



EPHESIANS

A Worthy Walk

“Therefore, I, the prisoner of the Lord,
implore you to walk in a manner worthy
of the calling with which you have been called.”

Ephesians 4:1



A Commentary by Aaron Ferguson

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Ephesians

A Worthy Walk

Purpose

To *explain* what Christ has done for us and to *challenge* us to live a life that reflects our redemption

Summary

While this letter may have been to provide an update on Paul's confinement (6:21, 22), it is much more than that. It is a field manual for the people of the Church, reminding us of the circumstances from which Christ has rescued us and admonishing us to live in a manner worthy of their redemption. Knowing that the church at Ephesus would experience tremendous difficulties (Acts 20:28-30; Rev. 2:1-7), it is not surprising that Paul would take time to encourage those people in their faith. While the first three chapters of Paul's letter are more doctrinal in nature (orthodoxy), the last three chapters are more practical, laying out specific guidelines for Christian conduct (orthopraxy).

Themes

- **Spiritual Blessings:** The opening of Paul's letter (1:1-14) recounts a multitude of spiritual benefits that we have been afforded through Christ (1:3).
- **Reconciliation:** Paul writes of two great acts of reconciliation. The first is that of God reconciling sinners to Himself; the second is that of reconciling Jews with Gentiles (2:1-22).
- **Mystery:** A mystery is something that is once hidden but revealed in time. Several mysteries are unveiled in the New Testament, one being the inclusion of Jews and Gentiles in one body called the Church (3:5, 9). The idea of the Church was hidden from Old Testament saints.
- **A Worthy Walk:** The second half of Paul's letter (4-6) hinges on this transition, that our lives reflect externally what Christ has done for us internally (4:1). That change only comes as we submit to the leadership and influence of the Holy Spirit (5:15-6:9).
- **Spiritual Warfare:** Paul challenges us to stand firm against our spiritual enemy, which can only be accomplished with spiritual resources (6:10-24), not in the flesh.

Leading Ideas

- God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ (1:1-23).
- We were once dead in our sins, but God, in His mercy, made us alive in Christ (2:1-7).
- Salvation is a work of God, made possible by the grace and faith He extended to us (2:8-10).
- Christ broke down the dividing wall between Jews and Gentiles (2:11-3:13).
- God is able to do more in and through us than we could ever ask or think (3:14-21).
- Our lives should be a clear reflection of what Christ has done for us (4:1-6).
- God has given each Christian a spiritual gift in order to build up the body of Christ (4:7-16).
- Our lives in Christ should reflect a genuine change from the old self to the new (4:17-32).
- Children of the light do not play around with or participate in the deeds of darkness (5:1-14).
- We make the most of our time when we submit to the influence of the Holy Spirit (5:15-21).
- Under the influence of the Spirit, God will strengthen the bonds of marriage (5:22-33).
- Under the influence of the Spirit, God will affect your relationships (6:1-9).
- The Christian life is a spiritual battle that requires us to utilize spiritual resources (6:10-24).

Penman

The Apostle Paul

Recipients

The churches in Ephesus and the surrounding area (Acts 19:10)

Date Written

Since Paul mentioned his imprisonment, the letter should be dated around 60-62 AD, when he was in Rome (Acts 28:16-31).

Key Verses

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ."

Ephesians 1:3
(Key to Chapters 1-3)

"Therefore, I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called."

Ephesians 4:1
(Key to Chapters 4-6)

The Story Behind the Letter

An Extended Intro to Ephesians

Leading Idea

Positive change in a community is most effective and enduring when individual's hearts are changed.

“Gods made with hands are
no gods at all...”

Acts 19:26

When a riot broke out in Ephesus over Paul's preaching against idols, the town clerk calmed everyone by saying, “What man is there who does not know that the image of Artemis fell down from heaven? These are undeniable facts” (*Acts 19:35, 36*). When men are left to themselves, they invent their own gods, their own religions, and their own means of salvation and worship, but what truth, what reality, or what effectiveness can these things have if they are man-made? Does it make sense that a fallen, corruptible being, as man is, prone to error and evil, can erect anything that can save his soul? Does it make sense that man, who is a material being, can salvage the part of him that is immaterial?

“I recognize Jesus, and I know about Paul, but who are you?”

Acts 19:15

There is the question, “Does anyone know of us in hell?”

Do the demons know us? Are they concerned about our work? Are they hearing so much about us that they plot and plan to undermine our efforts? When we preach on Sunday, when we visit with our neighbors or co-workers, when we attend that Bible study, or share the gospel with a family member, do the devils take notice? Or do they hear our names, shrug their shoulders, and say, “Who is that?”

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Ephesus was once a prosperous port city on the west coast of Asia Minor, capital of the Roman province there. It was so important, that the Persians, Greeks, Macedonians, and Romans all occupied and controlled its commerce. It was most famous for its temple to Artemis or Diana, one of the wonders of the ancient world. Artemis was the goddess of the hunt, of the moon, and of fertility. Much of the town's economy was centered on tourism and the worship of the goddess (*Acts 19:24-27*), not to mention numerous other Greco-Roman idols. Since Artemis was the goddess of fertility, all manner of sexually perverted acts infested temple life. Participating in sexual activities was a way to thank or praise the goddess, which should be no surprise; immorality always follows on the heels of idolatry. While Ephesus seemed to thrive on the outside, it was spiritually dark and dead on the inside. Citizens were intrigued with magic and sorcery; Paul noted a strong presence of demonic oppression there.

Paul was introduced to Ephesus on his second missionary journey (48-51 AD, *Acts 18:18-22*). He did not stay long, but, rather, he left Priscilla and Aquila behind (*18:26*), possibly to develop a church until he could return and spend more time with the people. On his third trip through Asia Minor (*52-57 AD, 19:1-20:1*), Paul invested three years in Ephesus and became endeared to the people there (*20:17-38*). When he departed, he appointed young Timothy to pastor in his place (*1 Tim. 1:3, 20*). Paul never again returned to Ephesus; he was arrested in Jerusalem, imprisoned in Caesarea, and ultimately stood trial in Rome. It was during his time in Rome that he wrote this letter to the Ephesians (*3:1, 13; 4:1*).

What we have, in the story behind the letter to the Ephesians (*Acts 19*), is an example of how believers can have the greatest impact on a community. Many Christians today fall prey to the idea that positive change is accomplished most effectively through external means, for example by establishing the right organizations or charities, by convincing the masses through the media, religious books, or debates, by electing enough conservative leaders and utilizing the power of local government, or by instituting enough moral laws to keep evil at bay. While all of these options, in and of themselves, are good steps to take, they will never affect the kind of change that Paul did in Ephesus in just two years. Now, granted the Apostle Paul was empowered by God in a unique way for the times, but he also used a method that is tried and true, one that we can and should use today to impact the communities in which we live. It is really quite simple -- *Paul preached the gospel and led people to Christ.*

Upon a cursory glance of life in Ephesus, we can gather quickly that the people there were plagued with several weighty issues – sickness and disease, evil spirits, magic and sorcery, rampant idolatry, pagan spirituality, and the love of money, to name a few. However, after mobilizing local believers and sharing the gospel daily himself (*19:1-10*), so that “all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord,” those who believed “came and disclosed their practices” (*v.19*). Furthermore, so many people were repenting from their idolatry that local businessmen who peddled and encouraged idol worship were losing considerable amounts of money (*v.23-28*). In other words, *external change took place in that community when individual's hearts were changed internally*. Notice that Paul did not start a new para-church organization, he did not print and pass out leaflets, he did not organize a protest rally around the statue of Artemis, and he did not attempt to influence elections or run for office. Again, while none of these things are wrong, they are attempts to affect change from the outside in, whereas Paul used a more effective method of *changing the community by changing people from inside out*.

Another group that found the gospel effective was the demons. They were also quick to mobilize and obstruct the church's efforts in that region. When God's people affect change by using the gospel and impact lives on a large scale like this, the demons take notice. However, while they may distract and discourage our efforts, may we understand that they cannot defeat the Church or the gospel.

Ephesians 1:1, 2

¹“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, by the will of God, to the saints who are at Ephesus and who are faithful in Christ Jesus: ² Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Paul an Apostle

*Acts 9:22, 26
1 Corinthians 9:1; 15:8, 9
Galatians 1:1, 13-17*

By the Will of God

A Divine Course Correction

Leading Idea

By the will of God we are what we are – called, saved, and useful.

After investing three years in Ephesus (*Acts 19:1-20:1*), Paul left behind a healthy church with young Timothy as its pastor (*1 Tim. 1:3, 20*). Paul himself, though, never returned; rather, he was arrested in Jerusalem, imprisoned in Caesarea, and, finally, stood trial in Rome. It was during his time in Rome that he wrote this letter to the Ephesians (*3:1, 13; 4:1; 6:22, 23*). His purpose was to encourage them in their faith, by reminding them of Christ’s redemption and His expectations.

Although Paul’s salutation is brief, there are some important pieces to note. First, he called himself an apostle. The word “apostle” simply means “one sent,” as one with a special mission. Those apostles with a capital “A” comprised a special category. They witnessed the risen Savior, they established and governed the early Church (under Christ), and they had authority to speak and write the words of God, as a prophet would in the Old Testament. Paul was called to be an Apostle when God pursued him on the road to Damascus. He referred to his Apostleship at the beginning of the letter to establish his rightful authority to speak into the lives of the Ephesians.

Second, Paul pointed out that he was an Apostle “by the will of God.” It was not Paul’s intention to be a Christian or a friend of the Church, much less an Apostle (*Galatians 1:1*). In other words, Paul had his own plans for life and God had His plans. The Lord, in His grace, did not allow Paul to fulfill his intentions; instead, He had better things in mind for Paul. We should be grateful that, by God’s will, Paul’s life was changed, for we are the beneficiaries of his divine course correction. Likewise, while we have our plans and intentions for life, we should be grateful that the Lord also has a plan for us, and, by His grace, His will is accomplished for our good and His glory. When was the last time you experienced a “by the will of God” moment in your life?

Third, the letter is addressed to the “saints who are at Ephesus.” The word “saints” refers to the “holy ones,” believers in Christ. Although we are not holy by our own doing, and we regularly do un-saintly things, we are made holy through Christ. His blood makes us clean, and, consequently, God sees us as holy, as if we had never sinned. Thus, we are saints because of Christ. If Paul were writing to your church, he would include you in his address to all the saints.

Next, Paul used a term to describe the saints, those “who are faithful in Christ.” While all believers are “saints,” not all believers are faithful. Faithful saints are reliable, trustworthy, disciplined, and consistent in their walk. Faithful saints strive to live the Christian life to the best of their ability and do not make excuses for their unfaithfulness. Which type of saint are you?

Finally, Paul’s salutation ended with two greetings, “grace and peace to you,” a regular opening for his letters. Grace is the unmerited favor of God, a gift, not something we earn. Peace is not referring to quiet circumstances but to quiet spirits. In other words, Paul does not wish that the Ephesians were living peaceful lives but lives of peace. One can be still on the inside while all hell is breaking loose on the outside. Have you taken time lately to recognize God’s grace in your life? Have you realized that God is your source of peace in the midst of your busy-ness? Grace and peace to you.

Every Spiritual Blessing

The Blessings of God

³“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, ⁴ just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him...”

“It is good that God chose me before I was born, because He would have never chosen me after I was born.” *C.H. Spurgeon*

Doctrine of Election

Acts 13:48
Romans 8:28-30
Romans 9:11-13; 11:7
1 Thessalonians 1:4, 5
2 Thessalonians 2:13
2 Timothy 1:9
1 Peter 1:1; 2:9
Revelation 13:7, 8

God’s election cannot be based on His foreknowledge of our “good” life or our faith; if that were the case then, His choice would be swayed by our works and, therefore, would be conditional, meaning salvation would be by our own doing, not His. However, salvation is not of works (*Eph. 2:8, 9*).

Election should encourage believers and give them even more confidence in the sovereignty of God. It should also be a humble reminder of God’s mercy and grace.

Election should never be a reason to boast, for salvation is God’s work, not ours.

Election should also encourage us to share the Gospel. Knowing that God has chosen some to be saved means that there is a good chance that we will have success in evangelism.

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Leading Idea

God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

After his brief salutation, Paul launched his letter with an immediate reminder of the manifold blessings of God (v.3-14), spiritual blessings, that is, not physical. So many times we consider blessings to fall on the material side (health, wealth), and we neglect to consider the myriad of ways that we are blessed by the immaterial riches of God in Christ. If we look at life through the lens of eternity, what is more important, that which is provided on earth or that which is secured in heaven? In the next stretch of verses (v.3-14), which is all one long sentence in the Greek, Paul lists many of these aforementioned blessings:

- God chose us before He formed the world (v.4)
- God made us holy and blameless (v.4)
- God predestined us for adoption (v.5)
- God blessed us with His glorious grace (v.6)
- God redeemed us and has forgiven us (v.7)
- God lavished His grace upon us (v.7, 8)
- God has made known to us the mystery of His will and gives us purpose (v.9)
- God revealed His plan for us (v.10)
- God gave us an inheritance (v.11), guaranteed by the Holy Spirit (v.14)
- We are the praise of God’s glory (v.12, 15)
- We were sealed by the Holy Spirit (v.13)

Note that all of these blessings are a result of our position before God in Christ. These blessings have not been supplied to us by our own doing; rather they have been given because of our right standing before the Father, because of the work of the Son. Paul made this fact very clear by reminding the reader 11 times through various phrases: “in Christ” (v.3, 10, 12), “in Him” (v.4, 7, 9, 10, 13 twice), “in the Beloved” (v.6), “through Christ” (v.5). Being found in Christ is a wonderful position, seeing how we have been “in Adam” since birth, condemned in our trespasses. The first half of *Ephesians* (Chapters 1-3) speaks to our newfound position in Christ, while the second half (4-6) speaks to our expected practices in Christ. While our practices are not yet perfect, our position forever will be.

Speaking of our position before the Father, consider our first spiritual blessing – “that God chose us before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him” (v.4). This verse refers to the doctrine of election, the fact that before creation, God chose those people to be saved from sin, apart from any conditions or merits of their own; the choice was by His good pleasure alone. Further in the passage (v.11), Paul stated that “we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose, who works all things after the counsel of His own will,” meaning that God does as He pleases; no thing and no person sways His divine decisions.

The doctrine of election frustrates some people for two reasons; it is difficult to understand and it seems unfair. No doubt, the subject of election is difficult to grasp; if God has chosen those to be saved, and He does all the work of salvation, then how does that allow for genuine repentance and faith on our part? You see the dilemma. However, what we are told in Scripture is that followers in Christ are elected and, yet, to follow Christ one must repent and believe in Him by faith. Both are true. How, I don’t know. That’s why He is God and I am not. I believe what the Bible says. God chose me before time, for which I am grateful; in my fallen sinful nature, I would have never chosen Him. To the point that election is unfair, this viewpoint assumes that God is obligated to save everyone, which He is not. He does not have to save anyone; He is merciful to save any at all (*Romans 9:20-24*).

Ephesians 1:5, 6

⁴“...In love, ⁵He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, ⁶to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.”

How Deep the Father's Love for Us

Stuart Townend

How deep the Father's love for us,
how vast beyond all measure,
that He should give His only Son
to make a wretch His treasure.

How great the pain of searing loss;
the Father turns His face away,
as wounds which mar the chosen One,
bring many sons to glory.

Behold the Man upon a cross,
my sin upon His shoulders.
ashamed I hear my mocking voice
call out among the scoffers.

It was my sin that left Him there
until it was accomplished.
His dying breath has brought me life;
I know that it is finished

I will not boast in anything,
No gifts, no power, no wisdom;
But, I will boast in Jesus Christ,
His death and resurrection.

Why should I gain from His reward?
I cannot give an answer;
But, this I know with all my heart
His wounds have paid my ransom.

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All in the Family

Divine Adoption

Leading Idea

Through Christ, we have been adopted into God's family, for His glory and good purposes.

Paul opens his letter to the Ephesians with a wonderful list of spiritual blessings which we have in Christ (v.3-14). We have already considered the first blessing, the fact that before creation, *God chose* those people whom He would save from their sins; this truth refers to the *doctrine of election*. Those who are of the Elect are made “holy and blameless before God” through salvation in Christ.

The next spiritual blessing Paul mentions (v.5) is that God has “predestined us to adoption as His sons.” While predestination is related to election, they are not the same. Election refers to the beginning of God’s dealing with us in a gracious way; it is the first step in the salvation process. Predestination is the next action in that process, by which God determined to adopt those whom He elected to become members of His divine family. Adoption is altogether an act of love on His part, for He could have forgiven our sins and given us right legal standing before Him without bringing us into His family. The act of divine adoption intimates God’s desire for salvation to be much more personal in nature. He brought us back to Himself; we could not be near to God at first because of our sin, but through Christ’s death, we have been forgiven and made “holy and blameless before Him.”

A small and often overlooked phrase in this action is that God adopted us “as sons.” The term “sons of God” is not a discriminatory remark slighting females. Females are included in this phrase as well. So then, why didn’t Paul use the term “sons and daughters of Christ”? In the Jewish culture, as the males were the leaders of their families (God’s intention), the males were the natural heirs of their father’s resources (wealth, land, and belongings). Females in that culture did not receive any inheritance, because they were taken care of by males in marriage. Thus, it would not have made any sense for Paul to say, you are “daughters of God,” because daughters received no material benefits from their fathers. Sons, however, received an inheritance from their fathers; therefore, for Paul to write that “all of you are sons of God” was to say that even female Christians will benefit from the inheritance of God through Christ. Thus, the term “sons of God” is an elevation of females, not a discrimination or slight against them (see also *Galatians 3:26-4:7; 2 Corinthians 6:17, 18*).

An interesting note here is that earthly parents cannot give to their adopted children any of their physical characteristics; their nature cannot be infused into an adopted child. However, with our adoption in Christ, God has shared with us the nature of His son, and He has infused in us His characteristics (*John 15:15; Romans 8:15, 28-30*).

Next, Paul stated that our divine adoption was intentional, “according to the kind intention of God’s will,” not accidental. What could possibly be His purpose for our adoption? It was to bring Him glory (*Ephesians 1:12, 14*). Paul mentioned in another letter that “it is God who is at work in us, both to will and to work His for His good pleasure” (*Philippians 2:13*; see also *2 Thessalonians 1:11, 12*).

Finally, Paul referred to God’s grace, which was “freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.” The Beloved here, of course, is Christ (*Matt. 3:17; Col. 1:13*), and God has freely poured out His grace through Christ. To extend grace is to give to someone what they do not deserve. In our case, as sinners, condemned to death, we deserved nothing but judgment in hell; yet, God chose to pour out His love on us, not sparing His own Son, but delivering Him up for us all, that we might live (*Romans 8:32*).

Two great hymns come to mind; one is in the margin, and the other is called “Grace Greater Than Our Sin.” The first stanza says, “Marvelous grace of our loving Lord, grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt! Yonder on Calvary’s mount outpoured, there where the blood of the Lamb was spilt.” The chorus is wonderful, “Grace, grace, God's grace, grace that will pardon and cleanse within; grace, grace, God's grace, grace that is greater than all our sin!” Praise God for His wonderful grace!

Ephesians 1:7-10

⁷“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace⁸ which He lavished on us. In all wisdom and insight⁹ He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him,¹⁰ with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth.”

Salvation in Christ, the Great Mystery

John 4:25
Romans 16:25, 26
Ephesians 3:1-6
Ephesians 5:32; 6:19
Colossians 1:26, 27
Colossians 2:2; 4:3
1 Timothy 3:9

Paid in Full

The Redemption of Sinners

Leading Idea

God paid our debt to sin with the riches of His grace in Christ.

Paul continues his list of spiritual blessings which we have in Christ (v.3). We have already considered the first few blessings (v.4-6), namely that we have been chosen by God before creation to be blameless and holy and that He has predestined us to be adopted as part of His family. Now, it is time to look at what Paul included next (v.7-10).

We are told that “in Christ, we have redemption through His blood...” (v.7). To redeem means to purchase, to buy back, or to ransom something or someone for a price. In our case, we were enslaved to sin, which came with a curse -- death; while we were unable to purchase our own freedom, Christ was able to pay for our lives with His own. From the beginning, God established the price for sin – blood (*Lev. 17:11*); something had to die (thus, the Old Testament sacrificial system). Therefore, the price for our redemption from sin was expensive, the sacrifice of God’s Son, Jesus Christ (*Rom. 3:23-25; Heb. 9:22; 1 Pet 1:18, 19; Rev. 5:8, 10*). He became our curse for us so that we might be set free from our bondage to sin (*Gal. 3:13*). He became our ransom (*Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45*). We have been bought with a price, so we are not our own but His possession. Thanks to Christ, our sin debt has been paid in full! We have been redeemed!

As part of the redemption process, God extended to us “the forgiveness of our trespasses.” In my mind, forgiveness is altogether separate from redemption. He could have redeemed us from the curse of sin without forgiving us of our sin and bridging the gap between us. Forgiveness intimates atonement or reconciliation, making things right between us; forgiveness involves removing the stain of sin and conforming us to the righteousness of Christ (*Rom. 3:23-26; 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 9:15; Eph. 1:14; 2:13; 4:30*). Forgiveness is an act of grace, undeserved and unmerited on our part, simply an extension of His love which He chose to pour out or “lavish on us” (v.8).

Another spiritual blessing that Paul included was that we are privileged in the New Testament, in that God has “made known to us the mystery of His will.” A mystery, of course, is something that is previously unknown but that is slowly revealed in time, as an investigator may progressively discover evidence and dispel the mystery of a crime. To Bible students, this process is called “progressive revelation,” the fact that God revealed His plan of salvation through a Messiah in stages or degrees. Adam knew less about the Messiah (*Gen. 3:15*) than Abraham did (*Gen. 12:1-3; 22:18*), and Abraham knew less about Him than Moses or David or Isaiah and so on. God pulled the sheet off and unveiled His purposes slowly and kept many generations guessing at His end game. His end game was salvation through Jesus Christ, for both Jews and Gentiles, and the redemption of a people from all nations called the Church (already mentioned in v.7, 8). Since these things were a mystery, no one saw them coming. Paul will tell us more about this mystery later in the letter (3:1-6).

Finally, Paul notes that God has “summed up all things in Christ,” meaning that He is the culmination of all things. When the time was right (*Gal. 4:4*), God enacted His plan which was “suitable to the fullness of the times” and reconciled fallen man to Himself through Christ’s mediation of a New Covenant. The curse of sin has been lifted, the sting of death has been broken, and justification has been decreed. Furthermore, all authority has been given to Christ (*Matt. 28:19*) in heaven and on earth; He has been given the throne of the Kingdom and shall return to establish His reign forever. In time, all things will be completed and all things remaining will be united in Christ.

¹¹“Also, we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, ¹² to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory.”

A Divine Inheritance

Benefits of Joining God's Family

Leading Idea

As adopted members of God's family, we have been given a divine inheritance.

We are still reading through Paul's list of spiritual blessings which we have in Christ (v.3). We have already considered the fact that we have been chosen by God before creation to be blameless and holy and that He has predestined us to be adopted into His family (v.4-6). We have also discovered that in Christ we have redemption and forgiveness through the grace that God has lavished on us and that He has made known to us the mystery of salvation, that which has been hidden from those who lived before Christ (v.7-10).

The next spiritual blessing Paul highlights is that, because of our adoption into God's family (v.5), “we have obtained an inheritance” (v.11). As part of the elect, chosen before creation (v.4), redeemed, forgiven, and adopted into God's family, we are now the undeserving recipients of a number of benefits. As we are God's “children,” we are now His heirs (*Galatians 3:26-4:7*); as “sons of God,” divine heirs, we shall receive an inheritance (actually we have already received it, v.11).

An earthly inheritance could incorporate all sorts of things, for example property, assets, or titles that are passed down from predecessors to heirs through death. The heir receives the free inheritance for the purpose of possessing and enjoying what now belongs to him. Our spiritual inheritance has been transferred to us also through death, the death of Christ on the cross. All that we have been given to possess and enjoy has been afforded by His precious sacrifice. Apart from Him, we receive nothing, not redemption, forgiveness, divine adoption, nor an inheritance. All we are and all that we have are because of Christ.

Our spiritual inheritance includes benefits that we can enjoy now as well as benefits that we will enjoy later. For example, benefits that we have already received include justification (right standing) before God because the righteousness of Christ has been given to us (*2 Cor. 5:21*). We have also been made new creatures in Christ (*2 Cor. 5:17*), free from the power and penalty of sin (*Gal. 5:1*). We have inherited eternal life with our Father in heaven (*John 3:16; Rom. 6:23*). We have been given the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, who enables us to live the Christian life (*Acts 1:8; 1 Cor. 3:16*). We have been given God's Word, and, because of the Spirit within us, we have the ability to understand and apply it (*1 Cor. 2:10-14*); and, we are told that we have been given everything that we need for life and godliness (*2 Peter 1:3*). While we have inherited these blessings and so much more, we have also many untold benefits waiting for us in heaven (*John 14:1-3; Col. 1:11, 12*).

It is, indeed, wonderful to think on these things. It doesn't take long to get overwhelmed with all that God has done for us. The question I have is why, why has He done this, and why me? I don't know the answer; no one does. All we can point to are the truths of Scripture, in which we are told that “we were predestined according to God's purpose” (v.11). He is the sovereign God, who “works all things after the counsel of His own will” (v.11, meaning that He does what He pleases; no one advises Him), and He chose to do it this way. I had nothing to do with His choice; His blessings fall on me unmerited, unearned. All I can do is praise Him.

Paul reminds us that everything God does is for His glory, which also explains the purpose behind all that we have discussed, so that “we, the first to hope in Christ, would be the praise of His glory” (v.12). The phrase “the first to hope in Christ” probably describes the first Jews to believe that Jesus was the Messiah, a group in which Paul included himself. However, it is safe to say that all predestined followers of Christ (including us) were chosen for the purpose of glorifying God. Have we fully recognized all that God has afforded us, and are we living in such a way as to reflect well on Him?

¹³“In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation, having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise,¹⁴ who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God’s own possession, to the praise of His glory.”

Free to Sin?

One of the arguments raised against eternal security is that it encourages sinful living. Since salvation has been sealed for believers, then, they could technically live anyway they wanted. While this may be true, it would be contradictory to do so, a sign that, perhaps, the person was not genuinely converted.

First, Paul tells us that believers have “died to sin” and have been “united with Christ (*Romans 6:1-14; 2 Cor. 5:17*). To continue in sin would be inconsistent with the new direction of their lives. There will be a change in thoughts, passions, interests, and decisions.

Second, Paul tells us that the Holy Spirit indwells believers and that He is conforming them to the image of Christ (*1 Cor. 3:16; Romans 8:29*). To continue in sin would be evidence that He is not at work in their lives and, therefore, may not be indwelling them.

Third, John tells us that while Christians may be tempted and, at times, will sin, sin will not be a pattern in their lives (*1 John 3:3-10*). They will not be comfortable with sin’s presence but, instead, battle against it. Genuine believers will show signs of sanctification.

Sealed for Eternity

Security of Salvation

Leading Idea

One of the roles of the Holy Spirit is to secure our salvation.

For several verses now, Paul has been listing the spiritual blessings which we have been given in Christ (v.3). So far, we have discussed the fact that we (believers) have been chosen by God before creation and that He has predestined us to be adopted into His family (v.4-6). We have also discovered that in Christ we have redemption and forgiveness and that He has made known to us the mystery of salvation, that which has been hidden from those who lived before Christ (v.7-10). Finally, because of our adoption into God’s family (v.5), we have obtained an inheritance with numerous immediate and eternal benefits (v.11, 12).

The next blessing Paul mentions is that “we have been sealed by the Holy Spirit” (v.13), who is given to us “as a pledge of our inheritance” (v.14). What does Paul mean that we are sealed in the Spirit? First, for authenticity, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit “certifies” that one has indeed accepted Christ as his Savior (*Romans 8:16, 17*). Just as a letter from a king would include his royal seal, so we, as sons of God, have been given the Spirit to identify us as one of His children (*John 3:33; Acts 10:44, 47*). Second, as a means of preserving our inheritance until we can possess it ourselves, the Holy Spirit secures our salvation (*Eph. 4:30; 2 Cor. 1:22; 1 Peter 1:5; Rev. 7:2, 3*).

Does this mean that a Christian cannot lose his salvation? That is correct, because it was never his to lose. In other words, since salvation is a work of God (and not a work of our own), then it is His to lose, not ours. If we could lose our salvation, then salvation would be conditional, meaning based on our actions. In that case, we would never be able to keep or maintain our salvation. However, God’s love and the sacrifice of His Son is unconditional, a free gift, not based on any conditions or merits. Since that is true, we cannot lose what we did not earn, and God cannot lose what God intends to keep.

If one could lose his salvation (or lose it and gain it back somehow), that would present several problems. For example, pertaining to this letter, all of the spiritual blessings that Paul mentions that God has given us through Christ would be forfeited. Rather than being adopted into God’s family, we would be removed? Rather than being redeemed and forgiven, we would be unforgiven and returned to slavery; and, rather than receiving an inheritance (which we’ve already obtained), it would be revoked? Instead of being regenerated and made new (*John 3:3; Titus 3:5; 2 Cor. 5:17*), we would slip back into degeneration and be made old again? Rather than being justified before God (*Romans 5:1*), we would be considered un-justified? Wouldn’t these things prove God to be a liar, for He has promised things that we cannot have? Eternal life would not be eternal if it could be taken away (*John 3:16; Romans 6:23*). The motivation for our good works would be fear of losing our salvation rather than a response of love for our salvation.

God does not want us to live like this, not knowing whether or not we are saved. Would God predestine us to be justified and glorified (*Romans 8: 30*), if we could lose our salvation? No, Jesus promised that all of those who have been given to Him by the Father could not be “snatched out of His hands” (*John 10:28, 29; Jude 24, 25*). “Who will bring a charge against God’s elect?” (*Romans 8:33-39*), for “who can separate us from the love of God? Thank God He preserves us and we are not responsible to preserve ourselves.

Finally, I want to draw attention to how one obtains salvation and the eternal sealing by the Spirit. Paul wrote that it was through “hearing and believing” (v.13, *Romans 10:14-17*). God has chosen human means – communication -- to bring people to a saving knowledge of Christ. Thus, one of our purposes in this life is to share the truth of the Gospel with others, knowing that some of them God has chosen and so they will respond. Have I been faithful to share the Gospel when given the opportunity?

¹⁵ “For this reason, I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints, ¹⁶ do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers, ¹⁷ that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. ¹⁸ I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might...”

Unceasing Thanks

Paul's Prayer of Thanksgiving

Leading Idea

Thanking God for His blessings should be a constant, overflowing response in our prayer lives.

Still in the opening thoughts of his letter to the Ephesians and having just finished a list of spiritual blessings which we have been given in Christ (v.3-14), Paul transitions into sharing his prayer of thanksgiving for the people (v.15-23). The transitional phrase, “for this reason,” indicates the shift in Paul’s thoughts. “This reason” could point to the collection of diverse spiritual blessings which Paul had just recounted or it could refer to the fact that the Ephesians, “after listening to the message of truth, the gospel,” believed in Christ and received the indwelling Holy Spirit (v.13, 14). I favor the second position because Paul prays that the Spirit will give the Ephesians knowledge and wisdom and that He will enlighten their hearts (v.17, 18).

Just as the previous passage (v.3-14) was one long sentence in the original Greek language, so is Paul’s prayer here (v.15-23). As expected, Paul shares several concepts that we must grasp before proceeding with the letter.

First, Paul mentioned that he had “heard of the faith and love” which existed among the Ephesian Christians (v.15). Faith and love are signs of genuine conversion. While faith is a prerequisite for salvation (a gift from God, 2:8, 9), our faith in God should deepen after conversion; as we trust the Lord with little steps in little areas, our trust grows and our faith is strengthened. Furthermore, love for God’s people is always evidence of genuine believers. The Apostle John tells us that those who harbor the love of God in their hearts will not be able to help but love others (*John 13:34, 35; 1 John 4:16-18, 20; 5:1*). If someone were watching you and taking notes on your life, would they be able to confirm that faith and love are exhibited regularly?

Second, Paul wrote that he did not “cease giving thanks” for the Ephesians when mentioning them in his prayers (v.16). As Christians, we must learn to pray, to pray without ceasing, (*1 Thess. 5:17*) and to make thanksgiving a large part of our unceasing prayer. How often we pray for God to help us, to provide for us, and to protect us, and when He does, we fail to thank Him for what He’s done. Thanking God for His countless blessings should be a constant, overflowing response in our prayer lives. Furthermore, who are you mentioning in your prayers? Do you pray for people other than yourself? Make it a habit to pray for and to pray with people and see what God will do.

Third, in regards to what to pray for others, Paul’s letter offers suggestions. He prayed that God would give the Ephesians a “spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him” (v.17). It should be our passion, as well as our prayer for others, to know more of God, more of His nature, His character, His love towards us, and what He’s done for us through Christ. This knowledge and wisdom is revealed to us by the same Spirit that we received and who secured our salvation at conversion (v.14). In that vein of thought, Paul expressed other ways to voice the same prayer, that the “eyes of their hearts would be enlightened,” that they would “know what is the hope of His calling,” that they would understand the “riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,” and, finally, the “surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe.” These lofty descriptions all connect to the list of spiritual blessings that Paul had just recorded (v.3-14). His hope was that the Ephesians would grow in their understanding of these tremendous truths.

This prayer continues for several more verses (v.20-23), but Paul closes with some important thoughts about Christ. Thus, I would like to take time to consider these thoughts separately and, therefore, will address the second part of the prayer in the next passage.

Ephesians 1:20-23

^{19b} “...These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might ²⁰ which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. ²² And He put all things in subjection under His feet and gave Him a head over all things to the church ²³ which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”

Sitting at the Right Hand

Psalm 16:11
Matthew 26:64
Hebrews 1:3, 13
1 Peter 3:22

The Strength of His Might

The Great Power Within Us

Leading Idea

The power that raised Christ from the dead is the power that enables us to live the Christian life.

This passage (v.19b-23) is a continuation of Paul’s prayer (v.15-19a), which is one long sentence in the original Greek. In his prayer, Paul wrote that he did not “cease giving thanks” for the Ephesians because of the faith and love which they demonstrated (15, 16). Then, he prayed that the people there would be given “a spirit of wisdom and revelation of the knowledge of God” (v.17) and that “the eyes of their hearts would be enlightened, that they would know the hope of His calling, the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and the surpassing greatness of His power toward those who believe” (v.18, 19).

In regards to the “surpassing greatness of His power” (v.19), Paul adds that it is “in accordance with the working of the strength of His might, which He brought about in Christ when He raised Him from the dead” (v.19b, 20). In other words, the power of God that resurrected Christ from the grave is the same power that has been given to us, to affect in our lives what God has intended. Jesus said Himself that when the Holy Spirit comes upon us, we would receive power (*Acts 1:8; Col. 1:29*); the Greek word used for power here is our word for dynamite. The same Spirit by which Christ worked the miracles of His ministry has been given to all believers, to indwell them, to teach them, to convict them of sin, to conform them to the image of Christ (which is sanctification), and to equip them for the work of ministry. We lack nothing that we need to be effective representatives for Christ in our world, for “His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness” (2 *Peter 1:3*). This truth is often overlooked, as believers pray for God’s power, grace, strength, peace, etc., when all they need to do is receive all that God has given them.

It is important to note here that spiritual power is not an object but a person, the Holy Spirit. Often believers are misled to think that they just need more power in their lives to accomplish God’s will; thus, they pray for more power, as if they are attempting to obtain more authority, more ability, more effectiveness in their lives. This view of power is altogether unbiblical. All the power that we need (or will receive) has already been given to us in the Holy Spirit; and, since power is a Person, not an object, we don’t possess it, but rather He possesses us. For God’s power to be expressed in our lives, all we need do is surrender to the Spirit and make ourselves more available for Him to work. When we yield every aspect of life to Him in obedience to God’s Word, we can be an effective vessel in His hands, a powerful spiritual force for His glory.

Next, Paul describes the undisputed authority that has been given to Christ (v.21, 22). He is seated at the right hand of the Father, a place of privilege, distinction, and rule. He is far above all other rulers and has been given all authority in this age and the one to come (perhaps referring to the Millennial Reign). The Father has put all things in subjection under His feet, a fulfillment of the Psalmist’s prophecy (8:6: see also *Eph. 4:15; 5:23; Col. 1:18; Heb. 2:8*). Christ has also been given “the Name that is above all names, that at His name every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that He is Lord” (*Phil. 2:9-11*).

Paul’s point in stressing the authority that God has given Christ is that Christ is in our side (or I should say that we are on His side), for Christ has been given “to the Church” (v.22). As His followers, we will one day rule with Him. This truth should give us great confidence in the faith, for we are on the winning team, we have the conquering King, and all foes will be vanquished before us. We need not fear for our future, for we will be victorious because Christ is the Lord of all earthly and heavenly lords.

1" You were dead in your trespasses and sins, 2 in which you formerly walked, according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. 3 Among them we too all formerly lives in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest; 4 but God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace have you been saved) 6 and raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."

But God

Hopeless to Hope-filled

Leading Idea

We were once dead in our sins, but God, in His mercy, made us alive in Christ.

After a lengthy introduction to his letter, which described all of the spiritual blessings that we have been afforded through Christ (1:1-14), as well as the blessings that Paul himself had been praying for the people of Ephesus (1:15-23), the Apostle shifts gears (which perhaps explains the chapter break) to remind the Ephesians of two more blessings – how God has reconciled them to Himself (v.1-10) and how He has reconciled them, as Gentiles, to the Jews through the Church (v.11-22). Both of these acts are a mystery that requires close examination. Let's focus on the blessing of salvation first.

To describe the salvation experience, Paul starts with one's status before Christ – spiritually dead (v.1). In the Garden of Eden, the Lord warned Adam that if (or when) he ate of the forbidden fruit, he would surely die. Adam did not die physically that day, but he certainly died spiritually; and, unfortunately, he cursed his posterity with the same disease – spiritual death. All human beings, therefore, are born dead, the penalty of imputed or inherited sin (*Romans 6:23a*). Since we are born dead, we do not belong to the Lord of life but the lord of death (v.2); Satan is our master and we are his slaves. Thus, we live according to his likeness, acting as any "son of disobedience" would, according to the course of his fallen world, in rebellion and defiance to God. As such, we are naturally servants to our lusts and impulses (v.3) and deserving the wrath of God. The Bible never indicates that man was partially corrupted by Adam's fall; rather he is described as totally depraved, completely ruined, and, as such, hopeless and helpless, for dead men cannot resuscitate themselves.

After Paul paints the picture of man's utter destitution and despair, he pens perhaps the sweetest pair of words in the human language – "but God" (v.4). We were once dead, but God gave us life. We were once slaves, but God set us free. We were once depraved but God made us holy. What a transition! What a transformation! He intervened for us, when we could do nothing to change the situation; and, He did it with the same power with which He raised up Christ Jesus (v.20), the connection of this passage to Chapter 1. However, the question that begs to be asked is why, why did God save us?

Paul tells us that the reason God saved us from spiritual death is because of His love and mercy. The Apostle used another "but God" passage in his letter to the Romans, "But God demonstrated His own love towards us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (5:8). God desires to do for men what they cannot do for themselves (His love); He also desires to withhold the punishment they deserve (His mercy). "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son" (*John 3:16*). We owe our transition from death to life to God's mercy and love, not to our deeds; thus, Paul adds that it was "by grace that you have been saved" (v.5). Salvation is entirely a work of God. It was His idea and it is by His actions that we are rescued from our former status.

As a result of God's work on our behalf, we are "made alive together with Christ" (v.5). We are no longer spiritually dead, as we were at birth; rather we have been reborn and made spiritually alive within. "If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old has gone, and, behold, all things are made new" (2 *Corinthians 5:17*). Not only have we been made alive with Christ, we have "been raised up and seated with Him in the heavenly places" (v.6). Positionally, here is how God views us now, no longer as one of Satan's slaves or as a citizen of his fallen world, but rather as one of His children (as Christ) and a citizen of heaven. We have overcome this world and its "god" because of Christ.

This work of God through Christ on our behalf is a mystery to us. We did not deserve it. All we can do is praise Him for doing it and be grateful for being counted among His redeemed! We will marvel, "for ages to come, at the surpassing riches of His grace and kindness towards us" (v.7). It is a good thing that we have eternity to participate, for it will take an eternity to explore the depths of this great act!

⁸“For by grace have you been saved through faith, ⁹and that not of yourselves; it is a gift of God, not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we should walk in them.”

A Work of God

The Gifts of Grace and Faith

Leading Idea

Salvation is a work of God, made possible by the grace and faith He extended to us.

This passage (v.8-10) is a continuation and completion of Paul’s previous train of thought (v.1-7), that of explaining to his readers the process of salvation. He has already described the fact that we were once spiritually dead in our sins (v.1-3) and that God, in His great mercy and love, made us alive with Christ (v.4, 5). We were once hopeless and helpless, but God intervened and changed our circumstances. We are now hope-filled with the promise of life everlasting.

Before Paul changes the subject and talks about how Gentiles and Jews have been reconciled through the Church (v.11-22), he makes sure that the people of Ephesus understand the source of their salvation. Salvation is entirely a work of God! In our original state, dead in our trespasses and sins, and in living in rebellion and defiance to God, we would have never loved God or chosen to follow Him. It was the Lord who had to initiate the change, for we could not do it in our own power. Thus, Paul reminds us that “it was by grace that we have been saved” (v.5, 8).

Grace can be defined as “unmerited favor,” as receiving something that was not deserved. We certainly did not deserve salvation but God extended it to us anyway. That is grace or love (*Romans 5:8*). It is God doing for us what we could not do on our own. If we could earn salvation in our own way, then there would be no need for Christ; His sacrifice on the cross would be for naught. Likewise, if salvation could be earned by men, they would have a reason to boast; but no man can boast, “for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God” (*Romans 3:23*). No, it is grace that saved us. Paul uses the word “saved” to intimate that we have been rescued or pardoned. What have we been saved from? The wrath and judgment that He reserves for His enemies (*Romans 5:9*). That’s why we sing of His amazing grace, because we have no merits on our own to earn God’s favor or to be redeemed!

Paul also says that we are “saved through faith” (v.8). Faith is a confident trust in Christ Jesus, that He is who is says He is, the living Son of God, the Savior of men, and the only means by which we can be rescued from our sinful, condemned state. That kind of faith does not originate with us; it has to be given to us by God (v.9). Why would someone who lives in rebellion to God ever decide to put his faith in Him? Why would someone living in and content with their transgressions and sins ever put them aside to live for Christ? Why would someone ever believe in a God that he has not seen, trust Him at His Word, and stake his future on the promises that He’s made? He wouldn’t. No one would exhibit that kind of faith on his own; it must be given to him by God.

Thus, Paul reinforces this truth by stating that “we are God’s workmanship” (v.10), not a work of our own. The Greek word used here is “masterpiece” (poeima), a work of art. The apex of God’s creation was human beings, but His finest work was the recreation of man from death to life through Jesus Christ. We were once a formless lump, but the skillful Potter fashioned us into a useful vessel.

While Paul makes it clear that we are not saved by good works, he emphasizes the fact that we were saved for good works. Though deeds are not the root of our salvation, they are the fruit of our salvation. In fact, as James reiterated (*James 2*), works are evidence that our new faith is valid. We were saved for good works. What works? Works that “God prepared for us beforehand,” from the beginning, when He predetermined that we would become one of His children. He has work for us to do, works that incorporate our giftedness, interests, and experiences; and, the purpose of these works is not to make ourselves look good but to honor the Lord. “Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (*Matthew 5:16*). We were saved to serve, to work. Each of us has a spiritual career, full of exciting works, but how many of us are squandering our time, our resources, or are not seeking and doing what we’ve been saved and called to do.

¹¹ Therefore, remember that formerly you, Gentiles in the flesh, who are called 'Uncircumcision' by the so-called 'Circumcision,' which is performed in the flesh by human hands, ¹² remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now, in Christ Jesus, you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, ¹⁵ by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, ¹⁶ and might reconcile them both into one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. ¹⁷ He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those were near, ¹⁸ for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father."

Process of Prayer

Notice how the Persons of the trinity are portrayed in the process of prayer (v.18). We approach the Father by way of the Spirit, a reality made possible by the work of the Son.

Two in One

Christ Our Peace

Leading Idea

Christ broke down the dividing wall between Jews and Gentiles.

Paul often wrote about the mysteries of our faith, that which, at one time, God's people did not comprehend, but which was made known to them in time, such as the mystery of salvation (1:3-2:10). Another mystery of which Paul wrote and taught was that of the unification of Jews and Gentiles. At one time, these two groups were bitter enemies, but now, through Christ, they have been made one body – the Church. No one predicted this union, rather it was "not made known to the sons of men, but has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit" (3:5). It is this mystery that Paul begins to unfold in this part of his letter (2:11-22).

The Apostle first points out the fact that Gentiles were once excluded from being called God's people. Before, the term "God's people" referred only to the Jews, because they were included in the covenant promises of Abraham. Remember, the physical mark of those covenant people was circumcision (v.11). Those people who were not of the covenant were, of course, not circumcised and, therefore, they were looked down upon by the Jews as pagan nations (heathen or God-less). Recall what David said about Goliath, "Who is this *uncircumcised* Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?" (1 Samuel 17:26). Only the Jews, then, were considered God's chosen nation; all others were "excluded from the commonwealth of Israel" (v.12) and were "strangers to the covenants of promise"; and, since they were lowly outsiders, they were considered as "having no hope, but without God."

Thus, a great deal of "enmity" (hatred or animosity) existed between Jews and Gentiles. Jews considered everyone else as worthless and Gentiles saw Jews as snobbish and prideful. The Messiah was to come from the Jews for the Jews (Matthew 15:24); and, the Gentiles were to miss out on God's blessings. In fact, Gentiles were not allowed to enter the Temple in Jerusalem (Acts 21:27, 28), except upon penalty of death. Jews viewed themselves as God's children but they viewed Gentiles as dogs (Matthew 15:21-28). It is easy to see why the Jews were hated by all, not only because Satan hated God's people, but because the Jews were so snooty and self-centered. This enmity or hatred against the Jews became known as anti-Semitism and has been demonstrated by many nations throughout history.

But God, as He had already reconciled all sinners to Himself through Christ, also reconciled Gentiles and Jews into one body (1 Cor. 10:32; Gal. 3:28, 29). The title of "God's People" has been applied to a different group; it used to refer to the Jews only, but now it refers to all Christ-followers. As both Jews and Gentiles find their sins forgiven in Christ, their new life is in Him. All racial and ethnic boundaries are overcome, for they are now known only as Christians. While God certainly honors our diversity, He is more honored by our unity; for He has forged, out of many, one people, His body, the Church (v.14). Inside the Church, there is no place for barriers, inequalities, or segregations of any kind. There is only the sinner and the saved, the Christian and the lost. Christ has fulfilled the Law and introduced a New Covenant in His body (on the cross) and put to death the hostility between Jew and Gentile (v.15). Jesus not only *made* peace, but He *is* our peace; no hostility should exist between His followers (v.17, 18). Perhaps this is one application of His title, "Prince of Peace."

This enmity or hostility took some time to dissipate after Jesus' resurrection, first among the Disciples (Acts 10:1-11:18), then Paul (Acts 13:44-49), and, then, throughout the Church. The cross is God's answer to ending any and all hostility that exists between men. Racial discrimination, segregation of any kind, anti-Semitism, bigotry in all its forms, and any other form of strife can be conquered in Christ. None of these hostilities should exist in the Church, for God's people should live in peace and unity. While God does not expect uniformity in all things, He does expect unity of faith (Eph. 4:1-6). The prejudices, biases, and racial injustices that so often plague the nations of men are a result of their fallen sinful nature; that nature can be made new in Christ, in whom all men are viewed as equals.

19" So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household,²⁰ having been built on the foundation of apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone,²¹ in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord,²² in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit."

From Strangers to Saints

The Privileges of God's People

Leading Idea

We Gentiles are now citizens of God's kingdom, members of His family, and "stones" in His temple.

In the previous passage (2:11-18), the Apostle Paul addressed the mystery of the Church, primarily the fact that Gentiles have been included with the Jews as God's people (more to come regarding this subject, 3:1-6). Those who were once viewed as the "uncircumcised" (v.11), "excluded from the commonwealth of Israel" (v.12), "strangers to the covenants of promise," or as "having no hope and without God," were made one with the Jews, when the dividing wall between them was destroyed by Christ's crucifixion on the cross (v.14). It is not that the Gentiles became Jews, mind you, but that both groups became Christians; and, thus, they now have a common bond that unites them.

Now, Paul affirms the Gentiles in their new standing in Christ, specifically in regards to their place in His Church. He used three metaphors that were familiar to them at the time – citizenship, family, and a temple. Let's look at the symbolism in each of these pictures of the Church.

First, Paul reminded Gentiles that they were "no longer strangers and aliens" but "fellow citizens with the saints" (v.19). No doubt, this analogy struck a chord with anyone in the Roman Empire, for citizenship in the empire included many privileges and protections. "Strangers and aliens" are, of course, unincorporated outsiders who have no such privileges. As followers of Christ, we Gentiles are citizens of heaven (*Philippians 3:20, 21*), the Kingdom of God, and as such, we enjoy both immediate and future privileges, which Paul has already detailed for us in the opening of his letter (1:3-23). Since that Kingdom is unseen, for now, and our privileges are spiritual in nature, our divine citizenship is often overlooked and forgotten. We tend to be more concerned about our earthly citizenship, fixed upon the temporal pleasures and benefits of this world, when our true home is in the next world.

The second illustration Paul used to describe the Gentile's inclusion in the Church was that of "God's household" (v.19). As Christians, we Gentiles have been adopted into God's family (1:5). Of course, being a member of a family has its own benefits and privileges. We belong; we are no longer orphans, but we have a loving Father in heaven who protects us and provides for our needs. We are given an inheritance, which includes numerous immediate and future blessings (1:3-23). We have siblings (beginning with Christ Himself) who care for us and encourage us. We are not alone in this life; we are not without hope or help, but we have loved ones in the faith who are equipped and ready to assist.

It is interesting that Paul described God's household as one being built upon a foundation (v.20). The foundation was begun by Christ. He is the corner stone, meaning the chief or first stone that was laid. The corner stone set the course for the other "stones" to follow; Christ, then, is rightly called later the "head of the Church" (5:23). After Christ laid the first stone in the faith, God used others to build around Him, namely the "apostles and prophets," the Disciples and other teachers and authors with whom He communicated the truths of the new covenant.

The third metaphor Paul used in describing the Church was a "holy temple" (v.21), the "whole building being fitted together." Of course, everyone at that time was familiar with temples. The Romans built temples in nearly every city of their empire; and, no doubt, early Christians were aware of the Temple of God in Jerusalem. We know from Scripture that God is omnipresent, but it was in that Temple that He chose to manifest His presence; however, that Temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD. So then, where does God manifest His presence today? In the individual lives of His followers (1 *Corinthians 3:16*) and the collective body of the Church. Jesus said, "Where two or more are gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst" (*Matthew 18:20*). Each believer is a "living stone" that God has added to His new temple (1 *Peter 2:5*), and His building will not be completed until every "stone," whom He has called, has been added (2 *Peter 3:9*).

¹For this reason, I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ for the sake of you Gentiles, ²if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you, ³that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery. ⁴When you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁵which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit, ⁶to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ through the gospel, ⁷of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God's grace which was given to me. ⁸To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ ⁹and to bring to light what is the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things, ¹⁰so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the Church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. ¹¹This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ, ¹²in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him. ¹³Therefore, I ask you not to lose heart at my tribulations on your behalf, for they are for your glory."

A Prisoner of Christ

Paul's Ministry to the Gentiles

Leading Idea

Paul's ministry validates the inclusion of Gentiles in the Church.

[Note: I have edited this passage, without altering its meaning, to make it fit the space in the margin.]

Now that the Apostle Paul has spent a good part of his letter explaining one of the great mysteries of the faith – the fact that, because of Christ, Jews and Gentiles have both been included in the Church (2:11-22) – he turns his attention to the role that he has played in making this mystery known to all, as well as the persecution that he has experienced as a result. Paul wrote his letter to the Ephesians while in prison (3:1); of course, a prison letter comes as no surprise to us, for Paul, it seemed, was regularly “in trouble” with the Jews. However, it was not Paul’s intention to produce sympathy in his readers; rather he wanted them to know that it was his calling and pleasure to fulfill his assigned mission (3:2, 13). It was “for this reason” that he wrote (3:1); it was for this reason that he was born.

I find it interesting that Paul refers to himself as a “prisoner of Christ” (3:1) rather than a prisoner of Rome or a prisoner of the Jews. He doesn’t call himself a prisoner of Caesar or a prisoner of Herod. Why not? First, before one is imprisoned, he must be captured, arrested, and taken into custody. For Paul, then, to refer to himself as a prisoner (2 Timothy 1:8; Philemon 1:1, 9) suggests that he views his life as having been “captured” by Christ, not taken by force, mind you, but freely surrendered to. By surrendering to Christ, we are submitting every aspect of our lives to His influence, His direction, and His desires; our thoughts, our words, our efforts, our time, and our resources are wholly given to Him to be used for His purposes and for His good. Second, though the term “prisoner” is most often considered in a negative way, Paul views it as a badge of honor, not something to be ashamed of (v.13). In other letters, he uses a similar term in that of a bond-servant or a slave; while many might view life in prison or life as a slave as the very lowest of existence, Paul regards being a prisoner of Christ the highest level of living. One can live for many reasons, for money, for fame, for positions, for himself or others, but, for Paul, there is no higher calling or honor than to live for Christ. Third, a prisoner’s life is “in the hands” of his captor. Whatever happens to him is a result of the decision or purposes of his arrestor. Thus, for Paul to call himself a prisoner of Christ intimates that Paul understands prison as part of God’s plan or purposes for him. Rather than sit and sulk in jail, Paul sees jail as another opportunity to glorify God. How many of us would view prison as another opportunity to serve the Lord? Most of us would consider prison as the end of the line.

The mystery that Paul describes here is that the Gentiles are now “fellow heirs with the Jews, members of God’s family, and partakers of the promise of Christ” (v.6). In God’s plan, He chose not to reveal this mystery to people in the Old Testament; they had no idea that Jews and Gentiles would be reconciled in one body called the Church. Proclaiming this mystery was part of Paul’s calling as an Apostle (v.7-9). Though he viewed himself as the “very least of the saints” (v.8), because of his background, he understood God’s purpose in choosing him; to be the most feared persecutor of the Church and, then, to become the greatest preacher for the Church makes for a powerful testimony.

This mystery, God’s plan for the Church to be comprised of people from all walks of life, was not only kept from the saints of old, but it was kept from the angels and demons, those in the “heavenly places” (v.10). They long to look into these things (1 Peter 2:8-10) and are awed by the wisdom and grace of our God. Though sending Christ was His “eternal purpose” (v.11), they marvel at God’s plan.

Though the Gentiles were once despised as strangers and aliens, they have been brought into the fold of God’s people. Paul’s life purpose was to confirm this truth, to assure Gentiles everywhere that they are, indeed, included in the gospel of Christ. He comforts them with this thought (v.13) and encourages them to view his imprisonment as validation of their inclusion.

¹⁴ “For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, ¹⁶ that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. ²⁰ Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, ²¹ to Him be the glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.”

Power in the Inner Man

Paul's Prayer for the Ephesians

Leading Idea

God is able to do more in and through us than we could ever ask or think.

After a lengthy interjection (3:2-13) regarding the mystery of the Gentiles' inclusion into the Church and his calling to confirm that inclusion, the Apostle Paul picks up where he left off at the beginning of the chapter (3:1). Now, he shares the elements of his prayers concerning the Ephesian saints.

Before focusing on that list, let's first consider one of Paul's introductory statements, namely that God is “the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name” (v.14). This description is unusual, indeed, and could have multiple meanings. However, it makes sense, in light of its context (2:18, 19), that Paul is affirming that God is the heavenly Father of all the saints, all members of the divine family, living and dead, Jew and Gentile. He is certainly the Creator and Sovereign Head of all creatures but He is more so to those whom He foreknew and redeemed.

It is important to note that Paul regularly prayed for the welfare of others rather than for his own needs. Here his prayer for the Ephesians included four elements. First, he prayed that they would “be strengthened with power through the Spirit in the inner man” (v.16). Though God can certainly provide strength to our bodies, our bodies, in time, experience natural frailties and weakness; however, our souls (the inner man), in time, can grow stronger through the power of His Spirit. We must not focus our attention on our temporal body but rather on our eternal soul (1 Timothy 4:7, 8), participating in those activities that encourage its maturation (worship, prayer, Scripture intake, service, etc.).

Second, Paul prayed that “Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith” (v.17). With the power of God's Spirit in the inner man, Christ takes up residence in the hearts of all believers. The question that each of His followers must answer is how much of his heart does He have access to? While Christ desires to invade every room and closet of our hearts, we are oftentimes reluctant to allow Him in to all places (i.e. our finances, our past hurts, our prejudices, our entertainment, our relationships, etc.). It is important for us to “practice His presence” in our lives, to recognize the fact that He is with us everywhere we go, in everything we do, hearing everything we say, and knowing everything we think. Is Christ comfortable in our “home” or do the activities of our lives grieve His Spirit?

Third, Paul prayed that the Ephesians “may be able to comprehend what is the breadth and length and height and depth and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge” (v.19, 20). It is interesting that Paul prayed that “the saints would comprehend the love of Christ” but, then, that he admitted that His love “surpasses all knowledge.” While this request is earnest, it is impossible. No one could ever understand the vastness or completeness of the love of God, particularly what He has done for us through Christ. However, two encouragements are found here: 1) that God's love for us is so vast that we could explore and experience it the rest of our lives and never reach its end; 2) that the same love that God has available for us is also available to be channeled through us to others. To love the Lord with all our heart, and to have the love of God in our heart, will only naturally result in our loving others in the same manner as He has lavished His love on us.

Finally, Paul prayed that his readers would be “filled up to all the fullness of God” (v.19). Here again is another sincere but impossible request. No man, other than Christ, can experience the fullness of God. However, what Paul may be praying here is that God would fill up what each saint makes available to Him. While a cup can be filled to the brim with ocean water, it “contains” the ocean but it does not hold it in its entirety. As we empty ourselves of sin and selfishness and become more fully devoted to the Lord, His Spirit is able to do more than “we could ever ask or think” (v.20), all of which will bring “glory to Christ and His Church” (v.21).

Ephesians 4:1-6

¹ “Therefore, I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, ³ being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling, ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.”

Prisoner of the Lord

I love that Paul uses this phrase to describe himself. See the note on *Ephesians 3:1* for more details.

A Worthy Walk

Preserving Unity

Leading Idea

Our lives should be a clear reflection of what Christ has done for us.

For three chapters now, the Apostle Paul has reminded the Ephesians of what God has done for them – the many spiritual blessings afforded by Christ (1:3-14), the fact that He saved them from their trespasses and sins (2:1-10) and that He included them (as Gentiles) in His Church (2:11-22). Now, for the next three chapters (4-6), Paul transitions to discuss how God expects them to live in light of what He has done. Notice the word “therefore” (4:1) at the beginning of this section. This pivotal term highlights his shift from doctrine to duty, from principle to practice. So many believers want to be taught the practical steps to take in the Christian life (orthopraxy or “right practice”), but they must understand that before right practice comes right teaching (orthodoxy). Without knowing why they do what they do (motives), their actions simply become empty meaningless motions.

Having said all of that, Paul sets the stage for the second half of his letter by writing, “I implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called” (4:1). This challenge is the springboard for everything that follows. In essence, he is beckoning his readers to live a life that honors the Lord. Since He has predestined them, chosen them, called them, saved them, sanctified them, reconciled them, and equipped them, Paul pleads with them to live for Him. After all that God has done for us, it would not make sense for us to live for ourselves, or to live in order to please others, or to remain habitually trapped in sin, or to chase after the desires of the flesh or of this world; that would be to walk in an unworthy manner. Our lives should be a clear reflection of the work of Christ.

The first suggestion that Paul provides, in order “to walk in a worthy manner,” is to “be diligent to preserve the unity” of the Church (v.3), or as Paul states, “the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” Keep in mind that the Lord is the One who reconciled Jews and Gentiles into one body (2:16; 3:6). It is He who afforded this unity through the blood of Christ; however, though God obtained this unity, it is our responsibility to maintain it. Believers from all different backgrounds, nationalities, ethnicities, personalities, and flaws, living together peacefully is not an easy task. The Church is not made of perfect people; every member has a saint’s heart with sinful flesh, which is bound to create problems that need to be overcome with Christian character, the fruit of the Spirit (*Galatians 5:22, 23*).

In order to preserve the unity and peace of the Church, Paul offers several key characteristics that must be demonstrated (v.2): *humility* (lowliness of mind or self-importance), *gentleness* (meekness, self-control), *patience* (perseverance, long-suffering), *tolerance* (bearing with one another), and *love* (caring for others unconditionally). It is a shame for God’s people to quarrel, to split into factions, or to encourage disunity. A divided church is an ineffective church. How can a squabbling body of believers edify one another, much less appeal to or impact those outside its walls? Peace-less churches, with constant internal conflict, will exhibit little to no positive external influence and are a disgrace to the work and purposes of Christ. We must collectively “walk in a manner worthy of our calling.”

For that reason, Paul reminds us that as followers of Christ, though we are different and distinct in our own ways (v.4-6), we are “one body” in Him, having “one Spirit” to guide us, “one hope of our calling” (which refers to salvation and eternal life), “one Lord” (Jesus Christ), “one faith” (essential doctrines), “one baptism” (could refer to water or spiritual baptism), having “one God and Father” (note the reference to the Trinity in this passage). Though we are many, we are one. Though we are different, we are one. Though we are unique, we are one. Though we may have conflicting ideas, opinions, or interests, we look past our selfish inclinations to see and attain that which is for the good of the whole. We sacrifice selfish passions, preferences, and prejudices in order to find and build on common ground. We emphasize our common-ness, those things that bring us together, instead of dying on hills that divide us. That is a church that “walks in a manner worthy of its calling.”

⁷ “But to each one of us
grace was given,
according to the measure
of Christ’s gift.
⁸Therefore it says, ‘When
He ascended on high, He
led captive a host of
captives, and He gave
gifts to men.’ ⁹ Now this
expression, ‘He
ascended,’ what does it
mean except that He also
had descended into the
lower parts of the earth?
¹⁰ He who descended is
Himself also He who
ascended far above all
the heavens, so that He
might fill all things. ¹¹ And
He gave some as
apostles, and some as
prophets, and some as
evangelists, and some as
pastors and teachers
¹² for the equipping of the
saints, for the work of
service, to the building up
of the body of Christ,
¹³ until we all attain to the
unity of the faith, and of
the knowledge of the Son
of God, to a mature man,
to the measure of the
stature which belongs to
the fullness of Christ. ¹⁴ As
a result, we are no longer
to be children tossed here
and there by waves and
carried about by every
wind of doctrine, by the
trickery of men, by
craftiness in deceitful
scheming; ¹⁵ but speaking
the truth in love, we are
to grow up in all aspects
into Him who is the head,
even Christ. ¹⁶ from whom
the whole body, being
filled and held together
by what every joint
supplies, according to the
proper working of each
individual part, causes
the growth of the body for
the building up of itself in
love.”

Equipping the Saints

Spiritual Gifts

Leading Idea

God has given each Christian a spiritual gift in order to build up the body of Christ (Church).

In the previous passage (4:1-6), the Apostle Paul transitioned from discussing what God had done for the Ephesians to how they were to live in light of what He had done, “to walk in a manner worthy of their calling” (v.1). The first suggestion he made was to “preserve the unity” of the Church (v.3) in two ways, by exhibiting Christ-like character (humility, gentleness, patience, tolerance, love, etc.) and by embracing those things which they have in common (one Lord, one faith, one baptism, etc.). However, while it is vital to emphasize those common threads which bind us together, it is just as important to recognize our differences, the fact that each individual is unique. It is this subject on which Paul interjects his next thoughts, particularly in the area of each individual’s spiritual giftedness.

“To each one of us grace was given” (v.7). God has given a gift of grace to every believer, no exceptions. This gift is in addition to the gift of salvation and was afforded by Christ’s victory over the cross (sin) and the grave (death). They are like spoils given to the friends of a conquering King (v.8, 9), a King like Jesus, who fulfilled all things through His death, resurrection, and ascension to the throne of heaven (v.10). Sometimes these gifts are called “spiritual gifts,” because they are enabled by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12).

Along with individual spiritual gifts, God has blessed the Church with gifted men, such as “apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers” (v.11) who are divinely equipped for ministering the Word of God and propagating the Gospel. It must be noted that the term “apostles” referred to those who had spent time with or seen Jesus and who were sent by Him to accomplish a certain task; this group would have included the original Disciples and Paul. Apostles in that sense no longer exist. Likewise, it is important to note that the prophets of today are not the same as prophets in the Bible. The prophets in the Old and New Testament spoke directly from God; their words or revelatory messages were added to the Scriptures. The Scriptures are now complete; we have all that we need of God’s words in the Bible, therefore, prophets in that category no longer exist.

The purpose of God’s assigning believers with spiritual gifts is to “equip the saints for the work of service” (v.12) and for “building up the body of Christ.” While our gifts can certainly be used outside of the Church, they are primarily to be used inside of the Church, for the good of other believers, to encourage each other’s spiritual growth (v.13). It is a common misconception that pastors are the only ones who minister to the Church, when, in reality, the Bible states that all of us are ministers. They “equip the saints for the work of service”; they are not to minister service alone. Every member of the body is a minister; every member is gifted and has a part to play in the work of the Church (v.16).

The result of members ministering to each other, using their spiritual gifts to encourage the growth of the whole, is that “we will no longer be as children tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine or by the trickery, craftiness, or schemes of men” (v.14). God’s people should never become victims of the world’s philosophies; we should be able to stand firm in our faith though the “winds and waves” of the world may rage against us. It is the immature believer who falls prey by its deceptions, a believer who has not submitted himself to God’s Word or who has not exposed himself to the faith training found in the Church. Sadly, as the Church has compromised its biblical standards, more and more believers are becoming casualties in the war against the world.

Mature Christians, who are grounded in their faith and who grasp the truths of God’s Word, will be prepared to “speak that truth” to those who differ (v.15), not in belittling or argumentative ways, but “in love.” Ambassadors for Christ can articulate their faith, even combat the false claims of the world, in a way that is gracious and kind, maintaining relationships with the lost without turning them away.

Ephesians 4:17-24

17 “So this I say and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, ¹⁸being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart, ¹⁹and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. ²⁰But you did not learn Christ in this way, ²¹if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, ²²that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, ²³and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, ²⁴and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.”

Mind Renewal

Matthew 16:23

Mark 12:30

Romans 8:5; 12:2

2 Corinthians 10:5

Ephesians 4:23

Philippians 4:8

Colossians 3:2, 10

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Genuine Change

Old Self vs. New Self

Leading Idea

Our lives in Christ should reflect a genuine change from the old self to the new.

After interrupting his train of thought, in regards to “walking in a manner worthy of our calling” (4:1), with a brief tangent about spiritual gifts (v.7-16), the Apostle Paul picks up where he left off in this passage (v.17-24). In light of all that Christ has done for us – granting us a multitude of spiritual blessings (1:3-14), reconciling us Gentiles back to Him (2:1-10), and reconciling us with the Jews in the Church (2:11-22) – he explains how we should live our lives. To summarize, our lives in Christ should reflect a genuine change from the old self to the new (v.22-24).

First, in regards to our old self, we should “no longer walk as Gentiles” (v.17), meaning that we should no longer live as the lost world would live. We are Christians; our identity has been changed to reflect Christ. Therefore, our Gentile (worldly) thoughts, characteristics, and behavior should fall away.

Paul describes the lost as “futile in their mind” and “darkened in their understanding” (v.17, 18). These claims, of course, do not mean that lost people are dumb; however, while they may claim to be enlightened, their worldview is man-centered, which is opposite of God’s view. Thus, their approach to finding truth is aimless, and their answers to life’s questions are nonsense. Because their premise begins without God in the picture, and they reject the truth of His existence, the product of their thinking reveals a lack of understanding of the reality and true meaning of things. While their thoughts sound brilliant, they are shallow and empty.

Next, Paul states that the lost world is ungodly, “excluded from the life of God” (v.18), because of their “ignorance” of Him and “the hardness of their heart.” Oftentimes, the lost world wants nothing to do with God; even the mention of His name or of spiritual things repulses them. They have convinced themselves that He is a myth, a fairy tale, and a waste of time, and that those who follow Him are dumb and blind. Thus, they will not subject themselves to that sort of “foolish” talk or lifestyle. They have built a high wall of separation from God in their own minds and hearts. They resist Him at all costs, because they have deceived themselves into believing that they do not need Him in their lives.

As a result of rejecting God and His ways, those who are lost “becomes callous” to morality and righteousness and, therefore, have “given themselves over to sensuality and every kind of impurity” (v.19). The depravity of their hearts is revealed in the carelessness of their words and actions. The world pursues lustful pleasures, particularly in the area of sexual sin. Their shameful behavior is unbridled and seemingly insatiable; they constantly remove God’s boundaries, indifferent to the consequences. This type of indecent behavior is not suitable for a follower of Christ.

After painting an accurate picture of the unbelieving (Gentile) world, Paul turns to the opposite lifestyle of a Christian by saying, “You did not learn Christ in this way” (v.20, 21). What we know of Christ (which is the truth) does not match what we see in the world. Thus, when a person comes to Christ in salvation, his life is changed. That change becomes evident in time (some sooner than later); a renewed heart reveals itself in a renewed mind (v.23), which in turn reveals itself in renewed thoughts, character qualities, words, and actions. The old self is replaced with a new self (v.24). None of these things are changed if the heart is not changed first, for it is in the inner man, the heart, where depravity and sin reside; the heart is deceitfully wicked (*Jeremiah 17:9*) and must be cleansed.

If you have been saved from sin, by accepting Christ in faith, then you are a new person (*2 Cor. 5:17*); like shedding old rags for new clothes, your old self has been replaced by a new one, which will reflect the righteousness and holiness of Christ (v.24). In Him your old man has died, and in Him your new man has risen! You have been recreated in the image of God through Christ (*Gen. 1:27; 1 Cor. 15:49*).

²⁵ “Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. ²⁶Be angry and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷and do not give the devil an opportunity. ²⁸He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need. ²⁹Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear. ³⁰Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. ³²Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.”

Person of the Holy Spirit

John 14:17, 26; 15:26
John 16:8-14
Acts 13:2; 16:6, 7
Romans 8:26, 27; 15:30
1 Corinthians 2:11; 12:11

New Life, New Lifestyle

Change From Inside Out

Leading Idea

The new life we have in Christ internally should express itself in visible ways externally.

This section of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians is set off by a very important word – “therefore” (v.25). What is the “therefore” there for? It indicates the fact that because one thing is true, so then is another. The Apostle continues the previous passage (4:17-24) regarding the fact that in Christ “we have laid aside our old self and we have put on the new self” (v.22, 24), which has been “created (or recreated) in righteousness and holiness” (v.24). Therefore, because of this new life, there is (or should be) a new lifestyle as well, resulting in the following changes.

First, Paul says that Christians “lay aside falsehood and speak truth” (v.25). It is not befitting a believer to be dishonest but rather to be honest in all things. Dishonesty has many forms – outright lying, exaggeration, fabricating stories, flattery, breaking promises, cheating, etc. – but for someone who has the Spirit of God (who is truth) within him, truth will supernaturally bubble out of us. We will desire to live a life of integrity over deception. Besides, Paul reminds his readers that “we are members of one another.” Harkening back to his body illustration (v.16, in regards to spiritual gifts), he makes the point that one part of the body does not deceive other parts. The brain does not deceive the eyes, the hands, or the heart; neither should we misrepresent ourselves or the facts with others.

Second, Christians practice self-control, even when angry (v.26). A common misconception here is that all anger is sinful, but such is not the case. Jesus got angry at the moneychangers in the Temple, yet He did not sin. It is acceptable for us to be angry because of injustice, wrongdoing, or evil, for example, but we must be careful not to lose control or to allow our anger to boil over into other harmful actions – bitterness, holding a grudge, personal injury, gossip, slander, foul language, resenting others, damaging property, etc. (v.31). Thus, Paul says “be angry but do not sin” (see *Psalms* 4:4). A good way to prevent anger from escalating into sin is to resolve the issue as soon as possible; “do not let the sun go down on your anger,” as Paul wrote (v.26), otherwise “it gives the devil an opportunity” (v.27). In other words, the enemy uses our anger to get a foothold in our lives, which may lead to future sinful deeds. It is always best for us to idle our motor before we strip our gears; and, the best way to resolve anger is through forgiveness (v.32), remembering that God has forgiven you.

Third, God’s people do not steal; rather we share (v.28). We do not take, we give. As Christians, we should be the hardest working people around, reliable, trustworthy, dependable, seeking excellence in all we do; and, when God blesses our efforts, we look around to see what needs we can meet. Stealing is a self-centered activity; sharing is self-less. Stealing is of the devil (*John 10:10*); sharing is of God.

Fourth, Christians speak only what is kind, true, and necessary (v.25, 29; *Proverbs* 3:3, 4). Here is a good filter for our words; before we say them, put them through this test. Are they kind – “wholesome, edifying, and gracious”? Are they true? Are they necessary – appropriate “for the need of the moment”? Everything that we think needs not to be said out loud. Words are powerful. They can cause people to stand or stoop, depending on whether or not they are helpful or harsh. If we would practice using this filter – kind, true, and necessary – our words would “give grace to those who hear.”

Paul interrupts his list of lifestyle changes here and interjects a side note. Our actions and words oftentimes “grieve the Holy Spirit” (v.30). The Spirit of God – who is a Person not a force or it -- is dwelling in us; He hears everything we say, sees everything we do, and is disappointed or saddened by many of the things we force Him to endure (*1 Peter* 3:7). Be mindful that we are not alone; strive “to learn what is pleasing to the Lord” (*5:10*). Take note also, here, that Paul reminds us that we are sealed in the Spirit, referring to the security of our salvation. We do not secure our own salvation; God does it for us, and that which He seals cannot be unsealed (*1:13, 14*). We are forever saved because of Christ!

¹ “Therefore, be imitators of God, as children, ²and walk in love, just as Christ loved you and gave Himself up for you, an offering and a sacrifice as a fragrant aroma. ³But immorality or impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints; ⁴and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. ⁵For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of God. ⁶Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. ⁷Therefore, do not be partakers with them, ⁸for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light. ⁹(for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth), ¹⁰trying to learn what is pleasing in the Lord. ¹¹Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead expose them, ¹²for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret. ¹³But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light. ¹⁴For this reason it says, ‘Awake, sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.’”

Children of Light

Trying to Please the Lord

Leading Idea

Children of the light do not play around with or participate in the deeds of darkness.

[Note: I have edited this passage, without altering its meaning, to make it fit the space in the margin.]

Though translators have lumped the first two verses of this passage into this chapter (5:1, 2), it could be argued that they belong in the previous chapter. Learning how to be kind, tender-hearted, and loving is difficult (4:31, 32), especially when someone has hurt you or made you angry; however, Paul challenges his readers to “imitate God and walk in love” (as He is love), and to forgive others as Christ has forgiven us. The Christ-like thing to do would be to sacrifice oneself (pride, resentment, grudges) instead of trying to crucify others for their actions or words.

The following verses (v.3-14) are a continuation of the previous passage (4:25-32), in which Paul was explaining the fact that since “we have laid aside our old self and we have put on the new self” (v.22, 24), we have a new life and should exhibit a new lifestyle as well, resulting in a change of habits. For example, there should not be a mention of sexual immorality, impurity, or greed among God’s people (v.3). Neither should there be use of foul language, foolish talk, or dirty jokes (v.4), for that which comes from our mouth reveals what is in our hearts. Paul suggests that we replace these things with words of thankfulness, focusing on what is positive over that which is negative (4:29).

The Apostle takes his admonishment one step further, by reminding the Ephesians that those who practice such things – sexual immorality, impurity, greed, etc. – give evidence that they have not been saved (v.5). John echoes the same thought in his letter (1 John 3:7-10), saying, “No one who practices these things is born of God,” for one can be recognized by the deeds he is comfortable to commit. Neither of these passages is suggesting that a Christian can lose his salvation, or that someone who has lived a shameful lifestyle cannot get saved. What both Paul and John are saying is that this type of living will not be (or should not be) the norm for believers; if someone says he is a Christian, yet has no problem living an immoral lifestyle, then there is evidence against his conversion. For those who are genuinely changed by Christ within will express that change externally by their words and deeds.

However, the world is very deceptive (v.6) and it makes these sins, especially sexual sins, look attractive, normal, and pleasurable; but, Paul challenges his readers not to be deceived, for God’s wrath burns against them for their disobedience. They will be destroyed in time; thus, Paul urges his readers “not to be partakers with them” (v.7). The things the world does are the “deeds of darkness” and we, as followers of Christ, are “children of light” (v.8). What we do and what we say are night and day compared to the lost world, for “the fruit of the light is goodness and righteousness and truth” (v.9). We do what pleases the Lord (v.10), and to learn those things, we read His Word.

It is our wholesome lifestyle that sets us apart from the world; we stand out as bright spots in our darkened work places, neighborhoods, campuses, organizations, teams, etc. When we shine that Light, it causes others to notice and it provides opportunities for us to speak of the Truth (Matthew 5:14-16). The problem is that many Christians are not bright enough; they look too much like the darkened world, and when the world sees us doing and saying the things that they do, then, they notice nothing different. Why, then, would they want to be Christian? The most treacherous tool against Christianity is Christians who claim Jesus with their lips but deny Him with their lifestyle.

The last few verses of this section (v.11-14) are harsh. Paul challenges those in the church to flush out those who are living like double agents. “Don’t participate with them but rather expose them,” for the things that they are doing are “disgraceful.” One of the reasons for “dead or sleepy” churches is that sins are hidden there, and they need to be brought into the light.

Under the Influence

Making the Most of Your Time

¹⁵ “Therefore, be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise,
¹⁶ making the most of your time because the days are evil. ¹⁷ So then, do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. ¹⁸ And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord, ²⁰ always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; ²¹ and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.”

Leading Idea

We make the most of our time when we submit ourselves to the influence of the Holy Spirit.

This passage begins with “therefore,” which always points back to the previous verse, passage, or ideas that are being conveyed. In this case, Paul has just finished comparing the lifestyle of a follower of Christ to the lifestyle of a worldly lost person (5:3-14). To summarize, he describes the difference as he would night and day, as we are of the “Light” and they are of the “darkness.” Thus, the “therefore” here (v.15) continues or builds on that thought.

He adds “be careful how you walk (or live), not as unwise men but as wise...” (v.15). Insinuated here is that it is unwise to live like the world but wise to live a life that would “please the Lord” (5:10). Of course, learning how to please the Lord would entail reading His Word and obeying His instructions. As the Creator and Giver of life, it is best (certainly wise) to live life as He instructs. His boundaries, though they may seem unfair or restrictive, exist for our good and His glory. To adhere to them is wise indeed. It is the fool who ignores them, rejects them, or defies them.

Paul goes on to exhort the Ephesian Christians to “make the most of their time, for the days are evil” (v.16). Making the most of our time could certainly refer to one’s day, but in the context of the letter, it seems to be referring to one’s “walk” or life. Paul is saying “Don’t waste your life” distracted by the things of this depraved world, but rather glorify God in how you live, using the short time that you have on earth to accomplish His ends. “Understand what the will of the Lord is” for your life, instead of being “foolish” (v.17). Paul is not encouraging believers to strain to find God’s will for every little thing in life (i.e. what to wear today), but rather to understand the purpose of life in general and how He desires for us to live it (referring to the previous passage, 5:3-14). “Walk in a manner worthy of your calling,” he wrote (4:1). “Be imitators of God” (5:1) and “walk as children of Light” (5:8). Now, he adds, “Do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is” (5:17).

Using this idea as a springboard – “making the most of your time for the days are evil” – Paul encourages his readers to “be filled with the Holy Spirit,” instead of getting drunk with wine (v.18). Here, Paul uses a negative worldly experience (getting drunk) to describe a positive godly one (being filled with the Spirit). When one gets drunk, he allows something else to influence and control his thoughts, words, and actions (although negatively, which Paul calls “dissipation” or debauchery). When one is filled with the Spirit, he allows God to influence and control his thoughts, words, and actions, therefore thinking, speaking (v.19), and doing those things that would honor Him (v.20).

“Being filled” with the Holy Spirit is altogether different than the indwelling of the Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16). When one gives his life to Christ, the Spirit of God indwells him; every believer has the Spirit within him. Being filled with the Spirit refers to one allowing the Spirit to direct all that he does. While all Christians have the Spirit living within them, a minority of them allow the Spirit to influence them on a regular basis. In order to be filled with the Spirit, one must feed on the Scriptures (Col. 3:16; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17; Heb. 4:12), yield himself to His control (Romans 12:1, 2), pursue a pure life, confess and put away all known sin (1 John 1:5-9), daily die to self (Luke 9:23), surrender to God’s will, and depend on His power for all things (Gal. 5:16-25).

When believers allow the Spirit to control their lives, there are immediate changes, referring to all that Paul has mentioned so far, but also referring to what he mentions next (5:20, 21). Christians under the influence of the Spirit will first be full of praise, positive encouraging words, instead of a demeaning, negative attitude. They will “give thanks for all things” instead of complaining all the time. They will also be “submissive to one another in love,” which Paul will expand in the next passage (5:21-6:9).

²² “Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. ²³For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the Church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. ²⁴But as the Church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything. ²⁵Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, ²⁶so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the Word, ²⁷that He might present to Himself the Church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. ²⁸So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself, ²⁹for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ as does the Church, ³⁰because we are members of His body. ³¹For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. ³²This mystery is great, but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the Church. ³³Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife, even as himself, and the wife must see to it that she respects her husband.”

Love and Respect

Marriage Under the Influence

Leading Idea

Under the influence of the Spirit, God will strengthen the bonds of marriage.

To be fair to this passage, it must first be linked to Paul’s previous idea (5:18-21), that when believers allow the Spirit to control their lives, there are immediate changes that occur. First, when Christians are under His influence, they will be full of praise, positive encouraging words, instead of a demeaning, negative attitude (v.19). They will “give thanks for all things” instead of complaining all the time (v.20). They will also be “submissive to one another in love” (v.21), which Paul now expands in the next lengthy stretch of verses (5:22-6:9). I will address the first half here (v.22-33).

In this passage (v.22-33), Paul addresses marriage, and it is important to note (especially in today’s world) that marriage is a divine institution, meaning that it was God’s idea to establish marriage on earth. Therefore, He has the authority and right to define marriage for us; we do not have the authority or right to define marriage for ourselves. God’s definition of marriage is a covenant relationship between one man and one woman for life. He established marriage for several reasons – for procreation, for the establishment of the family (which is the building block of any civilization), and to represent the relationship between the Lord and His Church (v.23-30). Thus, for man to redefine marriage is to destroy one of God’s institutions and to mar the imagery between Christ and His Bride.

In marriage, the man and woman are equals but each of them has God-given roles. First, “wives are to be subject to their husbands, as to the Lord” (v.22). This verse is commonly misunderstood and misapplied. It does not mean that women are inferior to men, that women are to be subservient to men, that wives are to endure verbal or physical abuse, or that women are to have no say in a marriage or family. Submission is a daily voluntary choice of the woman, not to be demanded or imposed by force. Why should the wife choose to submit to her husband? She submits to him because he is the God-ordained “head of the wife” and home (v.23), she submits to him out of love, support, and respect for him (v.33), and she submits to him in honor of the Lord (v.22), despite the husband’s worthiness or spiritual condition. A wife’s submission to her husband does not happen naturally or easily; she must draw near to the Lord and, first, submit to the influence and direction of His Spirit (v.18).

Next, Paul addresses husbands, who are the “heads of their wives” (v.23) and homes, and who are to “love their wives as themselves” (v.25, 28, 33). While sensual love is natural or emotional, the love Paul describes here is not. He uses the word “agape” love, which is sacrificial love, meaning that a husband is to serve her, “nourish and cherish” her (v.29), praise her, lead her, protect her, remain loyal to her (“leave and cleave,” v.31), pray for and with her, encourage her, and provide for her. That type of love is not natural; men do not naturally think of anyone but themselves. Thus, for men to sacrifice time, effort, and resources to meet the needs of their wives (even when they can be unlovable) is unnatural. However, men are commanded to “love their wives even as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her” (v.25). This is a high standard of love, one that cannot be accomplished in the flesh; that kind of love must be supplied by God through the power of the Spirit (*Galatians 5:22*). Therefore, men must draw near to the Lord and allow Him to produce that kind of love in them. If men fall away spiritually, then their marriage relationship will suffer as a result.

Wives need love and husbands need respect. If both draw near to and honor the Lord, these things will be present in a marriage. With the help of the Lord, the bonds of marriage will strengthen over time.

Throughout this passage, Paul draws upon the illustration of Christ’s relationship to His Church (v.32). He is the “head of the Church” (v.23), He “loves the Church and gave Himself up for her” (v.25), He desires that she be “holy and blameless” (v.27), He “nourishes and cherishes” the Church (v.29), and we (the Church) are one flesh with Him, “members of His body” (v.30).

¹ “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ²Honor your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise), ³so that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth. ⁴Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. ⁵Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ, ⁶not by way of eye-service, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. ⁷With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men, ⁸knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free. ⁹And masters, do the same things to them, and give up threatening, knowing that both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.”

As Unto the Lord

Be Subject to One Another

Leading Idea

Under the influence of the Spirit, God will affect your relationships.

This passage is the tail end of a long stretch of verses (5:18-6:9), in which Paul is describing the changes that occur when believers allow themselves to be “under the influence” of the Holy Spirit (5:18). They will be full of praise, positive encouraging words, instead of a demeaning, negative attitude (v.19). They will “give thanks for all things” instead of complaining all the time (v.20). They will also be “submissive to one another in love” (v.21), which Paul first applied to husbands and wives in the marriage relationship (v.22-33). Now, he extends this application to the family and workplace.

Paul’s first admonition is to children, which refers to those still living in the home, under the authority of their parents. They are commanded to “honor their father and mother” by obeying them (v.1, 2). Of course, there are all kinds of parents (who may or may not know what they are doing) and all styles of parenting, but as long as the child is not being asked to do something immoral, he should obey. Parents who do not expect obedience from a child are raising a menace to society; and children who do not obey their parents are defying God’s natural order (“for this is right,” v.1) and setting themselves up for a miserable life (v.3). But notice that Paul goes much farther than obedience; he challenges kids to “honor their parents.” Honor entails much more than simple obedience; honor includes one’s heart, his attitude, words, and actions. How and when a child obeys is just as important as why he obeys. Kids are to treat their parents with respect as they would with God Himself (v.1).

Next, Paul addresses fathers (v.4). Although this admonition could apply to both parents, fathers are singled out because they have been given the role as “head of the wife” and home (v.23). While both parents should teach, train, discipline, and manage the children, ultimate supervision falls to the father (see *1 Timothy 3:4, 12*). Paul challenges parents not to “provoke their children to anger,” which, in our terminology, would mean to frustrate, aggravate, or exasperate them. This can happen for many reasons: an unhealthy or unstable marriage, anger management, hurtful words, manipulation, inconsistent discipline, narrow or inflexible restrictions, favoritism, refusal to admit mistakes, physical or emotional neglect, ignoring their words, desires, or interests. Parenting is difficult (to say the least) and requires a delicate balance of love and law, limitations and liberties, order and flexibility.

Two of the divine duties of the father (or parents) are “discipline and instruction.” Children need clear boundaries and accountability, which is best provided by a loving father. Of course, this does not mean that mothers cannot provide these things; they often do, but fathers must take the lead and muster the moral courage and character to bend the will of their children to the rule of law, first in the home, then in society, and ultimately to God. But discipline is more than punishment; it involves training and instruction. It is always better to be proactive in this area than reactive, meaning it is best to make standards and purposes clear before infractions and gently correct and guide children through infractions rather than to explode in anger and punish children after infractions. Affective godly instruction must be intentional, purposeful, and consistent, which is difficult. Just as a good coach constantly coaches his players, Fathers (parents) must take advantage of every opportunity to train their children; there are times it must be scheduled, but most of the time it will happen on the go.

Notice that both children and fathers (parents) are to do their duties as unto the Lord. It is out of our reverence (fear, love) for Him that we fulfill our roles. Paul applies the same principle to employees (slaves, v.5-8) and employers (masters, v.9). Christians should be the best employees, because we serve with “sincerity of heart” as unto the Lord; likewise, Christians should be the best employers, as we will treat those who work for us with kindness and respect, knowing that we will be accountable to God for our words and actions. None of these things are simple or easy, but when we submit to the influence of the Holy Spirit, the Lord can and will affect our relationships for good.

Standing Firm

In Our Spiritual War

¹⁰ “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might.
¹¹ Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.
¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.
¹³ Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. ¹⁴ Stand firm, therefore, having girded your loins with truth and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵ and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; ¹⁶ in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.
¹⁷ And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”

Enemy Scouting Report

Anointed Angel, *Ezek. 28:14*
Ruler of Demons, *Luke 11:15*
God of this World, *2 Cor. 4:4*
Prince of the Air, *2 Cor. 2:2*
Father of Lies, *John 8:44*
Murderer, *John 8:44*
Steals, Kills, Destroys, *Jn. 10:10*
Great Deceiver, *Gen. 3*
Opposes God's Work, *Zech. 3:1*
Perverts God's Word, *Matt. 4:6*
Hinders Saints, *1 Thess. 2:18*
Snares the Saints, *1 Tim. 3:7*
Ruler World, *1 John 5:19*
Devouring Lion, *1 Peter 5:8*

Leading Idea

The Christian life is a spiritual battle that requires us to utilize spiritual resources.

The Apostle Paul has reached the end of his letter to the Ephesians; but, before he signs off, he has one final message with which to challenge his readers (“finally,” v.10); that includes us. Since Christ has accomplished redemption for us and afforded us every spiritual blessing (1-3), and since He expects us to live a Spirit-filled life worthy of our calling (4:1-6:9), then we must understand that we are now participants in a spiritual war (v.12), a war that has been raging since the beginning of time, when Lucifer rebelled against God in heaven (*Isaiah 14; Ezekiel 28*). As such, we must also expect an active enemy who will exert every effort to disqualify us as combatants, to destroy our effectiveness.

Notice that Paul hints at the fact that our enemy has a plan, a strategy for this war, for he urges us “to stand firm against the schemes of the devil” (v.11). What are some of the devil’s schemes? Some of his weapons include fear, frustration, moral failure, distractions, discouragement, doctrinal error, pressure, persecution, confusion, chaos, and much more. Neither he nor his demons can indwell followers of Christ (*1 John 4:4*), but they can certainly harass and oppress us. They know our weaknesses; they know which buttons to push in order to cause us to stumble. They’ve been studying man for thousands of years; but, we should never fear them or be obsessed with them, for God has overcome them (*John 16:33; Col. 2:15*). They fear Christ, who has defeated sin and death. They have lost.

However, I find here a lesson in wisdom or discernment, having three points. First, for Christians to understand the world the way that it actually is, we must realize that there is more to life than what we see with our eyes or experience in our flesh. Though we live in a physical world, there exists another dimension, a spiritual world that is just as real. Behind the events that occur in our physical world are unseen spiritual forces. Since the spiritual world cannot be seen, it is easy to dismiss it; but, we must be wiser than that. We must recognize that every earthly issue that we face is really a spiritual issue and must be dealt with as such, “for our struggle is not with flesh and blood” (v.12).

Second, we cannot do battle with spiritual forces in our physical strength. That is why Paul says, “Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might” (v.10). Oftentimes, we are too confident in our ability to handle situations; but spiritual problems extend beyond our natural limits and, therefore, force us to rely upon the One who can give us supernatural strength.

Third, we must fight spiritual forces in spiritual ways. Thus, we cannot fight sin problems with physical solutions, as the natural man does. We must battle sin problems with spiritual solutions. Since we are to face physical problems with spiritual solutions, we are in need of spiritual weapons. God has given us those spiritual weapons in order for us to wage war in the spiritual world. As Christians, we are oftentimes just as guilty of approaching and “solving” immaterial problems with material weapons. That is foolishness.

We are instructed to be strong in the Lord, but how? “By taking up the full armor of God” (v.13). When the enemy bombards us with lies, stand firm by putting on the belt of truth (v.14); let us be mindful and meditate on what God says. When the enemy lures us with temptation or shames us with the guilt, let us stand firm and remind him of the righteousness that we have in Christ (breastplate). When we run across other combatants or casualties, let us be ready to share the Gospel (v.15, shoes of peace). When the enemy launches his flaming arrows of doubt, regret, uncertainty, despair, defeat, depression, or hopelessness, let us stand firm behind the “shield of faith” (v.16). Let us be confident in our salvation through Christ (helmet, v. 17) and use God’s Word (our sword) to tear down the enemy’s strongholds. One could also make the case that prayer is a mighty spiritual weapon (v.18). Let us stand firm, in God’s power and with His armor, and we will prevail and experience victory in this war!

¹⁸ “With all prayer and petition, pray at all times in the Spirit and, with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints,¹⁹ and pray on my behalf; that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel,²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.²¹ But that you also may know about my circumstances, how I am doing, Tychichus, the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, will make everything known to you.²² I have sent him to you for this very purpose, so that you may know about us, and that he may comfort your hearts.²³ Peace be to the brethren and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.²⁴ Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ with incorruptible love.”

Tychichus

Traveled with Paul from Greece to Asia, *Acts 20:4*

Messenger to the Christians at Colossae, *Col. 4:7*

Messenger to church in Ephesus, *6:21; 2 Tim. 4:12*

Messenger to Titus in Crete, *Titus 3:12*

Our Secret Weapon

The Importance of Prayer

Leading Idea

Prayer is not a one-time act but a way of life.

We have in this passage, the closing to Paul’s letter. It has been packed full of incredible reminders, important doctrine, and challenging thoughts. We should not expect anything less in his conclusion.

First, the Apostle exhorts his readers to pray (*v.18*). While prayer was not listed as part of the “armor of God” (*v.13-17*), it certainly could (and should) be considered, both as our secret weapon and as the environment in which we should breathe and battle. We are to be in the spirit of prayer when we assemble our armor, when we wield our weapon, and when we enter the fray. Paul challenges us to “pray at all times,” not sporadically, but habitually. He tells us how to pray, “in the Spirit,” understanding that since we are in a spiritual war, we must be equipped and enabled with spiritual rather than physical strength. To pray in the Spirit, we must surrender our minds, our bodies, our feeble abilities to His use, His leadership, and His will. Our desires must become His desires, our thoughts must become His thoughts, and our ways must align with His ways. Memorized, ritualistic, or rote prayers are both meaningless and powerless against our enemy. Our prayers must be frequent (“at all times”), focused (“be on the alert”), and fervent (“with all perseverance”). Prayer is not a one-time act but a way of life, a state of mind, an activity that never ends.

Next, Paul shares with his readers the objects of prayer – “all the saints.” The word “saints” here does not refer to a superhero of the faith, but rather it refers to all Christians. The New Testament refutes the idea of a special class of Christians; while it is true that some believers are more mature in their faith than others, before the Lord all believers are equal. Furthermore, while some denominations hold to the idea that one’s holiness or godliness (sainthood) is earned by their works, the Bible makes it clear that one’s holiness is a work of God through Christ Jesus (*1:3, 7; 2:1-5, 8-10*).

Obviously, we should pray for ourselves, but in praying for ourselves, we often forget to pray for others. Remember, we are in a war. One soldier cannot resist an invading army on his own. Wars are “team sports”; they require a team effort. It is good that each of us are spiritually prepared for battle, but our force, or team, or church, is only as capable to wage war as our teammates are spiritually prepared and equipped; thus, the need for continual discipleship, training, and prayer. Pray for the spiritual soldiers around you, that they too will be ready, willing, and able to engage the enemy when called upon. They must be able to trust your preparedness, and you must be able to trust theirs.

In light of this thought, Paul asked the Ephesians to pray for him (*v.19*); but, notice what he asks them to pray for. Though he is in prison in Rome (*3:1*), Paul does not ask for people to pray for his release, for his life, or even for his well-being; instead, he asked that people pray for boldness to share the Gospel when he had opportunities to do so (*v.20*). Wow, how convicting! How often do we pray for our health, for deliverance from our “chains,” for God’s blessing on our lives, instead of praying for boldness to share Christ with others? We are so concerned about ourselves when we fail to recognize the spiritual needs of those around us. Notice that Paul never called himself a prisoner of Rome or Caesar, but rather he called himself “an ambassador” of Christ, a prisoner of God; having said that, he recognized that even in the midst of dire physical circumstances (prison and possible death), there was work to be done, people to be saved, and good to be accomplished.

Finally (*v.21, 22*), so that the Ephesians would be informed of his situation, Paul sent his comrade Tychichus to them; it was Tychichus who probably carried the original letter to the church at Ephesus. Paul did not want the Christians there to be fearful for him but rather that they would be comforted and encouraged, as his concluding words indicated, “Peace, love, faith, and grace be with all those who love the Lord Jesus” (*v.23, 24*).