing toward God—the first of the Great Commandments. If this is what Jesus taught (cf. Matt. 22:36–40), then it is the truth (Eph. 4:21) that is in Jesus.

The following are some other places where believers are called to holiness and righteousness:

To show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. (Luke 1:72–75)

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. (Rom. 12:1)

Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God. (2 Cor. 7:1)

Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will. (Eph. 1:4–5)

And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. (1 Thess. 3:12)

For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. (1 Thess. 4:7)

For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. (Heb. 12:10)

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<sup>560</sup> Lincoln, 285.

Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness. (2 Peter 3:11)

Perhaps the best summary of everything that Paul strove to teach in Ephesians 4:17–24 is Peter’s statement in his first letter: “As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy’” (1 Peter 1:14–16).

Frank Thielman concludes:

Paul says that the lives of his readers should reflect the dramatic transformation that has taken place in them at their conversion. They should no longer live in a way that speaks of the confusion, demonic control, and despair that characterize those who are estranged from the life God provides. They should instead live in ways that show their thinking is continually being renewed spiritually and that reveal their re-creation in the image of a God who is righteous and holy.<sup>561</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The promise of the new self is one of great hope. The renewal goes beyond the promise of eternal life—there are effects in the present. There is the hope of freedom from sin. There is hope for newness of life, which is to see life through the lens of God’s truth. There is hope that comes from relationship with God’s dear son. The new self carries with it the hope of complete renewal in eternity.

However, each and every believer must strive to live out this newness of life, to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Eph 2:12)—forsaking the old self with its sins and depravity. It is both the expectation set upon the obedient child of God and the gift of the Father made possible by the Holy Spirit. To be “new” is to live as Jesus lived.

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<sup>561</sup> Thielman, 307.

## *I AM FORGIVEN / Ephesians 4 : 25 - 32*

### **Introduction**

Paul tells the Ephesians in 4:17 that they must “no longer walk as the Gentiles do,” because they are “alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart” (4:18). Instead, they are to “put off” their “old self,” which “belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires,” and, instead, they are “to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (4:22-24). In 4:25-32, then, Paul lists specific ways in which the new self is lived out in reality. The Ephesians must be truthful, not false, with one another (v. 25). They must not allow anger to rule in their hearts (vv. 26-27). They must do honest work (v. 28) and use their speech for good, not evil (v. 31).

Then, in 4:32, Paul writes, “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.” While this verse can be viewed as another in his list of “new self” qualities—and it certainly is that—we can also see it as a principle that undergirds all of the things he has just said in the previous verses. Much like the idea, “Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law” (Rom 13:10), the fact that we are forgiven in Christ can lead us to a kind, tenderhearted, and merciful way of life that helps to keep us from things listed in vv. 25-31, such as anger, falsehood, thievery, and evil speech toward one another. All this comes very close to Paul’s words in Colossian 3:12-14 as well:

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, **forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.** And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

Thus, forgiveness is fundamental to our faith and identity in Christ. It provides the entire foundation for the “new self.” Without forgiveness, believers would still be dead in their trespasses and sins (2:1), rightly accused by and in bondage to the “prince of the power of the air” (2:2). In what follows, we are interested in the broader concept of forgiveness in Scripture, but especially how Paul understands it and uses it here in Ephesians 4.

### **Forgiveness in the OT and Gospels**

In Ephesians 4:32, the verb Paul uses for “forgive” is *charizomai*, which is related to *charis*, “grace.” But outside of Paul the more common word for it is *aphiēmi*, which can also mean “allow, permit” or “let go.” The only time Paul uses this word for “forgive” is in Rom 4:7, where he is quoting Psa 32:1 (he does use the noun form, *aphesis*, “forgiveness” twice, in Eph 1:7 and Col 1:14). However, this is the word for it throughout the Greek OT (Septuagint) and the Gospels.

Paul Ellingworth explains:

The Greek verb *aphiēmi* (‘forgive’), together with its cognate noun *aphesis*, is the most frequently used term for forgiveness in the Gospels. The verb has a wide range of meanings, including those of letting people go or dismissing them (e.g., Mk 4:36), divorcing a wife (1 Cor 7:11-13), or

leaving a person (Lk 10:30) or a place (Jn 4:3). Forgiveness can also be expressed as remitting (*apolyō*), pardoning (*charizomai*) or forgiving (*aphiēmi*) a debt.<sup>562</sup>

In the OT, although there are examples of one human being forgiving another (Gen 50:17; Ex 10:17; 1 Sam 15:25; 25:28; Prov 17:9), the majority of references to forgiveness of sins have God as subject. It belongs to his nature that he is a “a God forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin” (Ex 34:7; cf. Num 14:18-20; Neh 9:17; Ps 130:4; Mic 7:18; Dan 9:9). The OT thus contains many prayers for God’s forgiveness both of individuals (e.g., 2 Kings 5:18; Ps 25:11) and especially of his people Israel (e.g., 1 Kings 8:30-50; 2 Chron 6:21-39; Ps 79:9). In the psalms the distinction between prayers for individual and corporate forgiveness cannot be drawn sharply, since what were originally prayers of individuals came to be used in corporate worship.

Yet the OT never represents forgiveness as automatic: It flows from the sovereign freedom of the living God. Thus, although God’s forgiveness may be integrated into legal provisions and so be expected in certain situations, especially where sacrifice is involved (Lev 4:20-35; Num 15:25-28), God may on occasions refuse to forgive [e.g., Ex 23:21; Josh 24:19; Lam 3:42].

In the OT, forgiveness is connected strongly to sacrifice, which was present both before and during the era of the law. Of course, all the mercy shown in the OT pointed to the more perfect sacrifice of Christ that was to come. While in one sense God offered real forgiveness to Israel, in another sense sin was “passed over” (Rom 3:25) until the final sacrifice for them was to come. All that to say, forgiveness is never “free” in an ultimate sense. It has to be paid for. Barry Smith explains:

God is depicted in the Old Testament as merciful. He is described as “slow to anger” and “abounding in love/mercy,” “compassionate and gracious” (Exod. 34:6; Num. 14:18; Neh. 9:17; Pss. 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Joel 2:13; John 4:2). God is lenient toward his people, not treating them as their sin deserves (Ezra 9:13-15; Pss. 78:35-38; 103:8-10), and willing to forgive wickedness, rebellion, and sin (Exod. 34:7; Num. 14:18).<sup>563</sup>

There is, however, a tension in the character of God as depicted in the Old Testament, because juxtaposed to the characterization of God as merciful is the warning that God as righteous will not forgive sin or at least not leave sin unpunished (Exod. 34:7; Num. 14:18; Nahum 1:3).<sup>564</sup>

The tension between God as merciful and God as righteous manifesting itself on both national individual levels was to be resolved by God at the time of Israel’s eschatological renewal. . . . The tension between God’s dealings with human beings in terms of his mercy and righteousness finds resolution in the New Testament. That the eschatological promise of forgiveness and spiritual transformation have become realities through the appearance, death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus Christ is assumed throughout the New Testament. This eschatological resolution pertains to the nation, individuals within the nation, and individual Gentiles.<sup>565</sup>

In the era of redemption in which we live, we are blessed beyond measure to have the full revelation of how justice has been done, how God’s demand for holiness has been satisfied while at the same time sinners are freely forgiven. We live in a time at which both prophets and angels stand in awe (1 Pet

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<sup>562</sup> Paul Ellingworth, “Forgiveness of Sins,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1992), 241.

<sup>563</sup> Barry D. Smith, “Forgiveness,” in *Baker Theological Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 267.

<sup>564</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>565</sup> *Ibid.*, 269.

1:10-12). Thus, forgiveness is now able to flow freely from God toward us, and from us toward others. Which is what we see in Paul.

### **Forgiveness in Paul**

As mentioned above, the word Paul uses most often for “forgive,” including here in Ephesians 4:32, is *charizomai*. This verbal form is related to the word *charis*, which is Paul’s word for “grace” and can also mean, “favor,” “goodwill,” “graciousness,” and “thanks,” among others.<sup>566</sup> The general idea has to do with favor that has been shown. The verb *charizomai* can mean “give freely as a favor” (e.g., Rom 8:32; 1 Cor 2:12) and speak of cancelling a debt (Luke 7:42-43), but is also used in Paul in the sense of “to show oneself gracious by forgiving wrongdoing, *forgive, pardon*” (besides Eph 4:32, see also 2 Cor 2:10; Col 2:13; 3:13).<sup>567</sup>

Leon Morris covers the topic well:

#### *Vocabulary of Forgiveness*

Paul uses the verb *aphiēmi*, the normal NT verb for ‘to forgive,’ only five times (in the NT canon it occurs 142 times), and four of those do not refer to forgiveness (they have meanings like ‘leave’). He uses the corresponding noun *aphesis* twice only out of its seventeen occurrences in the NT. Another verb, *charizomai* (which is connected with *charis*, “grace,” and which means to ‘give freely or graciously as a favor’ or ‘remit, forgive, pardon,’ BAGD) appeals to him more, for he uses it sixteen times, of which ten have the meaning ‘forgive.’ We should also notice his use of *paresis* (Rom 3:25), which has the meaning of ‘passing over’ and signifies at least that the sins to which it refers were not punished. We could say the same about *epikalyptō*, ‘to cover,’ which Paul uses in a quotation from the LXX (Rom 4:7).<sup>568</sup>

#### *Forgiveness as Grace*

Paul uses the verb *charizomai* in the sense of ‘forgive’ mostly to bring out the truth that Christians ought to be forgiving people. Perhaps . . . Paul chose *charizomai* because of its resonance with *charis*, ‘grace,’ and its personal reference to people rather than to sins. Thus he writes to the Corinthians about someone they had disciplined and says the man has been punished enough . . . . Now, he goes on, ‘you should rather forgive [*charisasthai*] and comfort him’ (2 Cor 2:6-7). As his argument proceeds Paul emphasizes the importance of forgiveness as part of the Christian life. . . . What is abundantly plain is that Paul sees it as very important that both he and the Corinthians should forgive the offender. It is the way of the world to nurture grudges against those they think have wronged them. It is the way of those forgiven by Christ to forgive freely the wrongs people do to them.<sup>569</sup>

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<sup>566</sup> Walter Bauer, Frederick William Danker, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilber Gingrich, eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. [BDAG] (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1079-80.

<sup>567</sup> *Ibid.*, 1078.

<sup>568</sup> Leon Morris, “Forgiveness,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1993), 311-12.

<sup>569</sup> *Ibid.*, 312.

Also Peter O'Brien:

The word *charizomai*, “which can mean to ‘give freely or graciously as a favor’, has the specific nuance here of ‘forgiving’. It is not the common word for remission or forgiveness (which is [*aphiēmi*]), but one of rich content which emphasizes the gracious nature of the pardon (cf. Jesus’ parable of the two debtors, Luke 7:42). The aspect which the present tense [as contrasted with the aorist] may suggest is that this forgiveness is to be unceasing, even unwearying (cf. Matt. 18:22).”<sup>570</sup>

### **Vertical and Horizontal Forgiveness**

One important thing that Ephesians 4:32 teaches us is that vertical forgiveness provides the ground and motivation for horizontal forgiveness. This first requires us to understand how far separated we are from God because of our sin. We have committed “cosmic treason” against God.<sup>571</sup> As Paul writes, “For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened” (Rom 1:21). We were dead in trespasses and sins and God rescued us, as we already saw so clearly in Ephesians 2:1-10. Once this truth permeates our soul, once we realize how greatly we are loved in spite of how little we care about God’s good designs for us, it becomes much easier to show this same kind of mercy toward others who have done hurtful and sinful things to us.

### **Parable of the Unforgiving Servant**

Perhaps the most striking picture of this in Scripture is the Parable of Unforgiving Servant that Jesus tells in Matthew 18:23-35:

Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, ‘Pay what you owe.’ So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. Then his master summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’ And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.

This parable shows the frightening reality of what happens when we do not recognize forgiveness and grace as the root of our life and our relationships with others.

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<sup>570</sup> Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 351 n. 337.

<sup>571</sup> Justin S. Holcomb and Lindsey A. Holcomb, *Rid of My Disgrace: Hope and Healing for the Victims of Sexual Assault* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 133.

R. T. France writes,

The story is about a king and his slaves in order to explain how the kingship of God operates (v. 23). God has full sovereignty over those who as members of the disciple community belong to his kingship (note the repetition four times of the term ‘fellow slave’), but he chooses not to enforce his authority harshly but rather with unimaginable generosity because his “heart goes out” to them. Compared to the immeasurable extent of the divine grace which they have experienced . . . any generosity his people may be called upon to exercise in forgiving their fellow disciples is insignificant. The parable is in the educational tradition of Nathan’s parable of the ewe lamb (2 Sam 12:1-7); the hearer reacts (along with the fellow slaves in the story) with fury to the insensitivity and arrogance of the slave who could not see the inconsistency of his own behavior, and thoroughly approves of the gruesome punishment he receives in v. 34, but then the punch line in v. 35 turns the story back on the hearer: “You are the man!” The application, in keeping with the tenor of Peter’s question [in 18:21], is to the individual disciple (“every one of you”); none are exempt from the demand to reflect the divine mercy.<sup>572</sup>

The parable assumes that disciples are, by definition, forgiven people. It makes unmistakably clear that the initiative is with God: it is because he has first forgiven that we can be expected, and indeed enabled, to forgive. But the forgiveness we have already received may be forfeited by our failure to forgive in our turn. It was freely given, but it must not be presumed on.<sup>573</sup>

Morris’ comments on Ephesians 4:32 reflect the point of the parable:

Christians have been forgiven so much that it ill becomes them to hold grudges against those they fancy have wronged them. Paul has the same thought in Ephesians, ‘forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you’ (Eph 4:32). This time he points out the relevance of the work of Christ to the process of forgiveness. Forgiveness in Christ means forgiveness because of all that Christ is and does. Christ died for the forgiveness of his people; how can they then withhold forgiveness for the petty wrongs done to them?<sup>574</sup>

### **A Sinful Woman Forgiven**

There is a story in Luke 7 that has a similar theme. In it, a woman who was considered a “sinner” wets Jesus’ feet with her tears, wipes them with her hair, and anoints them with ointment (7:28). The Pharisee in whose house they were is inwardly repulsed by the display. Jesus sees his heart and says the following:

“A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?” Simon answered, “The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt.” And he said to him, “You have judged rightly. . . . Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven-- for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.” (Luke 7:41-43, 47)

Taken together, the point of both this account and the one in Matthew is that those who have been forgiven a great debt and received complete, unmerited mercy and grace, should be the ones who are naturally loving and merciful toward others.

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<sup>572</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 703.

<sup>573</sup> Ibid.

<sup>574</sup> Morris, “Forgiveness,” 312.

### **Justin and Lindsey Holcomb in *Rid of My Disgrace***

In their book, *Rid of My Disgrace: Hope and Healing for the Victims of Sexual Assault*, Justin and Lindsey Holcomb deal with the topic in detail. They write the following:

Forgiveness means not taking vengeance into our own hands toward those who have sinned against us. Godly anger allows the offense to be seen as an issue between the offender and God. When someone sinned against you, they also sinned against God. Vengeance belongs to God, and he will repay.

Forgiveness means more than not being vengeful, it also means loving your enemies, and anyone who sins against you acts like your enemy: “But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.” To forgive is to love despite being sinned against. Miroslav Volf anchors forgiveness in love: God’s love toward us, and then our love for others.

We see this reflected in Ephesians 4:32–5:2, which calls us to extend forgiveness and love to others because that is what we receive from God: “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”

Receiving forgiveness and love from God through Christ is essential to understanding forgiveness. Because God forgave you for your sins, you are now free to forgive others. Jesus received God’s anger and punishment so those guilty of cosmic treason would be forgiven. The gospel forgives and changes angry people into loving and forgiving people who are characterized by love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Grace is the miracle that causes change. It creates loving people who are empowered by the Spirit to do good in this world of hostility and evil. As sinners who have received mercy instead of wrath, we have the otherwise inexplicable capability simultaneously to hate wrong and to give love to those who do wrong. It is a miracle for a sinner to forgive another sinner. But this miracle is based on the prior miracle of God freely offering his Son to bear the wrath deserved by the guilty.<sup>575</sup>

### **Scholarly Commentary**

Below is some commentary on both the section of Ephesians 4:25-32 on the whole, as well as the idea of forgiveness in 4:32.

#### **Harold Hoehner**

To review, Paul has exhorted the Ephesians not to walk as the Gentiles do. He described the lifestyle of the Gentiles as walking in the futility of the mind resulting from darkened minds and alienation from the life of God. Consequently, they have lost all moral sensitivity and have given themselves over to impurity based on selfishness (vv. 17-19). He then explained that they were taught they had put off the old person and had put on the new person (vv. 20-24). Now he is going to give practical applications of how the new person in Christ lives day to day (vv. 25-32). The structure of 4:17-32 is as follows: (1) description of lifestyle of the old person (4:17-19); (2) statement regarding having put off the old person and having put on the new person (4:20-24); and (3) exhortation on living a new lifestyle in accordance with being a new person (4:25-32). Some conclude these exhortations at 5:2 while others would conclude them at 4:32. As

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<sup>575</sup> Holcomb, *Rid of My Disgrace*, 133.

mentioned above, 5:1 is the most logical place to begin a new section for this conforms to the pattern in which the major divisions in these three chapters revolve around the “walk” [*peripateō*] in 4:1, 17; 5:2, 8, 15 in conjunction with the inferential conjunction “therefore” [*oun*] in 5:1.<sup>576</sup>

This new section has five exhortations with regard to the believers’ conduct. Each of these exhortations has three parts: (1) a negative command, (2) a positive command, and (3) the reason for the positive command. All the exhortations have the three parts in the same order except the second one which reverses the first two parts.<sup>577</sup>

### **Andrew T. Lincoln**

In Jewish and early Christian paraenesis the motivation for humans being compassionate and forgiving could be in order that God might forgive them [e.g., Matt 6:14] or because God had forgiven them [e.g., 1 John 4:11]. Here the motivating clause takes the latter form. Such statements introduced by [*kathōs kai*, “just as”] have been called “the conformity pattern” and function within exhortations to show Christ’s or God’s saving activity as prototypical for believers’ conduct . . . Here, as in later instances in 5:2, 25, 29, [*kathōs*] has both comparative and causal force. What God has done in Christ for believers, which has been the theme of the first half of the letter, now provides both the norm and the grounds for believers’ own behavior. God’s forgiveness of them becomes the paradigm for their mutual forgiveness. Whereas in the similar statement of Col 3:13 it is [*ho kurios*, “the Lord”] who has forgiven the readers, and the Lord is almost certainly Christ, here in Eph 4:32 it is God in Christ who has brought about the forgiveness that must now be worked out in believers’ relationships.<sup>578</sup>

With the exhortation of 5:1 to be imitators of God and with the motivations supplied in 4:32 and 5:2, the last part of the section shows that even in his ethical instruction the writer has not lost his theological and Christological perspectives. Indeed, if the command to love can be said to sum up the other injunctions, then the notion of the imitation of God which accompanies it can also stand as an encapsulation of the theocentric focus of the writer’s ethical thinking. As elsewhere in the letter the theological and the Christological go hand in hand, for the God of whom the writer speaks is the God who has acted to forgive humanity in and through the love of Christ whose sacrifice was supremely pleasing to him. In this way, for believers, imitation of God also turns out to be imitation of Christ in his sacrificial love.<sup>579</sup>

### **Frank Thielman**

[On Ephesians 4:25-5:2]: Paul now begins to give practical advice on how his readers can live out the new existence he has just described in 4:20-24. The “therefore” with which the section begins probably connects these specific admonitions not only to the whole concept of taking off the old human being and putting on the new human being, but especially to the idea articulated in 4:24 that the newly donned human being is created in the image of God. The admonitions in 4:25-5:2, then, are practical illustrations of what it means to live as a new creature, made in God’s image, and no longer under the sway of the old human being.<sup>580</sup>

The four admonitions in 4:25, 28, 29, and 31-32 show an unmistakable pattern: an admonition not to do something (lie, steal, use foul language, and angrily abuse people) is followed by a matching positive admonition to do something (tell the truth, work hard for what is good, use edifying speech, and forgive) and then a motivating reason for following the admonition (we are members of each other, to help the

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<sup>576</sup> Harold Hoehner, *Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic Publishing, 2002), 614.

<sup>577</sup> Ibid.

<sup>578</sup> Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1990), 310.

<sup>579</sup> Ibid., 315.

<sup>580</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 309.

needy, to give grace to the hearer, because Christ forgave others). The admonition in 4:26-27, however, follows the pattern only in rough terms. . . . The combination of order and disorder in this section point both to the extemporary nature of the discourse and to its exemplary function. These admonitions were composed on the spot and give examples of what it means to live as a new human being who reflects the image of its Creator and imitates the quality of his love.<sup>581</sup>

[On forgiveness in 4:25]: His readers are to forgive [*charizomai*] each other just as God in Christ has forgiven [*charizomai*] all believers. When Paul spoke of God's forgiveness of transgressions through the death of Christ in 1:7, he used the noun [*aphesis*]. His use of [*charizomai*] here may have been intentionally designed to recall the language of God's lavish grace [*charis*] in Christ in 2:5, 7, and 8 (cf. 4:29).<sup>582</sup>

### **Peter T. O'Brien**

Finally, they are to forgive each other. The motivation for this response is of the highest order: "just as God in Christ forgave you". This statement is part of the New Testament's "conformity" pattern, in which God or Christ's saving activity, especially Christ's sacrifice on the cross, is set forth as a paradigm of the lifestyle to which believers are to "conform". The introductory "just as also" has both comparative and causal force (cf. 5:2, 25, 29): what God has done 'in Christ' for believers, which has been so fully set forth in chapters 1-3, provides both the paradigm of and the grounds for their behaviour. Here God's forgiveness of them is the model of their forgiveness of one another. In Colossians 3:13 the nuance is slightly different ("because the Lord [i.e., Christ] has forgiven you, so should you also forgive one another"), but the fundamental point is the same. They are to forgive each other, and that forgiveness is to be worked out in their ongoing relationships.<sup>583</sup>

### **Conclusion**

In Ephesians 4:25-32, Paul lists several things that are characteristic of those who are new creations in Christ. His final admonition in 4:32 to forgive one another can in many ways be understood as foundational to the others. We have been forgiven. We have been shown grace and mercy by a God that didn't have to show us grace and mercy. This forgiveness frees us to forgive others. It frees us from the need for vengeance. It frees us to give and receive love, even when we have been wronged. It keeps us from being overcome by evil and, instead, gives us the power to overcome evil with good.

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<sup>581</sup> Ibid., 309-10.

<sup>582</sup> Ibid., 320.

<sup>583</sup> O'Brien, *Ephesians*, 351-52.

# *I AM ADOPTED* / *Ephesians 5:1-21*

## **Introduction**

Though the book of Ephesians does not develop the theme of adoption like other works of Paul (Romans, Galatians, and Ephesians), the idea still lies behind much of Paul's reasoning in Ephesians 5. The transformation that comes from being "in Christ" is as much about the transformation of blood identity as it is about the spiritual renewal of a person. The following will survey Paul's use of adoption language throughout his letters, and explain how the metaphor informs Ephesians 5:1–21.

## **"Adoption" in Paul's Writings**

The term translated "adoption" appears in five particular instances in the New Testament (Rom. 8:15, 23; 9:4; Gal. 4:5, Eph. 1:5). The same Greek word *huiiothesia* appears in each instance, and is a technical term referring generally to giving sonship to one who was not a son. In the legal, Roman world, adoption was mainly concerned with establishing heirs.<sup>584</sup> Often the legal process of an adoption also involved the making of a will, as the purpose of the adoption was to establish an heir. The will, then, established the inheritance of that heir.

Jeanne Moessner explains:

The term *huiiothesia* in the secular usage of Hellenistic Greek means "adoption" or "adoption as sons and daughters." During the life of Christ, the legal and political ramifications of adoption were obvious at the highest level of Roman government as emperors who had no biological sons chose heirs to ensure the continuation of the Julio-Claudian family tree. In fact, all of the Julio-Claudian emperors adopted "sons." Although Claudius had a biological son by Julia Agrippina, he adopted Nero at age twelve and made him heir to the dynasty. Galatians, Ephesians, and Romans were written during a period when adoption secured the so-called "divine ancestry" of emperors. Adoption was an accepted and high profile method of perpetuating a lineage. Paul, whom many take to be the author of Galatians, Romans, and the authority behind Ephesians, and who was probably a Roman citizen, would have been keenly aware of the role of adoption in the Roman world at the time of his writings and missionary travels. Galatians, Ephesians, and Romans utilize the widely understood cultural process of adoption to illustrate the formation of a spiritual family.<sup>585</sup>

As it is used in Paul's writings, the term is particular in its relationship to the idea of sonship. The sonship of the believer is not a natural thing—believers are not naturally the sons of God (in the same way Jesus is). Instead, they are made sons by the divine intervention and act of God.<sup>586</sup> In Romans 9:4, Paul makes the assertion that Israel already possesses this adopted sonship, as they were the ones to whom the covenant was given. This reinforces Paul's point that sonship is the status of those who have entered covenant relationship with God. Israel as a nation was given the opportunity to gain this sonship by entering her covenant in faith. The significance of Paul extending the adoption language to the Gentiles

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<sup>584</sup> Peter W. v. Martitz, "νιοθεσία," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967), 398.

<sup>585</sup> Jeanne Stevenson Moessner, "One Family, Under God, Indivisible," *Journal of Pastoral Theology* 13 (2003): 52–53.

<sup>586</sup> Eduard Schweizer, "νιοθεσία," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967), 399.

(Gal. 4:5, Eph. 1:5) lies in the fact that Paul opens the doors of covenant relationship to those who were once outside the covenant boundaries.<sup>587</sup>

Martinus de Boer expands this in his commentary on Galatians:

The notion of the “sonship” of believers seems to belie what Paul has asserted in Gal 3:28, that in Christ “there is no male and female.” The latter passage clearly demonstrates, however, that the notion of sonship in 3:26 and in 4:5–7 is to be taken as a metaphor, one whose content and implication are determined by God’s action in Christ. As indicated above, the point of the metaphor is that believers become “heirs” of the promise. For a believer in Christ, who has become God’s “son” by adoption (4:5), is precisely as such also “an heir” of God’s promise (4:1, 7), together with Christ, who is God’s unadopted Son (4:4; cf. 3:16; Rom 8:17). As the “sons” of God, believers receive “the Spirit of his Son” (4:6) into their hearts: they receive “the inheritance” (3:18) of “the promised Spirit” (3:14). Equally important for Paul is the event by which the status of sonship is effected: God sent forth his unadopted Son to redeem those enslaved under the law (cf. 3:23–25) precisely so that they might be adopted as God’s liberated “sons” (4:4–5; cf. 3:1, 13), thereby become “heirs” of the promised Spirit.<sup>588</sup>

Paul’s development of the concept of adoption as sons in Galatians serves as the justification for the equality of the Jews and Gentiles. It is the promise that, having undergone the transformation from ignorance to knowledge of God, the Gentiles gained full adoption equal with that of the Jews. This adoption (in line with the legal practice of the day) implies full inheritance. This inheritance is both the Spirit (see quote above) as well as the future glory of Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:23–25). Paul further develops the *implications* of this adoptive sonship in Romans 8:

There is now no condemnation for those who are *in Christ Jesus*. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.<sup>589</sup>

So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. *For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.* For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry “Abba! Father!” The Spirit himself bear witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.<sup>590</sup>

It is hard to overstate the enormous implications of becoming sons of God with Jesus through adoption—it is a mind-blowing reality. The three main things we see here are (1) the liberating and empowering gift of the Spirit (v. 13), (2) the ability to cry out to God as his child, and (3) the promise of a future where we will be fully glorified alongside Jesus (including both a physical resurrection and eschatological reward).

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<sup>587</sup> Cf. Schwiezer, 399.

<sup>588</sup> Martinus C. Boer, *Galatians: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 250.

<sup>589</sup> Romans 8:1–2, ESV, emphasis added.

<sup>590</sup> Romans 8:12–17, ESV, emphasis added.

On the cry of “Abba,” several commentators<sup>591</sup> (including Russell Moore) have argued that Paul does not have the cooing of an infant in mind, as we sometimes here preached in pulpits. Instead, the image evoked is that of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane anticipating his suffering on the cross and crying out for deliverance (Mark 14:36). It is the scream of a child for a father when hurt or in danger. In other words, the idea of crying out “Abba” has more in common with the dark, desperate tone of the Psalms than with the happy babbling of a toddler. In other words, in Jesus we gain the right to cry out to God for deliverance because we are his adopted children.

### **Russell Moore on Adoption**

In his book *Adopted for Life*, Russell Moore has emphasized the importance of adoption for the church both theologically and practically. The following are some excerpts from his book along with commentary to help flesh things out more:

Adoption pertains to all believers because all have been adopted. Because adoption is a spiritual reality, it is contested on the cosmic level.

“[Satan and his forces] would rather we find our identity, our inheritance, and our mission according to what we can see and verify as ours—according to what the Bible calls ‘the flesh’—rather than according to the veiled rhythms of the Spirit of life. That’s why adoption isn’t charity—it’s war.”<sup>592</sup>

Both spiritual and physical adoptions revolve around the concept of a change of identity. What God has done for every believer should motivate him to consider doing the same thing for a child. The greatest villains of the Bible were Gentiles: Goliath, Jezebel, Nebuchadnezzar, and Haman. There were also stark regulations against association with Gentiles. So the Roman or Greek Christian would naturally wonder what their place was in the history of God’s redemption. We should wonder, too. As Moore says,

“You’re what they call a ‘Gentile.’ And your only hope in the world is a Jewish king, one nobody’s heard from in years and one that most of the Jews themselves don’t even recognize as the real thing.”<sup>593</sup>

The transition of the Gospel, then, is the shift from one identity to another.

“[T]he flight from one’s old identity is part of the gospel itself. That’s what repentance is, which is why the adoption passages of the New Testament spend so much time warning against finding one’s identity in ‘the flesh’”<sup>594</sup>

One of the greatest implications of the reality of adoption as the sons of God is that, amazingly, Jesus Christ is our brother. And brotherhood with Jesus means we have an equal inheritance with him. After his resurrection, Jesus instructed Mary to go to his **brothers**. About this Moore writes,

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<sup>591</sup> Cf. especially Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 502–503. See also James Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, Word Biblical Commentary, eds. David A. Hubbard & Glen W. Barker, vol. 38 (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 461–62 and C.E.B. Cranfield, *Romans: A Shorter Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 186–87.

<sup>592</sup> Russell D. Moore, *Adopted for Life: The Priority of Adoption for Christian Families & Churches* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2009), 18.

<sup>593</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>594</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

“Think about these words for a moment. They’re being formed by a tongue and teeth that, just hours before, were dead tissue in a hole in the Middle East. If you could catch even a hint of how awe-filled these words are, you’d drop this book right now...and we’d both fall to our knees in tears.”<sup>595</sup>

The fact that we are adopted into the family of God and Jesus is our brother has implications for the inheritance each of us has. Moore talks about how his sons would cry out for their rooms in the orphanage when he and his wife loaded them into the car. It seems so backwards to us. These children had a future ahead of them that outshone by far what they had known in the orphanage, yet they wanted what they already knew.

“They’d never seen the sun, and they’d never felt the wind. They had never heard the sound of a car door slamming or felt like they were being carried along a road at 100 miles an hour. I noticed that they were shaking and reaching back to the orphanage in the distance.”<sup>596</sup>

In the same way, we, too, hesitate when God calls us to the inheritance that we share with Christ. We fall back on what we know. We walk in the flesh. As C. S. Lewis said, “We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea.”<sup>597</sup> Of course, some of this is to be expected. We still live in a world that is broken. The devil’s reign has not been finally ended yet. So our inheritance involves not only the immeasurable blessing of a future eternity with God, but also the sufferings of the present. Believers are, to use Moore’s imagery, stuck in the shelter of a dirty orphanage. We are waiting for our savior Jesus, and when he returns he will bring us into realization of our full adoption. Until then, we groan and cry out “Abba” for the protection and deliverance of our Father.

### **Implications of Adoption in Ephesians 5:1–21**

Even though the concept of adoption is not as prominent in Ephesians as in some of Paul’s other letters, his adoption theology and its implications still find echoes in the book. Paul mentions adoption in passing in Ephesians 1:5, as if he assumes the reader already understands what it is and what it means. We talked about this above. The Ephesians were Gentiles (cf. Eph. 4:17ff.) and probably would have been well-acquainted with the Roman tradition of adoption. It is not a stretch to assume that the Ephesians would have fully appreciated the gravity of calling believers “adopted sons” of God.<sup>598</sup>

Frank Thielman expands the concept in light of Paul’s theme of being *in Christ*:

This is the light in which we should understand Paul’s claim that God predestined the adoptive sonship of believers *διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ* (*dia Iēsou Christou*). Adoption as God’s children is theirs “through Jesus Christ” because through their union with him, Jesus Christ shares his divine sonship with them. Believers call God “Abba Father” because Jesus spoke this way of his relationship with God (Gal. 4:6; Rom. 8:15; cf. Mark 14:36 and Jeremias 1971: 61–68). They are heirs of God because Jesus is God’s heir (Gal. 4:7; Rom. 8:17). His status as God’s Son lifts them out of the status of slaves and makes them sons and daughters of God with him (Gal. 3:23–4:7;

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<sup>595</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>596</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>597</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 26.

<sup>598</sup> Cf. Harold Hoehner, *Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic Publishing, 2002), 195–96.

Rom. 8:15–17). . . . Paul is saying that the goal of the adoptive sonship of believers is a relationship with God similar to that of Jesus’s own filial relationship with God.<sup>599</sup>

Ephesians 5:1–21 is best understood as describing the *response* of those who have experienced the transformation that comes through adoption, as Paul has outlined it in the previous chapters: predestined for adoption as sons (1:5), being made alive in Christ (2:4–5), being brought near to the family of God (2:11–22), made inheritors with the Jews of the blessing (3:1–6), and made equal members of the body of Christ (4:1–16). Chapter 5 picks up on the transition in Ephesians 4:17 that obligates the believing Ephesians to certain behavior. Having experienced the blessing of adoption, the child is lives in a new way—it is both obligation and natural outflowing of a new life. Paul characterizes this behavior in Eph. 5:1–21.

First, what should be done:

1. Imitating God (5:1)
2. Walking in love (5:2)
3. Walk as in the light (5:8b)
4. Discern what pleases God (5:10)
5. Walk as wise (5:15)
6. Make the best use of time (5:16)
7. Be filled with the Spirit (5:18b)
8. Give thanks (5:4b, 20)
9. Submit to one another (5:21)

Second, what should not be done:

1. Avoid sexual immorality, impurity and covetousness (5:3)
2. Avoid filthiness, foolish talk, and crude humor (5:4)
3. Do not associate with practitioners of the above (5:7)
4. Take no part in works of darkness, but expose them (5:11)
5. Do not get drunk with wine (5:18)

Paul’s point is simple: As children of God, imitate God. Paul appeals to the simple and classic “I want to be like my dad” idea. But there is much more at stake here than what a child will be when he grows up. In the first list above, #2–9 are all examples of how to go about imitating God, and Paul explicitly contrasts them with the ways one imitates the world—the vice list in this section is quite thorough, striking at the very heart of sin. So, we imitate our *true* father, not the father of this world, the “ruler of the authority of the air” (2:2), who wants to usurp the fatherhood of God in our hearts.

Thus, believers, as adopted children of God, must refrain from *doing* sinful things and *speaking* in sinful ways. Verse 3 prohibits the participation in sexual immorality and wanton licentiousness. It has in view all kinds of sexual debasement, as well as the behavior that stems from the “do what feels good” mindset.<sup>600</sup> Parallel to these is the prohibition against covetousness, which may be understood in the sense of the tenth Commandment, but also generally in the sense of blatant greed. This Paul equates with idolatry in verse 5. We should not be surprised at these prohibitions, as Paul has already addressed them in part in 4:17–19.

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<sup>599</sup> Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 52.

<sup>600</sup> Hoehner, 652.

Secondly, there are the prohibitions against ungodly speech. These are three: the prohibition against crass language (which Hoehner argues includes discussion of shameful, distasteful and profane things), empty discussions that have no eternal value or helpfulness, and joking that goes from humor to ridicule.<sup>601</sup> These are probably characteristic of the Gentile way of conversing, something we do not have to look very hard for in our culture with all the forms of media available to us. These are things, however, that Paul says have no place among believers and should be replaced with God-honoring thanksgiving.

The next verse is perhaps most sobering of this entire section: Those who practice those behaviors and conversations have no inheritance in the Kingdom of God. René López has summarized the six main views concerning this passage as follows:

1. **Loss of Salvation and forfeiture of entrance into the Kingdom:** This view is simply that those believers who persist in this behavior will not inherit salvation—that by willfully sinning they lose their inheritance of the Kingdom. This was the popular view among the early church fathers, particularly Ignatius, Polycarp, and Clement of Alexandria. This view has been replaced by subsequent views in most circles owing to the influence of Reformed theology, but it remains prominent in Arminian theological circles.
2. **Professing but not possessing Salvation:** This is the common way of addressing issues where believers seem to “loose” their salvation. The logic goes: if someone does not persist in righteousness and turns his back on God, the chances are most likely that he did not have saving faith to begin with and was never truly “saved.” This is a very convenient way of dealing with the problem, and is espoused by Martin Luther, John Calvin and John MacArthur among others. However, there is nothing in the text that seems to suggest Paul doubted the salvation of his audience, so this view has weaknesses.
3. **Believers who fail to remain in fellowship with God:** This view takes a much weaker stance on what the Kingdom of God actually is, offering the possibility that it refers to present fellowship with God and not eternal inheritance. Thus, those who persist in the sins listed in verses 3–4 lose out on their relationship with God, but not their ultimate salvation. This, however, stretches the meaning of “Kingdom of God” in ways that the rest of the Bible seems to avoid—Paul in particular uses the phrase elsewhere to mean the eschatological inheritance of the believer.
4. **Believers who will not enter the Millennial Kingdom:** Proponents of this view argue that the Kingdom of God refers only to the Millennial Reign of Christ and not to eternal life in particular. Those who hold this view would argue that the believer that persists in sin forfeits his rights to enjoying the Millennial Kingdom, though he will experience eternal life after the second resurrection. Unfortunately, this view does not acknowledge that “eternal life” is often synonymous with the “Kingdom” in the Gospels and others of Paul’s writings, which is the view’s greatest weakness.
5. **Believers who will forfeit rewards in the Kingdom and will not rule with Christ:** This is variation of view 4, which admits disobedient believers into the Millennial Kingdom, but argues that they will have no reward and will not reign with Christ. Proponents base this on texts like the Parable of the Talents where each is rewarded according to his work. This view focuses on what it means to “inherit” the Kingdom, but the argument for a meaning of “gain reward” is lacking for biblical evidence.
6. **Believers who are exhorted not to live like unbelievers:** This last view argues that Paul is simply reminding the Ephesian believers that unbelievers have no inheritance in the Kingdom, so

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<sup>601</sup> *Ibid.*, 655–56.

they should not be imitated. Where this view is appealing by avoiding discussion of salvation and eternal rewards, it makes little logical sense. The question it fails to answer is simply why would Paul tell believers not to behave as unbelievers if there was no threat of consequence? The admonition becomes anemic. Those who espouse this view, like the Reformed view, do more so out of the theological conviction that believers cannot lose the Kingdom no matter how long or how badly they continue in sin, and less out of exegetical evidence.<sup>602</sup>

Regardless of which view one espouses, Paul's warning is still sobering. His message is clear: one who has been adopted into the family of God in Christ should have nothing to do with sinful behavior. It is not enough to have simply claim adoption and go on with a sinful life. Adoption into the family of God has great implications for behavior.

Paul then engages the believers in the proper means of dealing with people who live in disobedience. They were not to associate with them or to partner with them (Eph. 5:6–9). Paul's point is simply that the Ephesians were not to do anything that would jeopardize their new identity as children of God. Contrary to the behavior of the immoral and those who live in the dark, believers are to live in wisdom (v. 15); contrary to those who live in a drunken stupor, believers are to live in sober judgment dependent on the Spirit (v. 18); contrary to those who live lives of selfish-ambition, believers are to live in fellowship, thankfulness and submission (vv. 19–21). Being adopted into the family of God means a transformation of lifestyle—one that reflect Christ himself.

### **Conclusion**

The adoption of the believer into the family of God is a wonderful picture of the transformation of the believer's identity. The implications of Paul's development of adoption theology are immense. Adoption means full equality with all believers before God. It means entering into the intimate relationship with the Father that Jesus himself shares. It means access to the Father for help in the time of need. It means inheritance of all that was promised Christ both partially now and complete in the future when we come into full glory.

But, as many of these verses show, the identity as an adopted child of God also means a transformation in behavior—it means imitating our father and living a life that reflects Jesus. It means putting off the things of the past life (old man), and turning whole-heartedly to those things that reflect the life and character of God. It is not that God brings us into his family only to turn around and punish us with constricting rules. No, it is for our *good* to live like this. While our flesh wars against our spirit, telling us that true life only comes when we indulge our fallen desires, God knows better. He knows these are lies, and that life is only found in the holy joy, love, and peace that flow through our veins by the work of his Spirit. In this life, we must continually choose for these things. We must choose life and imitate our father, the source of lasting joy and life. In Paul's teaching on adoption, the believer both enjoys the blessings of adoption and fights to walk in the obligations of adoption.

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<sup>602</sup>Adapted from René López, "Views on Paul's Vice Lists and Inheriting the Kingdom," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 168 (2011): 81-97.

## *I AM LOVED* / *Ephesians 5:22 - 33*

### **Introduction**

Ephesians 5:22–33 tells us a lot about what love should look like. Husbands must love their wives (v. 25a) and by doing so they imitate the love that Jesus shows to his people (v.25b–26). Love in the family draws its inspiration and its instruction from the love that God shows his people. In what follows, we will examine the love of God for his people in both Ephesians 5:22-33 and throughout Scripture, as well as the implications for the love that believers show one another. First we will survey love in the Bible generally before moving into Ephesians specifically.

### **Love in the OT**

The term used in Ephesians 5:22–33 for “love” is the well-known Greek word *agapē*, and it is central to the message of the section.<sup>603</sup> In the Septuagint, *agapē* is used almost exclusively to translate the Hebrew *ahab* which is the most common word for love in the Hebrew OT. Only in a secular context (and then only ten times) is *ahab* translated with a different Greek word.<sup>604</sup> In the OT, *agapē* speaks of the love of people for each other, for things, or in a religious setting for God. It can be used to speak of God’s love for his people expressed in compassion and care. In addition, *agapē* is used to express the sensual love between male and female, as well as the loyal love of dedicated friends (cf. 1 Sam 19:1ff).

Stauffer summarizes the OT usage this way: “From this analysis we learn that love in the OT is basically a spontaneous feeling which impels to self-giving or, in relation to things, to the seizure of the object which awakens the feeling, or to the performance of the action in which pleasure is taken.”<sup>605</sup> This love is best summarized in the great command in Deuteronomy 6:5 where the Israelites are told to “love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” The OT conception of love is nothing less than a total self-commitment to the thing or person worthy of love.

With regard to God himself and the love that he shows humanity, the OT assumes it to be the natural result of God’s love for himself.<sup>606</sup> In the mindset of the OT writers, nothing merits the love of God, and there is no way to earn it for oneself. No one can behave in such a way as to force God’s love. With regard to man’s relationship to God, however, it is taken as a moral imperative that those who would relate to God must love him (cf. Deut. 6:5).<sup>607</sup>

However, the OT differentiates quite heavily between the feeling of love and the actions that love necessitates. The OT writers most often refer to love not in the context of its effects on the emotional state of the lover, but on the actions that the one who loves takes in *response* to that love.<sup>608</sup> In the context of Israel, love for God is demonstrated in obedience to the commands of God. A love that does not obey is

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<sup>603</sup> Harold Hoehner, *Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 749.

<sup>604</sup> Ethelbert Stauffer, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 22.

<sup>605</sup> *Ibid.*, 22-23.

<sup>606</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>607</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>608</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

not considered love at all, and God's favor is shown only to those whose love is expressed in obedience (Deut 7:9).

God's love for his people is similar. It secures his actions on behalf of his people. Though this is not expressed in the LXX with the word *agapē*, the Hebrew word *hesed* refers to the loyalty of God in his loving, covenantal relationship with his people.<sup>609</sup> This covenant love is similar to that of *agapē* in that it is unconditional and irrevocable. Nelson Glueck explains this: "*Hesed* is really the positive element in the pardoning of sins by which God confirms that the union between Him and His people is restored. . . . In His *hesed* He receives them again into His covenant."<sup>610</sup> In the OT, God is dedicated to his people. His love necessitates it. There is perhaps no greater example of this covenant love than God's redemption of the people of Israel from the land of Egypt—in fact, this particular act becomes the standard by which all other acts of God are measured.

Hosea 11:1–4 expresses this:

When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. The more they were called, the more they went away; they kept sacrificing to the Baals and burning offerings to idols. Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk; I took them up by their arms, but they did not know that I healed them. I led them with cords of kindness, with the bands of love, and I became to them as one who eases the yoke on their jaws, and I bent down to them and fed them.

The love that God expressed in action through redeeming Israel from Egypt will become the paradigm for the NT teaching on the love of God. The same love was expressed in God's redemption of all the world from the slavery of sin through the blood of his son Jesus Christ.

### **Love in the NT**

In the NT, the noun *agapē*, "love," and verb *agapaō*, "to love," occur frequently. Below are just a few examples:

You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I say to you, **Love** your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. (Matt 5:43-44)

And he answered, "You shall **love** the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." (Luke 10:27)

And hope does not put us to shame, because God's **love** has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. (Rom 5:5)

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who **loved** me and gave himself for me. (Gal 2:20)

For we know, brothers **loved** by God, that he has chosen you. (1 Thess 1:4)

Though you have not seen him, you **love** him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory. (1 Pet 1:8)

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<sup>609</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 29–30.

<sup>610</sup> Nelson Glueck, *Hesed in the Bible* (Cincinnati: The Hebrew Union College Press, 1967), 83.

See what kind of **love** the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. (1 John 3:1)

There is no fear in **love**, but perfect **love** casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in **love**. (1 John 4:18)

But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the **love** you had at first. (Rev 2:4)

As we have already seen, the concept of love as developed in the OT is highly selective—it is exclusive and distinctive. There is no universal love for any and all—it is love for God, the things of God, and the people of God. Stauffer summarizes well:

God has set many nations in the world, but His love is for the elect people. With this people He has made a covenant which He faithfully keeps and jealously guards like a bond of marriage (Hos. 1 ff.). Transgression of the provisions of the covenant is a breach of faith, and the worship of false gods is adultery provoking the passionate [hatred] of Yahweh. For He is a jealous God, punishing guilt, but showing grace [*hesed*] to those who love Him and keep His commandments (Ex. 20:2 ff.).<sup>611</sup>

In the NT, then, it is Jesus himself who upholds love as the greatest of human obligations. Demanding “love with an exclusiveness which means that all other commands lead up to it and all righteousness finds in it its norm.”<sup>612</sup> For Jesus, just as in the OT, love is not merely a matter of feeling one way or another and responding to that feeling. Love is more than an emotion—it is integrally tied to action prompted by the will expressed in obedience.

Perhaps the most well-known verse on love is John 3:16, which expresses this willful love of God. There, John claims that Jesus was sent into the world to die for the world because of God’s love for the world. God expressed his love in action, providing the means by which the world (like Israel in Egypt) could be brought out of slavery to sin. Thus, “By His act of forgiveness God has instituted for humanity a new order which removes and supersedes the old worldly order of rank and thus creates as many new tasks as possibilities. The new relationship of God to man lays the foundation for a new relationship of man to man . . . . Peacemakers are called the children of God.”<sup>613</sup>

The theology of God’s love in the NT can be summed up this way:

The Son brings the remission of sins to which man replies with grateful love and to which he should respond with an unconditional readiness to help and forgive his fellows. The Son calls for unreserved decision for God, and gathers around Him a band of “storm-troopers” (Mt. 11:12) who leave everything, follow Him and love God with passionate devotion. He creates a new people of God which renounces all hatred and force and with an unconquerable resolve to love treads the way of sacrifice in face of all opposition. And He Himself dies, as the ancient tradition tells us, with a request for the hostile world [that they may be forgiven] (Lk. 23:34).<sup>614</sup>

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<sup>611</sup> Stauffer, 38.

<sup>612</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>613</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>614</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

The implications of God’s love for his people expressed through Christ are expanded further in Romans 8:

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:31–35, 37–39).

Just as being in Christ is a call to love, it is also the promise that nothing can remove the believer from God’s love. On this passage Douglas Moo states:

The fact that this love is identified specifically as “the love of Christ” in v. 35 and “the love of God” here [in verse 39] only shows again how much Paul joined (without equating) God and Christ in the experience of the believer. But even here, this love of God for us is “in Christ Jesus our Lord.” For it is in giving “his own Son” that God’s love is above all made known to us, and only in relation to Christ do we experience the love of God for us.<sup>615</sup>

God’s love for his people is inextricably entangled with his giving of his only Son. Thus, Jesus Christ’s love for God’s people is the very action which is an extension of God’s own love. In the NT, God’s love for his people is expressed in action. That action is the death, burial, and resurrection of his Son Jesus Christ on behalf of the world.

### **Love in Ephesians**

We move now into Paul’s conception of love. One scholar sums it up well: “For Paul love is the most important of all the Christian graces and the very heart of Christian ethics. Motivated by supreme expression of God’s own love in the sacrificial death of Christ, it springs from a transformed life filled with God’s own Spirit. The primary focus of love in Paul’s writings is its tangible expression within the Christian community.”<sup>616</sup> This is exactly what we see in Ephesians 5:22–33, where love is described in the context of the family.

### **Structure of Ephesians 5:22-33**

This section in Ephesians technically begins back in 5:21 and stretches to 6:9—it could all be subsumed under the idea of “submission.” In fact, one commentator labels the entire section of 5:21-6:9, “Submission in the Believing Household.”<sup>617</sup> The grammatical structure that begins this section in 5:21 is a bit unusual. Frank Thielman explains,

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<sup>615</sup> Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 547.

<sup>616</sup> Roger Mohrlang, “Love,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1993), 575.

<sup>617</sup> Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 365. Peter O’Brien structures the passage the same way, calling it “Relationships within the Christian Household” (*The Letter to the Ephesians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999], 405).

To begin a new major section of the epistle at this point may seem odd, since from a strictly grammatical perspective 5:21 sits in the middle of a sentence that runs from 5:18 to 5:22. The first term in this new section is the participle [*hypotassomenoi*, submitting], and grammatically speaking, it is simply the last of four participial elements that modify the phrase [*plērousthe en pneumati*, be filled in the Spirit] in 5:18b. The grammatical structure of 5:18b-21 might be diagrammed this way:

Be filled in the Spirit,  
    *speaking* among yourselves with psalms, hymns, and spiritual song,  
    *singing and making melody* in your heart to the Lord,  
    *giving thanks* always for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to  
        God, who is also Father,  
    *submitting* [*hypotassomenoi*] to each other in the fear of Christ.<sup>618</sup>

He continues,

The phrase, ‘submitting to one another in the fear of Christ,’ then, functions at the same time as a transition from the previous section on corporate worship to the new section on submission and as a heading over the new section, indicating its primary concern—submission to one another in the household.<sup>619</sup>

The transitional nature of the participle is important since in the ancient context of Ephesians the idea of Christian assembling together for worship and the idea of the household were closely connected. From Christianity’s beginnings through the end of the second century, Christians met for corporate worship in houses, and it seems likely that those in charge of these households, as the hosts of the meetings within them, had a strong influence over what took place there . . . . Because of this, the movement from a description of corporate worship among believers filled “in the Spirit” to the subject of conduct within the household was natural. Since Paul addresses wives and husbands, children and fathers, slaves and masters directly, he probably envisions members of each group gathered within a house for worship and listening to this letter as it is read aloud.<sup>620</sup>

### **On Household Codes**

This section is an example of what is called a “household code.” The phrase was coined by Martin Luther, “who referred to it as a *Haustafel* (a table of instructions for the household),” and has been used since the Reformation to refer to Paul’s instructions to wives, husbands, children, fathers, slaves, and masters, who were all part of the ancient Greek household.<sup>621</sup> This kind of instruction had connections with Paul’s Hellenistic context. As Thielman writes, “The proper ordering of the household was a common topic in the philosophical and exhortatory literature of the Greco-Roman world,” citing Plato and Aristotle, among others.<sup>622</sup> For example, Aristotle states,

Household management falls into departments corresponding to the parts of which the household in its turn is composed; and the household in its perfect form consists of slaves and freemen. The

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<sup>618</sup> Ibid. See also Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 365.

<sup>619</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 365.

<sup>620</sup> Ibid., 365-66.

<sup>621</sup> Arnold, *Ephesians*, 369.

<sup>622</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 366.

investigation of everything should begin with its smallest parts, and the primary and smallest parts of the household are master and slave, husband and wife, father and children; we ought therefore to examine the proper constitution and character of each of these three relationships.<sup>623</sup>

However, it should be noted that even though there are points of connection with household management in the Greco-Roman world, there are many differences.<sup>624</sup> While the “framework for this advice arises from the first-century Greco-Roman environment in which Paul and his readers live,” he “infuses that framework with the theology of the letter’s first three chapters.”<sup>625</sup>

### “Husbands, Love Your Wives, As Christ Loved the Church”

In Ephesians 5:25, then, husbands are instructed to love their wives as Christ loved the church. The rest of the chapter expounds upon this idea. This love is explained in Christ’s action of selfless self-giving. As Harold Hoehner puts it,

Paul’s exhortation to husbands “to love” is illustrated by “love” in the person of Christ. This is similar to 5:2 where he exhorts all believers to become imitators of God and walk in love, just as Christ also loved us and gave himself for us as an offering and sacrifice to God for a fragrant aroma. It should be noted that the analogy between husbands and Christ is not concerned with headship but love, that is, not “be heads over your wives” but “love your wives.”

The verb “to love” (ἀγαπάω) is the same as used in the exhortation to the husbands in the previous verse. This verb form has already been described in previous contexts as a love that is not selfish. Instead it is concerned with the highest good in the one loved. For example, in 2:4 it is God’s action of love to take sinners and make them alive with Christ, raise them, and seat them together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus. In the present context the specific object of Christ’s love is the church. Interestingly, this is the only time the NT specifically mentions Christ’s love for the church. . . . The supreme test of Christ’s love is that he gave himself for the church (redemption).<sup>626</sup>

On the passage, Clinton Arnold writes,

The extent of Christ’s love for the church is expressed in his action of giving his life for the church (5:25c). Paul uses the same expression earlier in the chapter when he speaks of how “Christ also loved us and gave himself . . . for us” (5:2), which is also how he explained the heart of the gospel to the Galatians (Gal 2:20). This does not mean it will be necessary for every husband to die for his wife, but it most assuredly means that every husband must deny himself of time, resources, and self-gratification to express his love for his wife.<sup>627</sup>

Paul has also explained this self-sacrificing love in the first chapter of Ephesians. God’s love was the motivation for his choosing believers for adoption (v. 5), brought about redemption through Jesus’ blood, forgiveness, and grace (v. 7), and allowed believers to catch a glimpse of his plans for the world through Christ (vv. 9–10). This love is the foundation for the love that husband should show his wife.

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<sup>623</sup> Aristotle, *Politics* 1.1235b.1-14, cited in Arnold, *Ephesians*, 369.

<sup>624</sup> O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 406.

<sup>625</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 369.

<sup>626</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 749.

<sup>627</sup> Arnold, *Ephesians*, 383.

However, it should also be noted that the extent of the command to love goes beyond that of the husband-wife relationship. As Andrew Lincoln points out, this text expands upon the more general call to loving sacrifice in Ephesians 5:1–2.<sup>628</sup> The apostle John also brings this aspect out in 1 John 3:16–18:

By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

Just as Paul defines the epitome of love with the self-sacrifice of Jesus Christ, so, too, does John. As Paul uses this sacrificial love as the foundation and motivation for husbands to love their wives, John uses it as the grounds for which each believer should love his brother. Just as the love of God was expressed in the giving of his son, and just as the love of Christ was expressed in his willingness to sacrifice himself, thus should believers love each other.

Though Paul speaks of love in Ephesians 5:22–33 in the context of the family as an exhortation to husbands, the lesson of love is apparent and useful for all believers.

### **The Church as Bride of Christ**

This passage also shows us that the church is the bride of Christ, his beloved.<sup>629</sup> It is important for believers who make up this church to understand, then, that they also are greatly loved by God. God's people as his beloved is a theme that stretches back to the OT. Arnold again is helpful here:

Throughout the prophetic texts of the OT, God's love, sanctifying care, and commitment to his people were expressed through the metaphor of marriage. God is the husband and his people are represented as his wife. This is perhaps best known in Hosea, where the prophet's relationship with his wife portrays God's relationship with his people. In a beautiful promise reminiscent of a marriage vow, the Lord tells his people through the prophet, "I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion. I will betroth you in faithfulness, and you will acknowledge the LORD" (Hos 2:19-20).<sup>630</sup>

Other important passages where God speak of Israel as his bride include Isaiah 54:5, 58:8, 61:10, 62:5, Jeremiah 2:2, 3:6, and Ezekiel 16. Arnold goes on to list "five distinct ways that Paul develops this theme in Ephesians in light of the advent of Christ":

- (1) The covenant relationship between God and his people is still expressed in terms of a marriage bond. This marriage is now between Christ and his church (God's Son and his new covenant people, who are comprised of Jews and Gentiles in one body in Christ).
- (2) This is still a marriage initiated by God with a people who are filthy and undeserving. . . . The new covenant people were once "dead in [their] transgressions and sins" (Eph 2:1).
- (3) God continues a work of cleansing his dirty and unlovely bride. In fact, Ezek 16:9 explicitly says that God "bathed you with water" . . . an equivalent expression to what Paul says that Christ has done for the church."
- (4) There is a similar two-stage cleansing and sanctifying work that God does for his people under both covenants. Under the old covenant, God initially cleanses Israel when he makes

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<sup>628</sup> Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1990), 374.

<sup>629</sup> Though he doesn't use the actual word, "bride" (*nymphē*), as John does in the book of Revelation (e.g., Rev 18:23; 22:17), the idea of marriage is clearly present.

<sup>630</sup> Arnold, *Ephesians*, 384.

her his bride, but because of her sin and waywardness, God needs to perform an additional cleansing and atoning work on his bride in the future. This corresponds to the new covenant relationship between Christ and the church insofar as Christ sanctifies and cleanses his bride when he initially makes her his own, but this is a process that will ultimately be completed only in the future when he restores all things (Eph 1:10; 4:30).

(5) Finally, under both covenants, God is faithful to the end and makes his bride glorious and beautiful (Ezek 16:13-14; Eph 5:27).

Eph 5:25-27 thus becomes Paul's christological interpretation of the prominent metaphor in the OT of the covenant between Yahweh and his people expressed through the marriage relationship.<sup>631</sup>

Understanding the fierce love of Christ for his bride and the lengths to which he has gone to rescue, save, and sanctify her can go a long way in providing us a firm foundation for our souls as the waves of life—sin, unbelief, spiritual attack, fear, shame, pain, grief, and failure—crash against us. This love repeatedly astounds us and causes us to love others more.

Earlier in Ephesians Paul made the comment, “so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (Eph. 3:17–19). On this Hoehner concludes:

The very fact that Christ's love expressed itself in his willingness to die on behalf of sinners is in itself beyond one's comprehension. The reality of Christ's love is overwhelming to all believers, from the point of conversion and continuing as growth in the knowledge of Christ progresses. No matter how much knowledge we have of Christ and his work, his love surpasses that knowledge. The more we know of his love, the more we are amazed by it.<sup>632</sup>

It is the natural assumption of the NT writers that those who have experienced the love of Christ through his atoning death are completely overwhelmed and undone by it. This reality, then, leads us to live lives that imitate the love we have received. As knowledge of that love increases, so too does the out-flowing of love increase in response.

### **Conclusion**

Knowledge of God's love for us is an overwhelming thing. God's love is always expressed through his actions on the behalf of his people, and this is most clear in the sending of his Son Jesus Christ to die for sinners. Jesus' love for sinners was so immense that he gladly gave up his life on their behalf. Love is a thing of action, and those actions elicit a response. Thus, it is the believers' responsibility to love as Christ loved them. This love is self-giving, it is active, it is unconditional, it is enduring, and it never ends.

As Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 13:8–13:

Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect

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<sup>631</sup> Ibid., 385-86.

<sup>632</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 489–90.

comes, the partial will pass away. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

It is easy to underestimate the love of God in Christ for us. But the great encouragement of a passage like Romans 8:35-39 that tells us that nothing can ever separate us from the love of Christ is that Christ's love is the very thing that our souls long for the most. Author Ruth Haley Barton writes,

Your desire for more of God than you have right now, your longing for love, your need for deeper levels of spiritual transformation than you have experienced so far is the truest thing about you. You might think that your woundedness or your sinfulness is the truest thing about you or that your giftedness or your personality type or your job title or your identity as husband or wife, mother or father, somehow defines you. But in reality, it is your desire for God and your capacity to reach for more of God than you have right now that is the deepest essence of who you are.<sup>633</sup>

This means that Romans 8 is very good news. Nothing can separate us from that which our hearts and souls long for more than anything. Nothing can separate us from the only thing that can give our souls true and lasting satisfaction: the love, grace, mercy, and joy of Christ. As believers, we receive and drink deeply of this love day in and day out as we walk on our earthly journeys, and we also shower it freely upon others because Jesus Christ first loved us.

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<sup>633</sup> Ruth Haley Barton, *Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2006), 24.

## *I AM REWARDED / Ephesians 6:1-9*

### **Introduction**

Ephesians 6:1 continues Paul's theme of submission that began in 5:21. As mentioned in the brief on Ephesians 5:22-33, "I Am Loved" (see pp. 5-6), the entire section of 5:21-6:9 could be labeled "Submission in the Believing Household."<sup>634</sup> In 5:22-33 Paul discussed submission and love within the marriage relationship. The household theme continues with Paul's instructions on how parents, children, slaves, and masters should live in the family of God.<sup>635</sup> Additionally, in Ephesians 6:2-3 and 6:8 Paul mentions the idea of reward from God. In what follows, we will look at the passage as a whole, in addition to considering more specifically the biblical teaching on reward for the believer in Christ.

### **Breakdown of Ephesians 6:1-9**

After giving instructions for husbands and wives in 5:22-33, Paul turns first to children and parents in 6:1-4, then to slaves and masters in 6:5-9. The passage comes very close to Colossians 3:20-25:

Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. Slaves, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.

It also breaks down easily, with 6:1-4 addressing children and fathers, and 6:5-9 addressing slaves and masters.

### ***Verses 1-4***

First, Paul instructs children and fathers. "Following on from the exhortations to wives and husbands in 5:22-33, the next groups within the household to be addressed are children and parents. It should be remembered that the instructions given are to be seen both as part of the wise and Spirit-filled living that the writer had discussed in 5:15-20 and as coming under the umbrella of the exhortation to mutual submission that had introduced the household code in 5:21."<sup>636</sup>

Frank Thielman also explains,

Paul turns next to the relationship between children and parents, the second of the three major topics of Hellenistic philosophical reflection on the ordering of the household and a common topic of moral discussion in antiquity generally. . . . Paul urges children to obey their parents and gives three reasons why they should do this. First, it is conduct expected of those who have been incorporated into the Lord through their faith in the gospel. Second, it is "right," by which Paul probably means that obedience to parents is widely acknowledged to be fair and proper. Third, the Scriptures both command it and attach a promise to the command—the first promise in the

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<sup>634</sup> Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 365.

<sup>635</sup> See the "I Am Loved" brief, pp. 5-6, for more on Paul's "household codes" and the context of our passage.

<sup>636</sup> Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1990), 395.

Mosaic law that is attached to a specific command. Paul is primarily concerned with this third reason for obedience to parents: the Scriptures promise that, generally speaking, children who obey their parents will live successful and long lives.<sup>637</sup>

And Peter O'Brien writes,

As in the earlier part of the household code, the instructions to children and parents (vv. 1-4) are similarly presented. First, there is the address to the subordinate group, here the "children", which is then followed by an imperative "obey your parents in the Lord" (v. 1). The motivation or warrant for this follows, "for this is right" (v. 1b). Paul then cites the Old Testament (Exod. 20:4-6): this provides additional warrant for his injunction (vv. 2-3) and contains a further exhortation to the children. To this is added two further motivating clauses, "that it may go well with you and that you may live long on the earth". In the appeal to parents, "fathers" are specifically addressed in a brief exhortation, which contains both negative ("do not make your children angry") and positive elements ("but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord", v. 4).<sup>638</sup>

### **Verses 5-9**

In the next verses, Paul turns to slaves and masters. Again, O'Brien and Thielman are helpful here. O'Brien writes,

The structure of 6:5-9 is similar to that of the earlier sections of the code, and it has close parallels to Colossians 3:22-4:1. The most variation occurs in the section where the imperative is amplified. The subordinate group, the slaves, is again addressed first (v. 5a). Then follows a fourfold description of the service to be rendered by them, each with an "as" phrase: "with fear and trembling in sincerity . . . as to Christ" (v. 5b), "not serving the eye, as pleasing men" (v. 6a), "as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God . . ." (v. 6b), and "wholeheartedly, as serving the Lord . . ." (v. 7). The motivation is introduced by "knowing that" the Lord will judge everyone according to their works (v. 8). The instruction to masters is much shorter than that to slaves: after the customary address they are admonished to "do the same" to their slaves. This is amplified by the clause "abandoning the use of threats" (v. 9b), and the motivation is again introduced by "knowing that" they share a common master in heaven who shows no favouritism (v. 9b).<sup>639</sup>

And Thielman,

Paul next addresses the relationship between slaves and masters, the third and final set of household relationships in the household code. As with the other two pairs (wives-husbands, children-parents), Paul first addresses the subordinate member of the slave-master pair, and as with the children-parents pairing, he devotes most of his energy to the subordinate party . . . His advice to slaves consists of a main admonition to obey their masters (6:5a), followed by a series of phrases that describe the quality of this obedience (6:5b-7). Basically, slaves are to perform their duties for their masters with integrity and consider their work as done for Christ. Paul next gives the reason why slaves should do this: God will repay everyone, whether slave or free, for the good they have done (6:8). Surprisingly, he then tells masters to do for their slaves what he has just required slaves to do for their masters (6:9a), and again he finishes with a clause that

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<sup>637</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 395.

<sup>638</sup> Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 440.

<sup>639</sup> *Ibid.*, 448.

gives the reason why masters should do this: they too have a master, and he is no respecter of persons (6:9b-c).

Throughout the section the emphasis lies on the leveling effect that Christ's lordship has on human relationships, and the reciprocity that should result from this among members of the household. Paul achieves this emphasis rhetorically by comparing the lordship of Christ with the lordship of the slave master (6:5, 6, 9b). He achieves it theologically by appealing to the principle of God's impartiality on the final day of judgment (6:9c).<sup>640</sup>

### ***Note on Slavery in the First Century***

Additionally, a brief word on slavery in the first century should be offered here before moving on. The slavery of Paul's day was very different from what we think of as slavery today in America. Clinton Arnold lists the differences:

- (1) Racial factors played no role.
- (2) Many slaves could reasonably expect to be emancipated during their lifetime.
- (3) Many slaves worked in a variety of specialized and responsible positions.
- (4) Many slaves received education and training in specialist skills
- (5) Freed slaves often became Roman citizens and developed a client relationship to their former masters.<sup>641</sup>

At the same time, Arnold goes on to say that "in spite of these substantive differences between Roman-era slavery and New World slavery, it is important not to construe this ancient form as more humane or as a morally justifiable economic system. Although we can point to some features that make it appear better than slavery in the Antebellum South of the United States, it still involved the coercive ownership of another person."<sup>642</sup>

Some have understood Paul's words to mean that he was ambivalent toward, if not accepting of, the first-century institution of slavery. One older scholar has written, "There is doubtless no approval, but at the same time no disapproval of the existing slavery in itself."<sup>643</sup> But this conclusion is not necessarily warranted. Ephesians simply does not tell us what Paul thought of the system, because his purpose in writing is to address how believers in the world should behave within the institutions in which they found themselves. It was not a treatment of current societal ills with which he took issue. Further, while "there is no explicit criticism of slavery here . . . the level of mutuality and reciprocity that is assumed to exist between master and slave creates an atmosphere in which it would have been difficult for slavery to survive if the advice of the passage had been rigorously followed."<sup>644</sup> All that to say, we should be careful in making judgments about what Paul thought of slavery as an institution in his day.

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<sup>640</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 404.

<sup>641</sup> Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 420-21.

<sup>642</sup> *Ibid.*, 421.

<sup>643</sup> H. A. W. Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle to the Ephesians and the Epistle to Philemon* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1880), 318, cited in Thielman, *Ephesians*, 404.

<sup>644</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 404. See also W. N. Kerr, "Slavery," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 1113: "The early church did not attack slavery as an institution. It did, however, reorder the relationship of slave and masters (Philem.), indicate that in God's sight there was neither 'slave nor free' (Gal. 3:28), and state that both were accountable to God (Eph. 6:5-9). The interpersonal relationship was recast in terms of the character of Christ and his kingdom."

### Comment on Ephesians 6:1-9

Before moving from a general treatment of the passage into the more specific topic of reward, below is some commentary from scholars on Ephesians 6:1-9 on the whole.

#### ***Peter T. O'Brien***

Following the exhortations to wives and husbands, Paul now lays out the reciprocal duties of children and parents. This set of instructions in vv. 1-4, like the following set addressed to slaves and masters (vv. 5-9), is considerably shorter in form than the exhortatory material on marriage (5:22-33). Structurally, the opening admonitions addressed to “children” (6:1) and “slaves” (6:5) to “obey”, like the exhortation to wives voluntarily to “submit” to their husbands (v. 22), are specific examples of the submission within divinely ordered relationships that is called for in the programmatic statement of v. 21, “Submit to one another in the fear of Christ”. And this submission (which is expressed by the fifth result participle that is dependent on the imperative “be filled”, v. 18) concludes the list of responses that should characterize the Spirit-filled living of those in Christ (vv. 18-21). Christian children and slaves who heed this apostolic exhortation to obey, and wives who voluntarily submit to their husbands (v. 22), show that they are receptive to the Spirit’s work of transforming them into the likeness of God and Christ. They demonstrate that they understand the Lord’s will (v. 17), and provide concrete examples of a wise and godly lifestyle (v. 15).<sup>645</sup>

#### ***Clinton E. Arnold***

As with the passage on marriage, this section is ultimately tied to Paul’s exhortation to “watch carefully how you walk” (5:15). These household instructions are directly dependent on Paul’s subsequent command to “be filled with the Spirit . . . by submitting to one another in the fear of Christ” (5:18, 21). Paul is convinced that properly ordered domestic relationships lived out under the lordship of Christ are foundational to the free and unhindered work of the Spirit in the lives of believers in the community. An attitude of self-denial and a deep concern for the needs of others is essential to living as a Christian in the household and in the larger community of faith. On this basis Paul delivers his instructions to each social grouping within the Christian household, based on their respective role obligations.

It is striking that in this passage as well as in the marriage passage, Paul addresses the subordinate members of each of the three pairs first. In other words, here he first addresses the children, then the fathers. Similarly, he first addresses the slaves, then the masters. This underlines the fact that he not only treats them as responsible members of the various households and the Christian community, but also accords them a degree of preference and honor. This may have been somewhat surprising to readers steeped in traditional Roman culture.<sup>646</sup>

### Reward in the Bible

The biblical idea of reward is prevalent throughout the NT. The general idea is that believers will be rewarded accordingly for the good they have done while still living in the body on earth. On the surface the concept seems easy enough, but the subject is complicated because it could be understood to contradict the notion of free grace in Christ—justification by faith alone. How judgment according to works can exist alongside justification by free grace is a much-discussed topic in NT scholarship today.<sup>647</sup>

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<sup>645</sup> O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 439.

<sup>646</sup> Arnold, *Ephesians*, 411.

<sup>647</sup> A good recent article on the subject is Dane C. Ortlund, “Justified by Faith, Judged According to Works: Another Look at a Pauline Paradox,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 52 (2009): 323-39.

While we cannot go into all the complexities of the subject here, what is provided below is, first, several significant places where the subject is mentioned, and, second, some commentary from pastors and scholars. First are several passages where the New Testament discusses the idea of reward.<sup>648</sup>

Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for **your reward is great in heaven**, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Matt 5:11-12)

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but **lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven**, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Matt 6:19-21)

His master said to him, “Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; **I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.**” (Matt 25:23)

For truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ **will by no means lose his reward.** (Mark 9:41)

But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and **your reward will be great**, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. (Luke 6:35)

**He will render to each one according to his works:** to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. (Rom 2:6-8)

Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? **For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God;** for it is written, “As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.” So then **each of us will give an account of himself to God.** (Rom 14:10-12)

Each one’s work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, **he will receive a reward.** If anyone’s work is burned up, **he will suffer loss**, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire. (1 Cor 3:13-15)

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, **so that each one may receive what is due** for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. (2 Cor 5:10)

Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that **from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward.** You are serving the Lord Christ. (Col 3:23-24)

Therefore do not throw away your confidence, **which has a great reward.** For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God **you may receive what is promised.** (Heb 10:35-36)

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<sup>648</sup> Wayne Grudem offers the following list of passages that “teach or imply degrees of reward for believers at the final judgment”: Dan. 12:2; Matt 6:20-21; 19:21; Luke 6:22-23; 12:18-21, 32, 42-48; 14:13-14; 1 Cor 3:8; 9:18; 13:3; 15:19, 29-32, 58; Gal 6:9-10; Eph 6:7-8; Col 3:23-24; 1 Tim 6:18; Heb 10:34, 35; 11:10, 14-16, 26, 35; 1 Pet 1:4; 2 John 8; Rev 11:18; 22:12; cf. also Matt 5:46; 6:2-6, 16-18, 24; Luke 6:35 (*Systematic Theology* [Leicester, England: IVP; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994], 1144 n. 4).

He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for **he was looking to the reward**. (Heb 11:26)

Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may **win a full reward**. (2 John 8)

The nations raged, but your wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, and **for rewarding your servants**, the prophets and saints, and those who fear your name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth. (Rev 11:18)

And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And **the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done**. (Rev 20:12)

Behold, I am coming soon, **bringing my recompense** with me, to **repay everyone** for what he has done. (Rev 22:12)

### Reward in Ephesians 6:1-9

There are two places where Paul specifically discusses the idea of reward in our specific passage. First, the idea is present in 6:2-3 by implication (as opposed to the use of specific “reward” vocabulary). Paul writes, “Honor your father and mother (this is the first commandment with a promise), that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.”

The twofold promise that Scripture associates with obedience to parents is prosperity and a long life. Both promises closely follow the wording of the LXX. The promise of prosperity, however, is not in the [Hebrew] of Exod 20:12, but is found in the parallel passage of Deut 5:16 (“that it may go well with you”). Paul does not include the latter part of Exod 20:12 (LXX), which describes the land as “the good land which the Lord your God gives to you.” This is probably left off to highlight the relevance of the promise to the Gentiles as part of the new covenant people of God for whom there is no land promise.

The two promises are remarkable and highly motivating. It is important not to overspiritualize the promises and see them as referring solely to the inheritance of eternal life; otherwise Paul would not have included the phrase “upon the earth.” These are promises held out to every believing child that obeying one’s parents will lead to their well-being and long life on earth. This cannot, of course, be applied in a meticulous way to every single case. Like any proverb, this is to be understood as a general pattern.<sup>649</sup>

The second place is 6:8, “knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord,” where we do have the use of reward language in the verb *komizō*, “to receive back,” which goes beyond merely “receiving” to the idea of “recompense or reward.”<sup>650</sup> Paul uses the word elsewhere only in Colossians 3:25, which is very similar to the present passage, and 2 Corinthians 5:10, which discusses reward at the final judgment: “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive [*komizō*] what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.”

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<sup>649</sup> Arnold, *Ephesians*, 417.

<sup>650</sup> Ibid., 425. See also Walter Bauer, Frederick William Danker, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilber Gingrich, eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. [BDAG] (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 557.

On reward in this passage, Clinton Arnold writes,

One of the motivations for serving with a good attitude and performing good works is the assurance of God's blessing and reward. The participle "knowing" [*eidotes*] is causal and gives the ground or reason for the immediately preceding clause ("serve in this way because you know that . . ."). Since the preceding clause, however, is a summary of the entire section (6:5-6), the motivation of receiving blessing is also tied to the main admonition of the section ("obey") and thereby relates to the whole series of thoughts on how to serve.

Although it is a part of God's plan for every person who comes into a relationship with Jesus Christ to live out their lives devoted to doing good deeds (2:10), Paul wants Christian slaves to know that their good works are all noticed by the one Master who really cares and that they will be rewarded.<sup>651</sup>

Paul is trying to give believing slaves an eschatological perspective on their present condition. Although they may face arduous days of difficult work and be asked to do thankless tasks that no one would ever want to do, the Lord notices all that they do, and they can be assured of future reward.<sup>652</sup>

Andrew Lincoln writes,

Even if work seems to go unrecognized by earthly masters, this is no reason to start trying to catch their eye, because the heavenly Master sees all that is done and will respond accordingly. This latter thought holds for both slave and free. In regard to reward from the heavenly Master, earthly social status makes no difference. The concept of reward, particularly at the final judgment, was a common one in Judaism and is taken over in the NT.<sup>653</sup>

### **Commentary on Biblical Reward**

#### ***Dictionary of Paul and His Letters***

For Paul rewards comprise both the enjoyment of all the blessings that are in Christ and a future tangible recognition of service in the furtherance of the gospel. To continue to experience the former, diligence in running the race is essential; to receive the latter, one's works must survive the fiery testing at the final judgment. . . . This ongoing benefit finds its focus in an intimate fellowship with Christ, a gain of such surpassing worth that by comparison even the finest human accolades are a loss, no better than rubbish (Phil 3:8-11). Paul describes this fellowship also as the prize awarded to those who successfully finish the Christian race (1 Cor 9:24-27). While these blessings are enjoyed in part now, their full experience awaits the life to come (Phil 1:21, 23; 3:14).<sup>654</sup>

Rewards as Paul views them therefore play a most important role in encouraging Christ's followers to be faithful and diligent in the ministries to which each is called. Far from being questionable in any way,

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<sup>651</sup> Arnold, *Ephesians*, 424.

<sup>652</sup> *Ibid.*, 425.

<sup>653</sup> Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 422.

<sup>654</sup> R. M. Fuller, "Rewards," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1993), 819.

they are a most gracious provision by God to motivate his children to run the race successfully, and so to enjoy both in this life and in that to come the blessings of salvation.<sup>655</sup>

### *John Piper*

There is teaching both in Paul's writings and in the words of Jesus that believers will receive differing reward in accord with the degree that their faith expresses itself in acts of service and love and righteousness. . . . For example, in 1 Corinthians 3:8 Paul says, "He who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor." And in Ephesians 6:8 Paul says, "Whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord." . . . And most of us remember the parable of the talents (or pounds) in Luke 19:12–27. Jesus compares his going to heaven and returning to a nobleman who went away and gave to ten of his servants one pound each with the command to trade with them so that his estate would be advanced in his absence. When he returns, one had traded so as to turn his pound into ten. And the nobleman says that his reward will be to have authority over ten cities. Another had turned his pound into five. And the nobleman said that his reward would be to have authority over five cities. Another had just kept the pound and done nothing with it. To this one the nobleman said, "I will condemn you from your own mouth." And he took the one pound from him.

Now what this parable teaches is the same thing Paul taught, namely, that there are varying degrees of reward for the faithfulness of our lives. But it also moves beyond that and also teaches that there is a loss not only of reward but of eternity for those who claim to be faithful but do nothing to show that they prize God's gifts and love the Giver. That's the point of the third servant who did nothing with his gift. He did not just lose his reward, he lost his life. Jesus says in Matthew 25:30, "Cast out that slave into outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

That leads us to the second purpose of the judgment. . . . to declare openly the reality of the faith and the salvation of God's people by the evidence of their deeds. Salvation is owned by faith. Salvation is shown by deeds. So when Paul says (in v. 10) we "will be recompensed . . . according to what we have done," he not only means that our rewards will accord with our deeds, but also our salvation will accord with our deeds. . . .

Let me close with an illustration that I think makes clear how deeds will function in the final judgment. Remember the story of how two harlots brought a baby to king Solomon, each claiming that the baby was hers (1 Kings 3:16–27). They asked king Solomon to act as judge between them. He said that a sword should be brought and that the baby should be divided and half given to the one and half to the other. The true mother cried out, "O, my lord, give her the child and by no means kill it." Solomon said, give this woman the child, for she is its mother.

What was Solomon looking for? He was not looking for a deed that would earn the child. He was looking for a deed that would prove that the child was already possessed by birth. That is the way God looks at our deeds. He is not looking for deeds that purchase our pardon in his judgment hall. He is looking for deeds that prove we are already enjoying our pardon. The purchase of our pardon was the blood of Jesus, sufficient once for all to cover all our sins. And the means by which we own it is faith—and faith alone.<sup>656</sup>

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<sup>655</sup> Ibid., 820.

<sup>656</sup> From the sermon, "What Happens When You Die? All Appear Before the Judgment Seat of Christ," located here: <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/what-happens-when-you-die-all-appear-before-the-judgment-seat-of-christ>

### ***Anthony Hoekema***

Salvation, to be sure, is wholly of grace; yet the Bible indicates that there will be variation in the rewards which will be received by God's people on the Day of Judgment. . . . Jesus often mentions rewards (Matt. 5:11-12; 6:19-21; Luke 6:35; Mark 9:41; Matt. 25:23). Jesus makes it unmistakably clear, however, that such rewards are not merited but are gifts of God's grace. Note particularly his words in Luke 17:10, "So you also, when you have done all that is commanded you, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.'" The Heidelberg Catechism expresses the same thought in Answer 63: "This reward is not earned: it is a gift of grace."<sup>657</sup>

The relation between our works and our future reward ought, however, to be understood not in a mechanical but rather in an organic way. When one has studied music and has attained some proficiency in playing a musical instrument, his capacity for enjoying music has been greatly increased. In a similar way, our devotion to Christ and to service in his kingdom increases our capacity for enjoying the blessings of that kingdom, both now and in the life to come.<sup>658</sup>

### ***Wayne Grudem***

In writing to Christians Paul says, "*We shall all stand before the judgment seat of God. . . . Each of us shall give account of himself to God*" (Rom. 14:10, 12). He also tells the Corinthians, "*For we must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad*" (2 Cor. 5:10; cf. Rom. 2:6-11; Rev. 20:12, 15). In addition, the picture of the final judgment in Matthew 25:31-46 includes Christ separating the sheep from the goats, and rewarding those who receive his blessing.<sup>659</sup>

It is important to realize that this judgment of believers will be a judgment to evaluate and bestow various degrees of reward . . . but the fact that they will face such a judgment should never cause believers to fear that they will be eternally condemned. Jesus says, "He who hears my word and believes him who sent me, has eternal life; *he does not come into judgment*, but has passed from death to life" (John 5:24). Here "judgment" must be understood in the sense of eternal condemnation and death, since it is contrasted with passing from death into life.<sup>660</sup>

[On degrees of reward]: We must guard against misunderstanding here: Even though there will be degrees of reward in heaven, the joy of each person will be full and complete for eternity. If we ask how this can be when there are different degrees of reward, it simply shows that our perception of happiness is based on the assumption that happiness depends on what we possess or the status or power that we have. In actuality, however, our true happiness consists in delighting in God and rejoicing in the status and recognition that he has given us. The foolishness of thinking that only those who have been highly rewarded and given great status will be fully happy in heaven is seen when we realize that no matter how great a reward we are given, there will always be those with greater rewards, or who have higher status and authority, including the apostles, the heavenly creatures, and Jesus Christ and God himself. Therefore if highest status were essential for people to be fully happy, no one but God would be fully happy in heaven, which is certainly an incorrect idea. Moreover, those with greater reward and honor in heaven, those nearest the throne of God, delight not in their status but only in the privilege of falling down before God's throne to worship him (see Rev. 4:10-11).<sup>661</sup>

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<sup>657</sup> Anthony A. Hoekema, *Saved by Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 262, 263-64.

<sup>658</sup> *Ibid.*, 264.

<sup>659</sup> Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1143.

<sup>660</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>661</sup> *Ibid.*, 1144-45.

It would be morally and spiritually beneficial for us to have a greater consciousness of this clear New Testament teaching on degrees of heavenly reward. Rather than making us competitive with one another, it would cause us to help and encourage one another that we all may increase our heavenly reward, for God has an infinite capacity to bring blessing to us all, and we are all members of one another (cf. 1 Cor. 12:26-27). . . . Moreover, in our own lives a heartfelt seeking of future heavenly reward would motivate us to work wholeheartedly for the Lord at whatever task he calls us to, whether great or small, paid or unpaid. It would also make us long for his approval rather than for wealth or success. It would motivate us to work at building up the church on the one foundation, Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 3:10-15).<sup>662</sup>

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, there is a tension in the idea of reward. Justification is free and comes from God's grace alone. Ephesians itself is clear on this (e.g., 2:8-9). But reward is based on how we conduct ourselves during our time on earth. The solution, in part, is not to see grace as contrary to effort (only merit). And not to see works or reward for works as contrary to grace. Paul never does. Consider 1 Cor 15:10, for example: "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me." This is what makes salvation all the more mind-blowing. We already saw in Ephesians 2:10—which comes on the heels of a strong, grace-centered text in 2:8-9—that even our work is a gift. We are *his* workmanship. He created us for good works, empowers us to do them, then rewards us for them. It is all grace.

At the same time, we are never called to *presume* upon this fact and take it easy. We are called to push forward, to take hold of what is already ours. God's grace motivates and compels us to enter more and more into his work and joy. We are all called to do this according to our specific natures, gifts, and abilities. The call is to be faithful. Not to be the best ever. Not to never fail. But to be faithful with what we have. God sees the heart and will reward according to what he sees, like what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 8:12: "For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have."

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<sup>662</sup> Ibid., 1145.

# *I AM HATED / Ephesians 6:10 - 24*

## **Introduction**

Paul brings his letter to the Ephesians to a close in Ephesians 6:10-24. The final verses of the chapter are made up of his closing greetings, but before this is a lengthy section where Paul commands his readers to “be strong in the Lord” so that they may be able to stand against the ungodly forces that battle for their souls. He provides a vivid description of the “armor of God” that is at the believer’s disposal in order to withstand the attacks of the enemy. Believers must realize that being “in Christ” does not mean the battle is done. We are not home yet, and in the meantime we will be despised, hated, and attacked. In what follows, we will examine this section of Scripture in more detail, and also briefly look at the broader topic of God’s great enemy, Satan.

## **Breakdown of Ephesians 6:10-24**

Ephesians 6:10-24 can be broken down into two general parts: (1) verses 10-20, which are concerned with standing strong against the devil, and (2) verses 21-24, which is the closing of the letter. Verses 10-20 can be broken down even further, as we will see, but first are some general comments on the sections.

### **Verses 10-20**

The phrase that begins our section is *tou loipou*, which is often translated, “Finally,” and introduces the final section of the letter.<sup>663</sup> Paul then goes on to discuss the need to stand strong against the schemes of the devil. On verses 10-20 in general, Thielman writes,

The passage shows the same curious mixture that appears elsewhere in the letter of a clear general structure that is ambiguous in its details. At one level, the passage seems to fall into two sections: an exhortation to be strong, using military imagery (6:10-17), and an exhortation to pray that is more straightforward and in which the military imagery all but disappears (6:18-20). At the grammatical level, however, these two distinct parts are closely tied together. The participles [*proseuchomenoi*, praying] and [*agrypnountes*, watching] at the beginning of the exhortation to pray (6:18) depend grammatically on the imperative [*dexasthe*, receive] at the end of the exhortation to put on the armor of God: “Receive [*dexasthe*] the helmet of salvation and the sword that comes from the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying [*proseuchomenoi*] at all times in the Spirit, through every prayer and urgent petition, and being watchful [*argypnountes*] in this very thing with all devotion and urgent petition for all the saints.”<sup>664</sup>

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<sup>663</sup> As a side note, some scholars point out that we would expect Paul to use *to loipon* instead of *tou loipou* if he was trying to say, “finally” (as he does elsewhere—e.g., Phil 3:1; 4:8; 1 Thess 4:1). It is argued that *tou loipou* actually is better translated, “from now on” or “henceforth,” as in Gal 6:17 (“From now on let no one cause me trouble”), the only other place we find it in the NT. Some early copyists apparently didn’t like it, either, as certain manuscripts have *to loipon* (though the best do not). Frank Thielman prefers “henceforth” (*Ephesians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010], 416-17), but other scholars argue that the believers are already doing battle with Satan, so it makes little sense to say, “From now on.” It’s hard to say for sure, but the translation, “Finally,” does seem to make better sense, and the grammatical evidence alone doesn’t seem conclusive one way or the other.

<sup>664</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 411.

### Verses 21-24

While we are not overly concerned with verses 21-24, suffice it to say that they provide the closing to the letter. “Paul has asked his Christian readers to pray for his bold proclamation of the gospel, and then reminded them of his situation in prison. He now mentions in his conclusion that he is sending Tychicus to provide them with further information about his welfare and circumstances. This letter closing is made up of two sections: first, the commendation of Tychicus and the explanation of his task as an apostolic emissary (vv. 21-22); and, secondly, the peace wish and final benediction (vv. 23-24).”<sup>665</sup> In the rest of the brief, we will focus on 6:10-20 and the general theme of the armor of God and attack of the enemy.

### Ephesians 6:10-20 and the Armor of God

#### Structural Outline

We can break 6:10-20 down in the following way:

- (1) Introductory command to “be strong in the Lord” (6:10)
- (2) General exhortation to put on the “whole armor of God” against the devil and to “stand firm” (6:11-13)
- (3) Specific pieces of armor (6:14-17)
  - a. Belt of truth (literally, “girding your loins with truth”) and breastplate of righteousness (6:14)
  - b. Shoes of readiness (6:15)
  - c. Shield of faith (6:16)
  - d. Helmet of salvation and sword of the Spirit (6:17)
- (4) Prayer for the battle (6:18-20)

Commentators break the passage down in slightly different ways, though most are similar to that above. The following are a few examples. First, Clinton Arnold:

- Appropriating the Power of God to Stand against the Powers of Darkness (6:10-20)
- A. Introductory Exhortation (6:10)
  - B. Exhortation to Appropriate God’s Power because of the Supernatural Nature of the Battle (6:11-13)
  - C. Resisting the Powers of Darkness by Appropriating Armor from God (6:14-17)
  - D. Prayer as the Foundation and Essence of Spiritual Warfare (6:18-20)<sup>666</sup>

Frank Thielman:

- Standing against the Strategies of the Devil (6:10-20)
- A. Wearing God’s Protective Armor (6:10-17)
  - B. Persevering in Watchful Prayer (6:18-20)<sup>667</sup>

Peter O’Brien:

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<sup>665</sup> Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 491.

<sup>666</sup> Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 437.

<sup>667</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, viii.

Spiritual Warfare, 6:10-20

1. *Be Strong in the Lord, 6:10-13*
2. *Stand Firm and Put on God's Armor, 6:14-17*
3. *Watch and Pray, 6:18-20*<sup>668</sup>

### The Whole Armor of God

Verses 10-13 are made up of a general command to be strong in the Lord and to put on the whole armor of God, as well as an explanation of who the enemy is. Thielman writes,

The basic exhortation (v. 10) is almost a title over the whole section, grammatically unconnected to the rest. Paul wants his readers to make use of the great power that God has placed at their disposal and that, according to 1:17-23, he has prayed they would understand (v. 10).

The general command to put on the armor of God (vv. 11-13) explains specifically how Paul's readers can carry out the exhortation of 6:10 and why they must carry it out. This subsection of the passage is arranged in four parts, the last two essentially repeating the first two:

- A command (to put on God's armor)
  - The reason for the command (the enemy is nonphysical and powerful)
- A command (to take up God's armor)
  - The purpose for the command (to prepare for withstanding present evil)<sup>669</sup>

This section (6:11-13) is repetitive because it "emphasizes the gravity of the point: believers must prepare themselves for the intense spiritual struggle they are facing if they are to keep the ground that God has won for them in Christ."<sup>670</sup>

Moving into verses 14-7, we get into the specific pieces of the armor. There are a few different things to say here. First, Thielman is again worth quoting:

Paul next describes six pieces of armor that his readers should put on (vv. 14-17). Each piece is identified with an element of Christian existence that has played an important part in the rest of the letter: truth (1:13; 4:15, 21-25; 5:9), righteousness (4:24; 5:9; 6:1), gospel preparation (1:13; 2:17; 3:6, 8; 4:11), faith (1:1, 13, 15, 19; 2:8; 3:12, 17; 4:5, 13), and salvation (1:13; 2:5, 8; 5:23). Paul connects putting on the first four pieces of armor closely with the initial imperative "stand, therefore" and presents equipping oneself with this armor as the means by which "standing" firm in the midst of the onslaught of evil becomes possible (vv. 14-16).<sup>671</sup>

He offers the offering schematic to show flow of thought in 6:14-16:

Stand		
by having girded	your waist	with truth
by having put on	the breastplate	of righteousness
by having shod	the feet	with the readiness of the gospel of peace
by having taken up	the shield	of faith

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<sup>668</sup> O'Brien, *Ephesians*, vii.

<sup>669</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 415.

<sup>670</sup> Ibid.

<sup>671</sup> Ibid.

For 6:17-18, we could create something similar:

Take up (or Receive)	the helmet	of salvation
praying	the sword	of the Spirit
being alert	in the Spirit	at all times
	in all perseverance	
	and petition	for all the saints

On verse 17, Thielman adds,

The last piece of armor in this set, “the shield of faith,” stands apart from the other three as especially important. Paul’s readers are to take it up “in addition to everything else,” and it has a special purpose: “to snuff out all the ignited missiles of the evil one.”

The last two pieces of armor are connected with a new imperative, “receive” (v. 17). The term emphasizes the gift character of these two pieces, but its imperative mood emphasizes that believers have a role to play in making these gifts effective: they must “receive” them.<sup>672</sup>

Verses 18-20 switch the focus from armor to prayer. In many ways, this serves as a foundation for the entire passage. “At the heart of spiritual warfare is prayer. Paul does not present this as an additional weapon, but as a foundational and continuous activity that is crucial to deploying all of the armor and weapons he has just commended the church.”<sup>673</sup>

This is not the only place where Paul uses military language. Cf. the following texts:

The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the **armor of light**. (Rom 13:12)

In the word of truth, in the power of God; by the **weapons of righteousness** for the right hand and the left. (2 Cor 6:7)

For the **weapons of our warfare** are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. (2 Cor 10:4)

But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the **breastplate of faith and love**, and for a **helmet the hope of salvation**. (1 Thess 5:8)

However, Ephesians 6:10-20 is his most extended treatment. Also worth noting is that all but one of the pieces of armor appear to be allusions to different texts in the book of Isaiah.

***Belt of Truth (6:14)***

“Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins.” (Isa 11:5)

***Breastplate of Righteousness (6:14); Helmet of Salvation (6:17)***

“He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head; he put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped himself in zeal as a cloak.” (Isa 59:17 cf. 1 Thess 5:8)

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<sup>672</sup> Ibid., 416.

<sup>673</sup> Arnold, *Ephesians*, 463.

### ***Shoes of Readiness (6:15)***

“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation.” (Isa 52:7; cf. Rom 10:15)

### ***Sword of the Spirit (6:17)***

“He made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me a polished arrow; in his quiver he hid me away.” (Isa 49:2; cf. Hos 6:5; Rev 19:15)

On this Clinton Arnold writes,

Many commentators have referred to the armor and weaponry of a Roman soldier as the background and inspiration for Paul’s extended set of metaphors here. The Roman historian Polybius gives the most complete description of the equipment of a legionnaire (see Polybius, *Hist.* 6.23.2-5 . . .). This is not altogether adequate, however, because Paul leaves out some of the important parts of the “complete armor” of a Roman soldier, such as the two *pila* (javelins) and the greaves (leg armor). More important, most of Paul’s imagery comes directly from Isaiah (see Isa 11:4-5; 59:17; cf. 1 Thess 5:8). Paul may have received some of his inspiration for this from the pervasive phenomenon of Roman soldiers in his world (esp. as he wrote this letter while living in Rome under Roman custody), but the primary background and impetus for it is the OT, especially Isaiah and the image of God as the Divine Warrior.<sup>674</sup>

Andrew Lincoln also comments on the relevance of the OT to the passage:

As far as the OT is concerned, traditions that picture Yahweh as a warrior (e.g., Isa 42:13; Hab 3:8, 9; Ps 35:1-3) and his agents as in need of his strength or power for their battles (e.g., Ps 18:1, 2, 32, 39 . . . 28:7; 59:11, 16, 17; 68:35; 89:21; 118:14; Isa 52:1) may well stand in the background, but it is the depictions of the armor of Yahweh and his Messiah in Isa 11:4, 5 and Isa 59:17 that are in the foreground for the writer.<sup>675</sup>

### **Our Armor or God’s?**

There is some question as to whether the passage refers primarily to God and his armor—something already done for the believer—or the act of the believer in “putting on.”<sup>676</sup> In the end, and keeping with other places in Ephesians (e.g., 2:8-10), the answer seems to be both/and. The armor is not simply the private, personal piety of the believer. *God* is the warrior here, but believers tap into his power by their actions in the Spirit in union with Christ. Thus, it does involve the believer’s action and will. One scholar puts it this way,

The purpose for this call to “put on Christ” reveals that this imperative is more than simply a call to personal piety; it is also a call to accept another view of the world. By receiving the “whole armor of God” pericope as a summary of the entire letter, the connection between spiritual warfare and Christian unity becomes clear. This logical connection calls us to recognize that disunity within the Church is a result of both external forces acting against the Church and attacks

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<sup>674</sup> Ibid., 436.

<sup>675</sup> Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1990), 436.

<sup>676</sup> For example, cf. the titles of two journal articles: “Ephesians 6:10-18: A Call to Personal Piety or Another Way of Describing Union with Christ?” (Donna R. Reinhard, in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48 [2006]: 521-32) and “The ‘Breastplate of Righteousness’ in Ephesians 6:14: Imputation or Virtue?” (David H. Wenkel, in *Tyndale Bulletin* 58 [2007]: 275-87). Both, in different ways, consider whether the armor is related to the believer’s action or something that has already been done for the believer.

on individuals within the Church, weakening individuals in order to weaken the whole. Thus Paul exhorts each believer to put on Christ for the sake of the unity and maturity of the Church.<sup>677</sup>

Thielman sums up the issue well:

The tension between what God has already done for believers and the need for believers to appropriate what he has done for them in their day-to-day existence lies beneath all of 6:10-17. Believers are already saved (2:8) by their faith in the word of God (1:13), and this salvation “is the gift of God” (2:8-9). Yet in order to stand against the devil and his cosmic allies, believers must receive these gifts as armor and wield them in their defense.<sup>678</sup>

### **The Enemy in Scripture**

Stepping back to look at the bigger picture, we find all throughout Scripture the theme of the devil, along with his hordes, as the great hater, accuser, and enemy of God and his people. While not as developed in the OT as the NT, his presence is still found there (e.g., Gen 3; Job 1:6; 1 Chr 21:1). In the NT, however, we get a much clearer picture of who he is. Below are some Scriptures:

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the **devil**. (Matt 4:1)

And if **Satan** casts out **Satan**, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? (Matt 12:26)

You are of your father the **devil**, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. (John 8:44)

But Peter said, “Ananias, why has **Satan** filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land?” (Acts 5:3)

You son of the **devil**, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord? (Acts 13:10)

The God of peace will soon crush **Satan** under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. (Rom 16:20)

So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of **Satan** to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. (2 Cor 12:7)

He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the **devil**. (1 Tim 3:6)

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the **devil**. (Heb 2:14)

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<sup>677</sup> Reinhard, “Ephesians 6:10-18,” 531.

<sup>678</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 416.

Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the **devil** prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. (1 Pet 5:8)

I know where you dwell, where **Satan's** throne is. Yet you hold fast my name, and you did not deny my faith even in the days of Antipas my faithful witness, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. (Rev 2:13)

And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the **devil** and **Satan**, and bound him for a thousand years. (Rev 20:2)

Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the **devil** has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short! (Rev 12:12)

Additionally, the entry in the *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters* is helpful here:

Paul refers to a personal, evil, spiritual being whose purposes are opposed to God, his people and his cosmos. “Satan” (or “Devil” occurring only in Ephesians and the Pastorals) are the most familiar terms Paul uses, but there are others. The OT and, more particularly, the varied Judaism of Paul’s day help shed light on the terminology and understanding of Satan common to Paul and many of his contemporaries.<sup>679</sup>

In the OT the Hebrew noun *śāṭān*, meaning “accuser” (with the nuance of “adversary” or “slanderer” in certain contexts . . . ) is used of both human (cf. 1 Sam 29:4; 1 Kings 11:14, 23, 25) and transcendent beings. The latter reference is found in three notable instances. . . . [Job 1-2, 1 Chron 21:1, and Zech 3:1-2]. In none of these cases do we find a being clearly defined as a cosmic adversary who defies divine sovereignty and authority. But these three canonical contexts seem to have laid the foundation for a later development in Jewish thought in which an evil, transcendent spiritual being, known by various names, maintains a spiritual kingdom that is opposed, but ultimately subject, to God.<sup>680</sup>

Within the Pauline corpus we also find an array of names or descriptive titles or phrases referring to this archenemy. . . . [“Satan,” “Devil,” among other less-used terms, such as “Beliar” or “god of this age”]. Ephesians offers a particularly rich selection of descriptive titles. He is called the “prince (or “ruler,” *archōn*) of the power of the air” (Eph 2:2; cf., e.g., Jn 16:11), the “spirit [*pneuma*] now at work among those who are disobedient” (Eph 2:2), the “evil one” (Eph 6:16; cf. 2 Thess 3:3) and “the devil” (Eph 4:27; 6:11).<sup>681</sup>

Satan is both a hostile enemy of God and his people and a conquered enemy. First, he is *hostile*:

- (1) **The God of This Age.** Paul clearly distinguishes between two kingdoms in the present age: the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of Satan.<sup>682</sup>
- (2) **Satan the Aggressor.** There is active engagement between the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of Satan. If Satan strives to maintain humans in his thrall, he also attempts to regain

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<sup>679</sup> D. G. Reid, “Satan, Devil,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1993), 862.

<sup>680</sup> Ibid.

<sup>681</sup> Ibid., 863-64.

<sup>682</sup> Ibid., 864.

those who have been lost to Christ and he resists Paul, a leading opponent in the battle for human lives.<sup>683</sup>

- (3) **Satan As an Instrument of Divine Will.** Satan's opposition is carried out under the sovereignty of God. The theological perspective that evil can be used for divine purposes, even as a means of executing divine wrath and discipline, is a theme familiar from the OT.<sup>684</sup>

Second, he is *conquered*:

In Romans 16:20 Paul expresses his victorious confidence that “the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.” . . . While the Gospels point to the defeat of Satan in the cross and resurrection (cf., e.g., Lk 22:1-6, 53; Jn 12:31; 14:30; 16:11), Paul looks back to Christ's triumph at the cross over the “principalities and powers” (Col 2:15; cf. 1 Cor 2:6-8). It is difficult to imagine that Paul would not have affirmed a proleptic triumph over Satan at the cross, for he speaks confidently of the defeat at the cross of the personified powers of sin, death, flesh, and even the Law . . . . Moreover, texts such as Galatians 1:4 (“he delivered us from the present evil age”) and Colossians 1:12 (“he has rescued us from the power of darkness”) imply a defeat of Satanic power reminiscent of God's victory in the Exodus. But this defeat, though real, is only provisional. Satan is still a potent and aggressive force of evil seeking to thwart and upset the work of God in Christ.<sup>685</sup>

### **General Scholarly Comment**

Finally, we conclude the brief with some general comment on this final section of Ephesians on the whole.

#### ***Peter T. O'Brien***

This final section of the exhortatory material of Ephesians, in which the readers are urged to be strong in the Lord and to put on God's mighty armour as they engage in a spiritual warfare with the powers of evil, occupies a highly significant place in the epistle. The paragraph not only ends the paraenetic material begun in 4:1, but it also serves as the climax of the letter as a whole, bringing it to a conclusion. The paragraph is neither “an irrelevant appendix” to Ephesians nor “a parenthetical aside” within it but a crucial element to which the rest of the epistle has been pointing.<sup>686</sup>

Here the apostle looks at the Christian's responsibility of living in the world from a broader, that is, cosmic perspective. The moral issues with which he deals are not simply matters of personal preference, as many within our contemporary and postmodern world contend. On the contrary, they are essential elements in a larger struggle between the forces of good and evil. Throughout this paragraph on spiritual warfare Paul's sustained imagery is drawn from the prophecy of Isaiah, which describes the armour of Yahweh and his Messiah (11:4-5; 59:17; cf. 49:2; 52:7). The Isaianic references depict the Lord of hosts as a warrior dressed for battle as he goes forth to vindicate his people. The “full armour of God” which the readers are urged to put on as they engage in a deadly spiritual warfare (v. 11) is Yahweh's own armour, which he and his Messiah have worn and which is now provided for his people as they engage in

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<sup>683</sup> Ibid., 865.

<sup>684</sup> Ibid., 866-66.

<sup>685</sup> Ibid., 866.

<sup>686</sup> O'Brien, *Ephesians*, 457.

battle. . . . Paul uses battle imagery as he calls them to stand firm in the midst of the spiritual warfare that is already in progress.<sup>687</sup>

At the same time, a number of concerns within the whole letter are brought back to the readers' attention in an emphatic way. The recapitulation of various issues, themes, and terminology from the earlier sections of the letter is very impressive, as several recent writers have shown. For example, the imperative to be strong in the Lord (6:10) brings to mind God's power, which was manifested in Christ's resurrection and exaltation, and is now available to believers (1:19-20). The imperative regarding divine empowering also has links with believers' strengthening through the Spirit (3:16) and the praise that God's power is at work among them (3:20). Often the connections between motifs in Ephesians 1-3 and 6:10-20 highlight the tension between what has already been achieved in Christ, so that believers now experience the life of the "new age", and this present evil age where the powers are active and in which believers now live.<sup>688</sup>

### **Frank Thielman**

Paul concludes the main part of his letter with a stirring call to arms and to prayer in light of all that he has said up to this point. "Henceforth" [*tou loipou*; 6:10] his readers should be strong in the mighty strength of God by putting on the armor that God provides and being devoted to constant prayer. Only in this way will they be able to "stand" against the onslaught of the devil and his cosmic allies. . . .<sup>689</sup>

The purpose of the section is clear. It exhorts the letter's readers, in light of all that has been said, to be strong in the Lord. In 1:17-23, Paul reported to his readers that when he prayed for them, he asked God to enlighten the eyes of their hearts so that they might understand the massive power that God has placed at their disposal through the risen and victorious Christ. This power has given them victory over "the Ruler of the realm of the air" (2:2, 6) and has constituted them as a unified people. Paul can describe this unified people by using the imagery of a newly created "human being" (2:15; cf. 4:11-16) and of the "dwelling place" of God's Spirit (2:19-22). As a unified church, they are the primary evidence that God's plan to unite all things in heaven and on earth in Christ (1:9-10) is being successfully executed (3:6), and so the church serves as a witness to the enemy powers of the cosmos that their defeat remains secure (3:10). This critical unity, however, needs to be worked out in practical ways in the day-to-day interaction of believers with each other (4:1-16; 4:20-5:2; 5:15-6:9) and with the unbelieving world (4:17-19; 5:3-14).<sup>690</sup>

With this concluding call to arms and exhortation to pray, Paul draws these themes together and succinctly outlines the task that lies ahead for his readers. God's great strength is available to them in Christ (1:19-23), but they must be empowered in this great strength (6:10). They have been rescued from following the Course of this world, the Ruler of the realm of the air (2:2), but they must recognize the strategic cleverness of their foe, who is not blood and flesh, and that the enemy's defeat, although certain, has not yet been accomplished (6:11-12). They know the truth (1:13; 4:21, 24-25; 5:9), understand righteousness (4:24; 5:9), and have been prepared for battle by the gospel of peace (2:14-15, 17; 4:3). They have exercised faith in the gospel (1:13; 2:8; 3:12, 17) and through it have received the Spirit and salvation (1:13; 2:8). Now they must "put on," "take up," and "receive" these gifts anew and in the present time (6:11, 13, 14-15, 17). In this way they will be able "to stand" [*stēnai*; 6:11, 13],

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<sup>687</sup> Ibid., 457-58.

<sup>688</sup> Ibid., 458.

<sup>689</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 411.

<sup>690</sup> Ibid., 411-12.

“stand” [*stētei*; 6:14], and “to withstand” [*antistēnai*; 6:13 NRSV] the onslaught of the devil and the cosmic powers aligned with him.<sup>691</sup>

### **Clinton E. Arnold**

In this passage, Paul brings to a conclusion the moral exhortation he began in 4:1, where he appealed to believers “to walk worthily of the calling to which you were called.” This injunction to give careful attention to how they walk is repeated throughout this second half of the letter (4:17; 5:2, 8, 15). Here Paul reveals that it may be more difficult to obey God and advance his kingdom purposes than many believers realize.

The aim of walking worthily of God is actually a profound struggle that goes beyond simply putting forth more effort or overcoming human obstacles. There are extremely powerful spiritual beings that strategize and carry out plans to derail the best intentions of Christians to live out God’s call in their lives. This theme of powerful supernatural opposition to the people of God can be traced throughout the letter. These are the powers who held humanity in bondage before the redemptive work of Christ (2:2) and now threaten to find an inroad and set up a base of operations in the lives of people who have come to know Christ (4:27).

The prominent themes of union with Christ and the new identity of believers come to a climax in 6:10-20 because it is through their relationship and all that it entails that believers are strengthened to resist the powerful attacks from the evil one and his emissaries. The readers are admonished to be strong “in the Lord,” that is, through growing deeper in a present, dynamic relationship of dependence on the one who is powerful enough to do more than they could ask or even imagine (see 3:20). Simultaneously, they are called to grow into a self-awareness of their new identity. This involves becoming profoundly cognizant of the changes that have occurred in their lives now that they have come to a knowledge of the truth, received righteousness, experienced salvation, been endowed with the gift of the Spirit, and are now able to exercise increasing faith in God.<sup>692</sup>

### **Dictionary of Paul and His Letters**

In Ephesians 6 the theme of divine weaponry, an image also employed in 1 Thessalonians 5:8 and Romans 13:12, is developed in memorable fashion . . . . Paul points out that the enemy of the church does not consist of “flesh and blood” enemies (like those of the old Israel). God’s people are now engaged with enemies in the form of principalities, powers and “the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Eph 6:12). These powers are under the direction of their leader “the devil,” whose schemes (*methodeiai*) they carry out against the church. While Israel was organized and regulated as the army of God in the wilderness, dependent on the victorious power of Yahweh, the church is outfitted in spiritual weaponry and finds her strength in the Lord and in the power of his might (Eph 6:10). With the “shield of faith” believers can “quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one” (Eph 6:16).<sup>693</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Being “in Christ” and finding our identity in him alone is the heart of salvation and what it means to live in a way that increasingly allows us to become what God intends for us. But this does not mean that life will be grand. Being in Christ does mean living in the grace, peace, and joy that the Holy Spirit imparts to us. But often these things come to us through great pain. To be in Christ necessarily means to be *not* in the world (1 John 2:15-17). To not be in the world means to be hated by the world. Jesus told his disciples, “You will be hated by all for my name’s sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved” (Matt

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<sup>691</sup> Ibid., 412.

<sup>692</sup> Arnold, *Ephesians*, 435.

<sup>693</sup> Reid, “Satan, Devil,” 866.

10:22), and, “A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you” (John 15:20). We are hated. We are in a war. We are despised by the cosmic forces that conspire against us, either within or outside of us. There is perhaps no greater text in Scripture that testifies to this reality than here in Ephesians 6. To be loved by Christ is to be hated by the enemy. We must armor up if we are going to survive.