A person cannot earn salvation by being good or doing good.

The Bible tells us that before faith in Christ, we were dead in our sins (Ephesians 2:1). This is true of the whole of humanity. Regardless of how moral and upright a person might appear, he or she cannot escape this indictment of deadness. Apart from Christ, we are dead in our sins—not sick, not dying, but dead. But God, because of His love for us, makes us alive with Christ. Salvation is by God’s grace apart from our good works, “it is God’s gift—not from works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

To the Galatians, Paul wrote that “a person is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ” (2:16), and “if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died for nothing” (2:21).

Jesus Himself said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). Jesus is waiting for you now.

- **Admit** to God that you are a sinner. Repent, turning away from your sin.
- **By faith receive** Jesus Christ as God’s Son and accept Jesus’ gift of forgiveness from sin. He took the penalty for your sin by dying on the cross.
- **Confess** your faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. You may pray a prayer similar to this as you call on God to save you: “Dear God, I know that You love me. I confess my sin and need of salvation. I turn away from my sin and place my faith in Jesus as my Savior and Lord. In Jesus’ name I pray, amen.”

After you have received Jesus Christ into your life, tell a pastor or another Christian about your decision. Show others your faith in Christ by asking for baptism by immersion in your local church as a public expression of your faith.
## FEATURES

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## SESSIONS

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*Evangelistic Emphasis
MEET THE WRITER

Brett Selby wrote this study of Ephesians. Brett serves as the Pastoral Leadership Specialist for the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma. He is a graduate of Oklahoma Baptist University (B.A.), Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (M.Div.), and Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (D.Min.).
Often people will say to us, “Good luck!” You don’t have to be around me for very long to discover that I don’t believe in luck. I only believe in luck if it stands for Living Under Christ’s Knowledge! As followers of Jesus, we have something so much better than luck; we enjoy the blessings of Almighty God. In Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians, we discover some of the richest blessings that are ours as saints—we discover what it means to be “in Christ.”

Even though the apostle Paul was in prison when he wrote the Letter of Ephesians, he knew and we know that the Word of God cannot be bound. The decrees of ancient rulers of Paul’s day time are forgotten today. The laws of the mighty Roman Empire are disregarded today. But a letter written from a prison cell almost two thousand years ago is being read and studied by millions of people around the world in the 21st century.

Of course, this isn’t just true of the Ephesians. The Bible is still the world’s most-read book. Although it was written by over forty men spanning over 1,600 years writing in three languages, it has one central theme: God’s loving redemption of fallen humanity. This theme is reflected in Ephesians.

As you study this letter, I pray that God will revitalize you and bring revival to you and to your church.

David O. Dykes
Terms listed here are identified in the Bible commentary with a dot (•).

**Apostle**—a word used in three ways in the New Testament: (1) to describe those who were sent with a message; (2) the twelve disciples of Jesus; (3) those who were leaders in the early church, providing pastoral leadership in a role similar to a modern-day missionary or church planter (See Acts 14:14; Gal. 1:19; Eph. 4:11; 1 Cor. 4:6,9.)

**Evangelist**—an individual with a unique gifting and calling to proclaim the gospel; not all believers have the spiritual gift of evangelism but all believers are tasked with the mandate to share the gospel

**Holy**—denotes separation from everything impure; an attribute of God; in the New Testament believers are called “saints,” which literally means “holy ones,” because through faith God justifies sinners, pronouncing them holy in His sight

**Mystery**—a word used by Paul to describe the message of the gospel (Eph. 3:3); an “open secret”; God’s truth made known by revelation

**Predestined**—literally means “to mark out beforehand”; used in the Bible six times (Acts 4:28; Rom. 8:29,30; 1 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 1:5,11); refers to God’s purposes for believers determined ahead of time

**Prophet**—people in the Old Testament who either revealed the Word of God to people in their generation (forthtelling) or predicted the future as God revealed it to them (foretelling); in the New Testament, the gift of prophecy involves the proclamation of God’s Word applied to contemporary issues

**Redemption/redeem**—the act of freeing or releasing by paying a ransom price; Jesus gave Himself as a ransom for many to free sinners from the bondage of sin (Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45)

**Righteousness**—refers to the result of God’s action in declaring believers righteous—that is, to be without guilt; God declares people to be righteous when they put their trust in Jesus (Rom. 5:1)

**Saint**—a believer in Christ; the word is related to “holy” or “set apart”
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INTRODUCTION TO EPHESIANS

A basic saying of the Christian life is “become who you are.” Because we have been brought to life in Christ, we can live new and distinctive lives through the power of God’s grace.

“Become who you are” actually informs the structure of Ephesians. Paul, the writer of the letter, often used this approach in his writings to teach what it means to be a child of God in this world. In Ephesians, he built it into the very fabric of the book. Chapters 1 through 3 are about the new life that is given to us in Christ. Chapters 4 through 6 are about a new walk or lifestyle that is based on this new life.

Because something is true, there is something that we are able to do. Before we become what Christ desires of us, we first must believe in what He has done for us. The latter occurs in a moment, while the former takes place over time.

Theologians use two words to describe this process: justification and sanctification. To be justified is to believe in the sufficiency of what Christ did on the cross to bring us back to God and to give new life. It is an event. It takes place at a particular time. To be sanctified is an ongoing process based on our justification.

It is a fatal mistake to base our status with God on the fact that we are making progress in behavior modification. It is also a mistake to assume that our position in Christ and the grace of God relieves us from any responsibility to strive for good behavior. The hinge of the entire letter to the Ephesians is found in the word therefore (4:1). It reminds us that because we have been made alive in Christ, we are now to live and walk in a way that is worthy of the gospel.

The sequence of these Bible study lessons reflects this truth. First, we will examine the spiritual realities of the life of a believer—things like salvation, redemption, adoption—as well the truth about our oneness in Christ and the mystery of the church. As we embrace these matters with resolute conviction, we then are ready to hear God’s call to us to embrace holiness and to engage in spiritual warfare.

Therefore, as you study Ephesians, ask yourself: “How can I become in daily life who I am already in Christ?”
OUTLINES OF Ephesians

I. A New Life (1:1–3:21)
   a. Greeting (1:1-2)
   b. The Purpose of Christ (1:3-14)
   c. Paul’s First Prayer (1:15-23)
   d. Salvation through Grace (2:1-10)
   e. Unity Restored (2:11-22)
   f. Mystery Revealed (3:1-13)
   g. Paul’s Second Prayer (3:14-21)

II. A New Walk (4:1–6:24)
   a. Walk Worthy (4:1-16)
   b. A New Self (4:17-32)
   c. Imitators of God (5:1-21)
   d. Right Relationships (5:22–6:9)
   e. Readied for Warfare (6:10-20)
   f. Closing (6:21-24)
Rejoice

God chose to provide the blessings of salvation through Jesus’ sacrifice.

EPHESIANS 1:3-14

People who have a goal for their lives and follow a clear plan for accomplishing that goal fascinate most of us. Everything they do appears to be tied to that goal. We admire their determination and focus. At the same time, we forget that God has a goal or purpose for His creation and He is focused on that goal. God does not work randomly but is moving His creation to fulfill His purposes. Paul explained that believers are the benefactors of God’s purposes, as He chose to bring us salvation through His Son.

How would you describe the purpose of creation? How do you see history moving to accomplish that purpose?
SESSION 1: Rejoice

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

EPHESIANS 1:1-14

Paul knew there was nothing accidental about his life and experience with God. Called to be an apostle by Christ, he knew that this calling on his life was the will of God (v. 1) and not just a random occurrence of being in the right place at the right time. The word *apostle* means “messenger,” someone through whom God sends His message. The teaching of the New Testament is an apostolic message. Paul, along with the other apostles, was the human instrument through which God’s Word has come to us. All of this was the will of God for us.

Typically, Paul wrote to a church because there was some situation in need of being addressed. It was sometimes a problem or an issue brought to his attention. Ephesians is different. Paul moves quickly from a personal greeting to a sweeping treatise on the eternal purposes of God in salvation. One way of looking at it is as a discussion of the grand scheme of things, but more specifically the divine things of salvation. Before the apostle dives into the nitty gritty issues of church life and function, he will take the Ephesians back to the foundation of the world.

This great message is directed to faithful saints (v. 1). Paul used the word *saint* differently than we often do. He was not just addressing people who are usually moral (although Paul will call for ethical behavior in light of God’s wonderful call to salvation), nor did he envision a person who bears up admirably under crushing burdens in life. A saint is simply a believer in Christ, set apart for salvation and service.

This faith was being lived out in Ephesus. It was a major city, perhaps the fourth or fifth largest city in the world at that time. There was great opposition to the gospel there (Acts 19:1-41). It was a port city, which meant diverse influences from all over the world came to Ephesus and vied for the minds of the populace. Nevertheless, it was in Ephesus where Paul had proclaimed the gospel of grace and peace (v. 2). In this great letter, we discover where grace and peace can be found.

*As you read Ephesians 1:3-14, notice each occurrence of the phrase “in Christ.” What is the significance of being “in Christ”?*
KEY THEMES IN EPHESIANS

- Our position and new nature in Christ (1:3-12; 2:1-10)
- The unity of all believers (2:11–3:12)
- The practice of faith (4:1–6:20)

EXPLORE THE TEXT

CHosen (EPH. 1:3-6)

"Blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavens in Christ. For he chose us in him, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless in love before him. He predestined us to be adopted as sons through Jesus Christ for himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he lavished on us in the Beloved One."

VERSE 3

Without a doubt, Paul’s focus was on praising God, and he expressed it by describing God as blessed. Yet in the very next breath, he reminded us that we are blessed. People are blessed by Him, and they in turn praise Him for those blessings. The same idea of giving God praise for what He has done is mentioned again in verses 6, 12, and 14. Thus, praise for God serves as bookends for the entire passage, with everything mentioned in between as its grounds.

BIBLE SKILL: Reflect on a repeated word or phrase.

Three times in Ephesians 1:3-14 Paul pointed to the praise of God’s glory (Eph. 1:6,12,14). Review each instance, looking for similarities and differences in how the phrase is used. What does this phrase reveal about the purpose of our salvation? How does knowing that purpose change our perspective on salvation? How does your salvation give you a means to rejoice over God’s gracious glory?
There is a two-fold description of the location of the blessings of salvation. First, they are located in the heavens. It is difficult to justify how some so-called Christian teachers promote a form of spiritual devotion that guarantees material and earthly blessings to the devotee. Secondly, these blessings are found in Christ—in a faith relationship with Him. While there is a common grace experienced by all people (Acts 14:15-17), God’s blessings of redemption and forgiveness are only found in Christ.

VERSES 4-6
For what reason do we offer our praise to God? Primarily it is because He has taken the initiative in our salvation. He came to us in the person of Jesus Christ. Through Jesus’ sacrificial death on the cross, God made us holy and blameless before Him. All of this flowed from His love for us. Unlike human love, the logic of God’s love goes like this: I love you because I chose to love you.

A statement you will never hear God say is, “Hmmm, I didn’t see that coming!”

There was and is nothing random about God’s redemption of His children by faith. This decision of God to save us goes back to eternity past, before the creation of the world. The fall of man in Genesis 3 did not catch God off-guard. A statement you will never hear God say is, “Hmmm, I didn’t see that coming!”

In addition to being chosen, we were also predestined to be adopted into a relationship with God through Christ. It is possible that Paul himself coined the word he used for predestination. If so, then it reminds us that the source of this teaching is divine revelation, not human reason.

Paul used adoption as an illustration of how we came into God’s family. Adoption is an intentional act and the status of an adopted child is a permanent one. God desired this relationship. This was His good pleasure.

The logical response to all of this, in Paul’s mind, was praise. All that God has done, by His own choice and will, showcased His glorious grace. We are reminded that God’s provision of salvation was not based on our merit or goodness. Paul was writing to men and women of Ephesus, a city filled with wickedness and immorality. God’s love is gracious, lavished on those whose personal worthiness falls terribly short. Along with humbling us,
this thought should call forth glorious praise to the One whose grace saved us.

_How should God’s choosing us impact our view of life? How should His choice to offer salvation impact our attitude toward God? In what way should you live differently because of it?_

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**KEY DOCTRINE: God’s Purpose in Grace**

Election is the gracious purpose of God, according to which He regenerates, justifies, sanctifies, and glorifies sinners. It is consistent with the free agency of man, and comprehends all the means in connection with the end (2 Thess. 2:13-14).

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**REDEEMED (EPH. 1:7-12)**

7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace 8 that he richly poured out on us with all wisdom and understanding. 9 He made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he purposed in Christ 10 as a plan for the right time—to bring everything together in Christ, both things in heaven and things on earth in him. 11 In him we have also received an inheritance, because we were predestined according to the plan of the one who works out everything in agreement with the purpose of his will, 12 so that we who had already put our hope in Christ might bring praise to his glory.

**VERSES 7-8**

To redeem means to pay a price to secure the release of someone or something. It expresses the idea of paying what is required in order to liberate from enslavement or bondage. Prior to coming to Christ, we were enslaved to sin. Release from sin’s grip could come only through the _forgiveness_ of our sins.

The price paid to secure our redemption was both costly and extravagant. The _blood_ of Jesus—His sacrifice on the cross—paid...
the price for our freedom. This forgiveness is not earned but freely given. The vastness of our forgiveness is seen in the fact that it was in accordance with the riches of his grace. The blessing poured out on needy sinners is lavish indeed.

How are redemption and forgiveness related? How does the truth that Jesus is the only way to gain redemption serve as motivation to share the gospel with others?

The price paid to secure our redemption was both costly and extravagant.

VERSES 9-10

The benefits and blessings of salvation would be unknown to us if God had not revealed them. He gives us the truth of His Word and grants us the enlightenment to understand it. This was part of His purpose and plan. The mystery that Paul wrote about points to a truth once unknown that subsequently was brought to light. God’s plan for our salvation was revealed over time, coming to light at the right time.

The essence of God’s plan is to unite everything in Christ, to bring every part of creation under the lordship of Jesus. Paul used a word for bring everything together that was somewhat uncommon in the Greek language. It carries three ideas: (1) to restore something to its original purpose, (2) to unify, and (3) to put all things under their proper head and master. Of course, Jesus does all these things.

VERSES 11-12

The Old Testament was not far from Paul’s mind as he wrote to the Ephesians. He set forth how those who believe in Christ have received an inheritance. Literally, the verb Paul used can be translated “chosen by lot.” This paints the picture of the tribes of Israel being assigned their lands by lot. (See Num. 26:52-55.) In the Hebrew vocabulary, an inheritance was anything that was given and generally means “to take possession.” Paul emphasized that salvation came through divine initiative. In the New Testament, the idea of an inheritance was much more than a temporal possession; it is equated with heaven itself.
How does the inheritance of a possession or land compare to the inheritance promised to believers?

SEALED (EPH. 1:13-14)

13 In him you also were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and when you believed. 14 The Holy Spirit is the down payment of our inheritance, until the redemption of the possession, to the praise of his glory.

VERSE 13

The city of Ephesus was filled with a variety of religious beliefs and competing truth claims. Our times are no different. What authenticates the true child of God? It is the Holy Spirit who provides the evidence that one is truly a believer in Jesus, both inwardly in the sense of assurance but also in a changed life lived before onlookers.

Believers are marked by the Holy Spirit.

The word sealed originally referred to a seal placed on a document—typically by a signet ring or stamp into a soft materials such as wax or clay—as a way to prove authenticity. It was a mark of ownership as well. Believers are marked by the Holy Spirit. His presence is both an inward and outward sign of true profession of faith. Jesus promised His disciples that He would not leave them alone but would send another One like Himself. (See John 14:16-17.) The gift of the Holy Spirit came to the Ephesians when they heard the gospel, the word of truth, and when they responded in faith. The grammar of this verse indicates that the hearing and believing preceded the sealing.

Another function of a seal was to ensure that the item sealed, such as a letter, was delivered intact and unopened. Believers are sealed in the sense that no power of evil will thwart their ultimate arrival into the eternal realms of glory. Throughout our lives as Christians we fall into sin and we grieve the Spirit who lives in us. However, the Holy Spirit ensures that our salvation is secure and someday we will arrive home safely to be with Christ forever.
How does the sealing of the Holy Spirit give a believer confidence to fulfill God’s purposes?

VERSE 14
In verse 13 Paul referred to the Holy Spirit as a seal. Now he called Him the down payment of our inheritance. This was a term related to business or commerce. It could be translated “down payment,” “deposit,” or “earnest money.” This was the initial payment to make sure that the full payment would be made at a later date. The term down payment demonstrates that though the Spirit is given at conversion, His complete work of transformation in us is not completed until later. (See 2 Cor. 5:5.) We receive the Spirit at salvation and He begins to work in us to make us like Christ. The receiving of the Spirit is the down payment guaranteeing that God will finish what He started in us.

The Holy Spirit confirms within us that we are in fact possessors of God’s eternal inheritance in two ways. First, God’s Word is the result of the inspiration of the Spirit. As we read Scripture, the reality of heaven becomes more vivid to us. Secondly, the Spirit floods our hearts with a deep sense of God’s love for us (Rom. 5:5) as well as providing our hearts with an internal witness that we belong to God (Rom. 8:16).

As we read through verses 3-14—one long majestic sentence in the original language—we see the involvement of the Trinity in our salvation. God blessed us by choosing us to be recipients of His loving salvation. It was through Jesus Christ that we were adopted into God’s family. And finally, the Holy Spirit seals us and secures our salvation and ultimate possession of the inheritance given to us by God. From beginning to end, God’s work of salvation brings glory to Himself.

How does the gospel of grace build assurance into the life of the believer? Why does a works-based salvation lead to uncertainty?
IN MY CONTEXT

- Since God the Father chose believers to be His children as an act of grace there is no room for spiritual pride or boasting.
- Jesus redeems all believers through His death and resurrection, giving them forgiveness, spiritual understanding, and an eternal inheritance.
- The Holy Spirit guarantees the salvation of all believers, marking them with confidence as God’s children.

Ask God to examine your life for spiritual pride. What actions do you need to take to counter any feelings of entitlement or pride when it comes to your salvation?

As a group, read aloud Ephesians 1:7, giving emphasis to the personal pronouns in the verse. Discuss how the emphasis on the personal pronouns impacts the way you understand the passage. Hold one another accountable for memorizing this verse this week.

List ways to offer praise this week to God for His salvation. Include both private and public means of offering praise including service to others. What action will you take this week as an act of praise for God choosing to provide Jesus for our salvation?

Prayer Needs
Remembered

God helps believers understand the riches and greatness of His calling on their lives.

**EPHESIANS 1:15-23**

Insight comes from understanding the relationship of cause and effect. Scientists propose theories based on cycles and predictable observed patterns. Sir Issac Newton posed the theory of gravity based on an apple falling perpendicularly to the ground. The effect revealed the cause. In our Christian lives, we see the realities of cause and effect. Paul prayed that the Ephesian believers would realize the effect salvation through Christ had in their daily lives.

*How do effects point to a cause in this world? In a person’s spiritual life? Can a cause exist without producing an effect? Explain.*
UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

EPHESIANS 1:15-23

It is generally understood by Bible commentators that Paul wrote Ephesians to both the church in that city as well as to other churches within its vicinity and influence. Thus, when he referenced a report he heard about their faith (Eph. 1:15), this applied to both those believers with whom he was familiar (Acts 20:17-38) but also more specifically to others whom he did not know personally. So with a pastoral concern for some of his audience with whom he was not familiar, it was entirely appropriate for Paul to pray that they would be enlightened in their faith.

In writing this letter, Paul followed a fairly standard approach to letter writing in the Greek-speaking world. The writer would begin with some type of thanksgiving and then follow with a prayer. However, the content of Paul’s thanksgiving was not typical but amazingly expansive as he enumerated the great blessings of God in 1:3-14, a single sentence made up of 203 Greek words. Following his anthem of praise to God for His spiritual blessings, Paul shared his prayer for those to whom he wrote. This was a logical spiritual progression. The apostle prayed for his hearers that God might grant them the capacity to realize His great work on their behalf.

Paul never got over the amazing grace of God that was revealed to him. He marveled at God’s greatness as well as at the riches of His goodness. Perhaps you should review last week’s lesson and remember how Paul piled phrase on top of phrase to describe the blessings that are found in Christ Jesus. It reminds us of a person who is so captivated by a subject or an experience that he seemingly can never discuss anything else.

As you read Ephesians 1:15-23, look for phrases that identify what Paul hoped to see in the lives of the Ephesians. How does each phrase relate to a growing understanding of salvation?
EXPLORE THE TEXT

KNOWLEDGE OF GOD (EPH. 1:15-17)

15 This is why, since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, 16 I never stop giving thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. 17 I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, would give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him.

VERSES 15-16

Paul addressed God in verses 3-14 then turned his focus on the recipients of this letter. Two things characterized these believers in Ephesus: faith in the Lord Jesus and love for all the saints. In a previous letter, Paul described the Christian life as “faith working through love” (Gal. 5:6). Jesus had also taught the same truth—that love was evidence of genuine faith. (See John 13:35.) We shouldn’t read into Paul’s words any insinuation that the Ephesian believers had mastered these two crucial virtues. Though they loved one another, Paul would encourage them to continue working on their unity and to bear with one another in love (Eph. 4:2-3).

It isn’t so much that we have to pray for others but rather that we get to do so.

The apostle’s prayer for the Ephesian church was characterized by two important qualities: persistence and gratitude. The consistent practice of prayer will never result solely from a sense of obligation but out of a deep sense of thankfulness for all that God has done. The same is true of a regular ministry of intercessory prayer. While we are commanded to pray for one another (Eph. 6:18), obedience to this mandate will not flow out of a begrudging spirit. It isn’t so much that we have to pray for others but rather that we get to do so. To pray for others is to remember them. To remember someone in prayer involves specific prayer. Paul’s prayer was both persistent and specific. As we keep others in mind, rather than just thinking about ourselves, we will be more faithful in intercessory praying.
What practical steps could believers take in their daily routines that would help them increase their focus on others for the purpose of praying for them?

Paul asked God to give the Ephesians a deeper knowledge of Himself.

VERSE 17
Paul asked God to give the Ephesians a deeper knowledge of Himself. After enumerating all of God’s blessings to them in Christ (1:3-14), the apostle asked God to open the eyes of his hearers so that they might grasp His greatness. No matter how close a person is to the Lord or how many years he or she has walked with Him, there is still more of Him to know. Only arrogance would think otherwise.

How does such knowledge come to us? Is it merely a function of intelligence or diligent study? While God can use both of these, the secret of knowing Him is found elsewhere. We know God only because He chooses to reveal Himself to us. This revelation is the work of the Holy Spirit. (See John 14:26.) Interpreters differ on whether the reference to the Spirit in Ephesians 1:17 is to the Holy Spirit or more along the lines of attitude or human spirit. The former seems more likely because we are dependent on divine revelation in knowing Christ.

This prayer for the Spirit is not for His indwelling—that takes place at the point of conversion when a believer is “sealed” with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13). Rather, we are to ask God to illuminate us through the ministry of the Spirit. Just as Paul prayed for his Ephesian friends, we should pray on behalf of one another and ourselves for a deeper knowledge of God.

How does Paul’s prayer for the Ephesian believers compare to most prayers voiced today? How might prayer habits change if the main focus were on spiritual growth?
HOPE OF GOD (EPH. 1:18-19)

18 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened so that you may know what is the hope of his calling, what is the wealth of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the mighty working of his strength.

VERSES 18-19

Paul prayed that the Ephesians would be enlightened and that illumination might occur in the eyes of their heart. What a captivating phrase! The goal is not just intellectual stimulation but rather an awakening of insight at the core of a believer’s being. The biblical usage of heart is not simply that of the emotions but rather the very center of a person’s existence. The Holy Spirit helps us grasp all that God has done for us in His Son and the extent of the blessings found in Him. Our minds are expanded, our emotions are awakened, and our wills are engaged in praise and obedience.

What specifically are the truths that bring this to pass? Paul mentioned three, and they are the goals of his prayer. The first was knowledge of the hope of his calling. Christian hope is grounded and ultimately realized in Jesus Christ. Because of Him, our present is secure and our future is eternal. God called us to this great salvation we possess. We call on the name of the Lord to be saved, but it is a response to His call of us. As we grow in our understanding of the Lord’s calling, our hope is increased and deepened.

Secondly, Paul prayed that the eyes of the Ephesians would be opened to the wealth of his glorious inheritance in the saints. Grammatically, this statement could mean the inheritance God receives (we are His inheritance) or the inheritance that we receive from God. The former would emphasize the value God places on those who are in Christ, but the context seems to fit the latter.

While God’s calling points us back to the beginning of our relationship with Christ, the thought of His inheritance directs our gaze toward the end of that journey. Someday we will see Christ (1 John 3:2) and be transformed by that vision. Forever changed and made into His likeness, we will live forever as joint-heirs of Christ (Rom. 8:17). If anything is worth our meditation and reflection, it is this knowledge of our ultimate possession of heaven.
Finally, Paul’s prayer was directed toward an awareness of the immeasurable greatness of his power. The Ephesian believers lived in the midst of a pervasive and aggressive paganism, which made boastful claims of power on behalf of the idols of their culture. (See Acts 19:34.) To know the great power available in Christ was a needful corrective in the hearts of the Ephesian believers.

God’s power available to believers is so great that it is immeasurable. The Greek word used here will reappear in Ephesians 2:7 and 3:19 to describe God’s grace and Christ’s love. Originally used to denote the throwing of a spear far beyond the goal, it came to indicate something incomparable that far exceeded any competitors.

*How are the three requests of Paul in verses 18-19 related to each other? How does growing in each area lead to greater understanding and praise of God for His salvation?*

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**KEY DOCTRINE: God the Son**

Christ ascended into heaven and is now exalted at the right hand of God where He is the One Mediator, fully God, fully man, in whose Person is effected the reconciliation between God and man (1 Tim 2:5-6).

**POWER OF GOD (EPH. 1:20-23)**

20 He exercised this power in Christ by raising him from the dead and seating him at his right hand in the heavens — 21 far above every ruler and authority, power and dominion, and every title given, not only in this age but also in the one to come. 22 And he subjected everything under his feet and appointed him as head over everything for the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of the one who fills all things in every way.
VERSES 20-21

God’s power that is operative in the believer’s life was brought about in Christ Jesus. Specifically, divine power was demonstrated in Jesus’ resurrection (v. 20), ascension (v. 20), and enthronement over all evil (v. 21). The latter two stem from the first. Because of His resurrection, Christ ascended to the right hand of God and rules over every evil power.

Apart from the resurrection of Christ, our faith is worthless. (See 1 Cor. 15:14,17,19.) To forget this is to forget the essence of the gospel. (See 2 Tim. 2:8.) In the classic John Donne poem, “Death Be Not Proud,” we read the affirmation of hope that “Death, thou shalt die.” The great enemy of humanity is death, but the resurrection proves that Christ has defeated it.

The power of God also was displayed in Christ’s ascension. This crucial Christian doctrine is often ignored, perhaps lost in the shadow of the resurrection. It is important for many reasons, one of which is the assurance that Christ is our Advocate (1 John 2:1), interceding for us at the right hand of God (Rom. 8:34). He who now possesses a resurrected body—just as we will someday—is the same One who dwells in God’s presence. This speaks to the state of our existence in heaven as resurrected beings.

The reference to being seated at the right hand of God was probably an allusion to Psalm 110:1, “This is the declaration of the LORD to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.’” As the extension and fulfillment of David’s line of kingship, Jesus sits forever on the throne next to His Father, putting all His enemies, including death, under His feet.

Christ’s dominion in verse 21 is generally understood as not simply over the angels but over the evil and demonic forces described in Ephesians 6:12. Simply put, in His resurrection Christ defeated all the cosmic forces of evil in this age and in the age to come. This provides us with confidence that the power of Christ’s resurrection is sufficient for life—now and forever.

How does Christ’s being at the right hand of God give a believer security and confidence?
VERSES 22-23
Why did God make Jesus head over everything? Paul encouraged the Ephesians by assuring them that all of this great work of God was for the church. Our tendency might be to read these verses only in an individualistic sense. But we need to remember that God’s work of salvation was to bring together His church. As part of His church, we can personally experience the power of Christ at work within us. We must not forget, however, that we are part of a larger body.

The church is the body of Christ and the fullness of Christ. There is great diversity of understanding concerning how the church is the fullness of Christ. At the very least we can say that the church is the means by which Christ is fulfilling His purpose—the transformation of the world. Our bodies are the means by which we accomplish things. As Christ’s body, we are His instruments through which He brings salvation to the world and thus fills all things.

How does Christ’s “filling” of our lives help us become part of the fulfillment of His purpose?


Most commentators believe Ephesians 1:20 is a strong allusion to Psalm 110:1. Read Psalm 110. Search for answers to the following questions: Why might this psalm be the most cited psalm in the New Testament? (See Acts 2:24-35; 1 Cor. 15:25; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3; 7:17,21; 1 Pet. 3:22.) What references to the messiah do you find in the psalm? How does this psalm help you better understand the power of God?
IN MY CONTEXT

- Believers do well to pray for themselves and others to grow in relationship with God.
- Believers can grow in hope and power as they more fully understand their calling in Christ.
- Believers can live with confidence in the power of the resurrection of Jesus.

 Discuss as a group how the prayers of the group can reflect Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians to a greater degree. What changes need to be made to how the group prays for one another?

 List challenging situations you currently face. Reflect on Ephesians 1:18-19 and voice this passage as a prayer for yourself. How does this passage give you hope to face the challenges you listed?

 How can you use this passage to encourage others who may have doubts about their salvation? Identify one person with whom you will share these truths this week.

 Prayer Needs

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Resurrected

God provides salvation by grace through faith apart from our good works.

EPHESIANS 2:1-10

A case can be made that virtually every advertisement and marketing message comes to us in a form of the “before and after” approach. At the very least it can be said that most cosmetic and fitness ads use this approach in which they show a person prior to using the product and then again with the amazing after effects. A subtle variation on this method is the “shock and awe” model, where shocking information is presented and followed up with an amazing solution to the problem.

How does a positive change in a person’s life motivate others to make that same change?
UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

EPHESIANS 2:1-10

At the close of the first chapter, Paul elevated the incredible essential truth of the gospel that God has raised Jesus from the dead (Eph. 1:20). The same power that raised Jesus is at work in believers (1:19). What would require such an amazing demonstration of power and might in us? What condition would necessitate it?

Paul painted a stark contrast between what human beings are in their essential nature and what they can become through the grace of God. This is not a cynical view—and certainly not an optimistic one—but rather a realistic picture of the human condition. A hopeful picture will be painted by the apostle, but he first lays the groundwork by clearly delineating our terrible plight created by sin. What we find is a biblical “before and after” picture.

As we have seen previously in Ephesians, this entire passage is one long sentence. We don’t come to the main verb until verse 5, where we read He “made us alive.” This is an incredible statement of the grace of God in salvation. Something had to happen to us in order for us to enjoy the blessed status described in 1:3-14. Our natural condition was anything but blessed.

Paul had prayed that the Ephesians’ eyes would be opened to the greatness of their status in Christ (1:15-23). God answered that prayer by inspiring Paul to write about the grace of God in salvation. Nothing should bring more awe to our hearts and minds than the awareness of what God in His mercy has done to save us.

Eventually, Paul will remind the Ephesians of their oneness in Christ. We find in the second half of the second chapter of this book an incredible vision of a new spiritual oneness where humanity comes together under the lordship of Christ. However, such a unity can never occur without a radical transformation of the individuals who comprise it. The ground of unity in Christ is the truth that through faith we are made alive in Him.

As you read Ephesians 2:1-10, notice the contrast of life before salvation and after salvation. What do these contrasts reveal about the nature of salvation found though faith in Jesus?
EXPLORE THE TEXT

ONCE DEAD (EPH. 2:1-3)

1 And you were dead in your trespasses and sins 2 in which you previously lived according to the ways of this world, according to the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit now working in the disobedient. 3 We too all previously lived among them in our fleshly desires, carrying out the inclinations of our flesh and thoughts, and we were by nature children under wrath as the others were also.

VERSES 1-2

Our condition prior to salvation is described as that of being dead in trespasses and sins. While it is true that Paul was directly addressing the Ephesians with the personal pronoun you, it is the whole of humanity that he envisioned. This is clear by his usage of “we” in verse 3. Regardless of how moral and upright a person might appear, he or she cannot escape this indictment of deadness. Apart from Christ, we are dead in our sins and trespasses—not sick, not dying, but dead.

KEY DOCTRINE: Man

Through the temptation of Satan man transgressed the command of God and fell from his original innocence, whereby his posterity inherit a nature and an environment inclined toward sin (Rom. 3:23).

Sinful behavior is the norm prior to conversion. Paul asserted that the Ephesians previously lived this way. At times you will hear people explain their inappropriate behavior by saying, “Well, that’s not really who I am.” More often that not, that behavior represents exactly who they are.

The lifestyle of an unconverted individual follows the pattern of the surrounding culture, described in Scripture as the ways of this world. Paul did not mean physical creation but rather the human value system and structures that are in opposition to God. This fallen world is in direct contrast with the kingdom of God.
Not only are spiritually dead persons living in conformity to the world, but they are also under the sway of the universe’s most malevolent creature, Satan. He is depicted as the ruler of the power of the air. Satan is a spiritual creature, invisible to the physical eyes but not to the eyes of faith in the inspired revelation of God, the Scripture.

Encouraged by the devil himself, the prevailing tendency of a lost person is disobedience. The essence of sin is willfulness, a stubborn resistance to the authority of Christ and to the recognition of His glorious nature. This attitude or spirit is at work in the hearts of the lost, prompting their behavior and maintaining their bondage.

How does our experience support the way Paul described life without Jesus? Why is it important for those without Jesus to understand where they stand without Jesus? Why is it important for believers to remember what life is like without Jesus??

VERSE 3
This spiritual deadness described by Paul does not result in a lack of activity, as would be true of a physical corpse. Rather, those who are spiritually dead are very active, albeit in a sinful and destructive manner. Their lives are marked by fleshly desires and thoughts. The New Testament usage of the word flesh is varied, but in this context Paul used it in the sense of our sinful nature, that part of us that defies God and exalts self.

Every unconverted sinner is under God’s wrath. We shouldn’t see His wrath as akin to human anger, which can be petty and unpredictable. Instead, the wrath of God is His constant and unyielding opposition to sin.

The very notion of divine wrath should tender our hearts toward the lost and fuel a desire for their salvation.

Surely this shocking depiction of the human condition should prompt believers in Christ toward a vigorous communication of the gospel and the way of salvation. The very notion of divine wrath should
tender our hearts toward the lost and fuel a desire for their salvation. The stronghold of sin is entrenched in the lives of the lost, reinforced by culture and the enemy, but the power of the gospel is greater. On a daily basis, let us all be quick to recognize an opportunity for a gospel conversation and courageous enough to seize it.

*How does Paul’s description of life without Jesus serve as motivation to share Jesus with others?*

**NOW ALIVE (EPH. 2:4-7)**

> 4 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love that he had for us, 5 made us alive with Christ even though we were dead in trespasses. You are saved by grace! 6 He also raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavens in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the coming ages he might display the immeasurable riches of his grace through his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

**VERSES 4-7**

There is no better sound byte of the gospel than the first two words of verse 4. *But God* summarizes exactly what He has done in salvation as well as the great debt that we as believers owe Him. The adversative *but* highlights the contrast between our plight and God’s provision.

There was nothing in us that merited or warranted this divine favor and blessing. While we don’t deserve it, we can’t deny that God extends to us His *mercy*, evidenced in the new life bestowed and prompted by *his great love*. Having waited until verse 5 to write the main verb of the entire passage, Paul exploded with this doxology: God has *made us alive with Christ*. If we have been awakened from the blindness created by sin, how could we respond with anything except praise?

The life that God gives to us through Christ provides us with purpose. As a “before and after” testimony to the power of the truth, these renewed lives of ours become the means by which God’s redemptive mission is accomplished in this world. If Christ’s only purpose in our salvation was to get us into heaven, it stands to
reason that upon conversion He would remove us from this life. But He didn’t, leaving us here to witness to the mercy and love of God.

If Christ’s only purpose in our salvation was to get us into heaven, it stands to reason that upon conversion He would remove us from this life.

Paul referenced three key moments in Jesus’ life: His resurrection, ascension, and seating at the right hand of God. We see this in these three phrases: made us alive with Christ, raised us up with him, and seated us with him in the heavens. Although we are still here on earth, believers have a position in heaven based on Christ’s exalted status.

The Christian faith is not merely characterized by dogma—by only believing certain truths. While there is an essential doctrinal component to Christianity, there is also an experiential dimension. Believers are one with Christ, in union with Him. It is a dynamic and living relationship, impacting both the mind and the emotions.

For all eternity, the church of Jesus—the company of the redeemed—will be a demonstration of God’s kindness and grace in salvation. The riches of God’s grace are described as immeasurable, the same word used for the greatness of God’s power in Ephesians 1:19. Perhaps it is not off the mark to view everyone who believes in Christ as a trophy of His grace. The verb display carries a stronger meaning than to simply make something known. All recipients of divine grace will be high-resolution displays of the many-faceted grace of God throughout all eternity.

How does the changed life of a believer serve as a display of God’s grace and character?

THROUGH GRACE ALONE (EPH. 2:8-10)

8 For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God’s gift — 9 not from works, so that no one can boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time for us to do.
VERSES 8-9
Paul was determined that God receive all the glory for the salvation of sinners. Without this clear understanding of grace as the source of our renewed relationship with God, we run the risk of diminishing His glory. This is why two of the historical watchwords of the Protestant Reformation were the Latin phrases *sola gratia* (by grace alone) and *soli Deo gloria* (glory to God alone).

The salvation that is addressed in verse 8 is more than simply the remission of sins, however wonderful that would be alone. Salvation represents the totality of the new life to be found in Christ—freedom from death and condemnation, possession of an eternal place in heaven, and the Holy Spirit residing within the heart. These blessings stem from God’s grace, and they come to a believer through faith in Christ.

The inclinations of the human mind (v. 3) gravitate toward a man-centered religion. Human pride wants to take its share of the credit in any endeavor. There is no room for pride, however, in salvation.

In Romans 3:20 Paul declared that salvation cannot be accomplished by the works of the law. A person is saved “by faith apart from the works of the law” (Rom. 3:28). To the Galatians, Paul wrote that “a person is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ” (Gal. 2:16), and “if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died for nothing” (Gal. 2:21). He reminded Titus that God “saved us—not by works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy” (Titus 3:5).

**Paul is consistently clear that a person cannot earn salvation by being good or doing good.**

Paul is consistently clear that a person cannot earn salvation by being good or doing good. We have nothing about which to boast. Our new life in Christ is God’s work, from beginning to end. The only person worthy of praise in the salvation event is God.

VERSE 10
Believers live lives of *good works* because they have been brought to salvation by grace through faith, not to earn God’s favor. As new creations in Christ, we are saved *for* good works, not *by* them. Previously, Paul set forth the desired outcome of God’s work on our behalf, that we would be “holy” and “blameless” (1:4).
The performance of good works as a result of God’s grace can be depicted by those two words. Primarily, these behaviors should involve making His kindness known to the world. God could accomplish the redemption of others in a variety of ways that don’t include us, but this is not His stated purpose. He wants to use us to make His goodness known to all. The motivation for living this type of life is gratitude, a sense of awe and wonder over how much God has done for our redemption.

*How do our reasons for doing good things relate to our understanding of salvation? What do our motives reveal about our beliefs about salvation?*

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**BIBLE SKILL: Memorizing Scripture**

Memorize Ephesians 2:8-10 in your preferred Bible translation. Rewrite the verse in your own words, emphasizing the parts of the verse that describe God’s role in salvation. How does this passage give you assurance of your salvation? Do you know anyone who is trying to earn salvation in his or her own power? How you can use this verse to help that person understand that salvation is a gift to be received rather than a reward to be achieved?
IN MY CONTEXT

• Apart from Christ, all people are separated from God and subject to His judgment.
• Believers find life and purpose though faith in Jesus.
• Salvation is granted through faith alone in Jesus removing all grounds for personal boasting.

On a scale of 1 to 10 (less to greater), how would you rate your urgency in telling others about Jesus? What actions can you take to help you “move the needle” toward greater urgency and more frequent sharing of your faith?

As a group, discuss how your Bible study group carries out its purpose based on new life in Christ. What is the purpose of your group and how does that purpose reflect insights found in Ephesians 2? Record insights.

Describe the changes believing in Christ makes in your life. How can these changes point others to Jesus?

Prayer Needs
Reconciled

God reconciles us to Himself in Christ, removing barriers of hostility between believers.

EPHESIANS 2:11-22

Divisions often run deep. Past injustices, current fears, and future imagined responses can contribute to the complexity of tensions. Adding to the complexity, people can be united on one front yet divided on another. Sports teams, shared work goals, and community events may bring diverse groups together yet not remove the divisions that exist away from that event or action. True reconciliation and unity are found in a shared belief in Christ.

What are some of the biggest walls you have seen that separate people? What are some of the underlying issues that cause divisions between people and groups?
UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

EPHESIANS 2:11-22
Paul had previously stated the purpose of the great salvation that God brought to light through Christ: “to bring everything together in Christ, both things in heaven and things on the earth in him” (Eph. 1:10). This is a majestic and magnificent statement, breathtaking in its redemptive scope. God’s purpose is that in Christ all believers find unity in Him, overcoming racial and cultural barriers because of the greatness of their common Savior. Because of our separation from God, we are at odds with one another. Since He is the source of all oneness, alienation from Christ always carries with it alienation from one another.

In Ephesians 2:1-10, Paul set forth how Christ is the means by which we are brought back to God. He followed by drawing a rational inference from this great truth that, in Christ, we are brought back to each other. Later, in chapter 3, Paul will address the revealed mystery of the church as God’s means to accomplish His stated purpose. Therefore, while this new community of Christ followers is the divine instrument of bringing people to faith in Him, there is more. Faith in Christ is the path to reconciliation between people from different backgrounds, regions, and races. Therefore, there are social and relational dimensions to the church’s proclamation of the gospel.

As you read Ephesians 2:11-22, pay attention to the metaphors used by Paul. How do these metaphors describe the actions of Christ in fulfilling God’s purpose of reconciliation?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

BROUGHT NEAR (EPH. 2:11-13)
11 So then, remember that at one time you were Gentiles in the flesh — called “the uncircumcised” by those called “the circumcised,” which is done in the flesh by human hands. 12 At that time you were without Christ, excluded from the citizenship of
Israel, and foreigners to the covenants of promise, without hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus, you who were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

VERSES 11-12
After affirming the truth that grace prompts a believer to do good works (Eph. 2:10), Paul made application to the race relations of his day through the words so then. Great animosity existed between Jews and Gentiles. The Ephesians were called upon to remember that interpersonal dynamic.

Paul rebuked the emphasis on externals and, no doubt, would have commended us also to focus on “eternals” instead.

Labeling and name-calling escalates animosity. Paul alluded to this when he reminded the Ephesians that, as Gentiles, they had been labeled the uncircumcised by Jewish people. This, of course, referred to the ancient rite practiced by Jews as the external mark of their covenant with God. (See Gen. 17:9-14.) Many prejudices, at least initially, draw impetus from external features. As something done by human hands, Paul rebuked the emphasis on externals and, no doubt, would have commended us also to focus on “eternals” instead.

Calling the Ephesians back to that time prior to their conversion, Paul highlighted their pre-conversion condition. First, they were without Christ. Since all of God’s blessings are found in union with Him (Eph. 1:3), there is nothing worse than being separated from Christ. Beyond that, they were also without community, excluded from the citizenship of Israel, and not having an identity grounded in God. Notice their exclusion from the divine covenants. Old Testament covenants initiated by God brought a particular type of relationship to the recipients. Without Christ, we are excluded separated from any relationship with God.

It goes without saying that apart from Christ, a person is without hope. Although God had a plan to include the Gentiles in His redemptive work, they were not aware of that and thus deprived of hope, a future focus that someday God would provide a Savior. Paul reminded the Ephesians, as a summary statement, they were without God. Lost in their idolatry, devoid of the light of divine revelation, they were bereft of goodness and truth.
Before Paul issued a call for reconciliation, he reminded his readers of their pre-conversion condition and how Christ had brought them back to the Father. To him, the only hope for reconciliation was in Christ, who could bring everything together in Himself. The fruit of unity is only to be found in the root of the gospel. Reconciliation based on any other reality will lead to disappointment.

How does a lack of intimacy with God fuel division and prejudice among people? How are divisions an indicator of our need for a Savior?

VERSE 13
Paul explained to the Ephesians that they were now in Christ Jesus. This key phrase denoted their union with Him, whereas previously they were dominated by their sinful nature. They had been brought near through Christ’s death on the cross for their sins.

While spiritual in nature, the nearness Paul portrayed in Christ was not merely metaphorical. Historical and archaeological evidence testifies to the fact that non-Jewish people were forbidden to enter the main portions of the Jewish temple and threatened with death if they did not comply. Perhaps the Ephesians would have nodded their heads in agreement with Paul’s words. One of their own, a man named Trophimus, was involved in a volatile incident where a mob thought that he had trespassed and violated the temple. This incident brought Paul into jeopardy and actually threatened his own life. (See Acts 21:27-31.)

Being brought near to God forms the basis for reconciliation between believers. Christ’s purpose of unity cannot be fulfilled through mere social activism; it is a direct application of the gospel. Oneness in Christ—a key component of the gospel message—is a defined reality. God calls believers to work toward what is already true in heaven.

As a believer in Christ, what actions might one take to begin to break down the walls of prejudice in our world today?
PEACE DECLARED (EPH. 2:14-18)

14 For he is our peace, who made both groups one and tore down the dividing wall of hostility. In his flesh, 15 he made of no effect the law consisting of commands and expressed in regulations, so that he might create in himself one new man from the two, resulting in peace. 16 He did this so that he might reconcile both to God in one body through the cross by which he put the hostility to death. 17 He came and proclaimed the good news of peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. 18 For through him we both have access in one spirit to the Father.

VERSES 14-15

Jesus is the solution to animosity. He is the peace that removes former hostilities between believers with different backgrounds. Interestingly enough, Paul used a verb tense in these verses that conveys an event that took place in the past. The point is that Christian unity is based on what Christ has already done, not what we have done or what we might do in the future. The cross has broken down all barriers between believers. If walls still exist—and the evidence says they do—it is because humans have rebuilt and maintained them.

In His death on the cross, Christ satisfied the requirements of the law of God through His sinless obedience. This sacrifice was intended for all people who believe in Him. Paul explained that by His death on the cross, Christ brought peace between believers. The result of this was a new community of both Jews and Gentiles, centered in Christ. While Paul had in view the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles in his time, what he wrote applies to all races and ethnic groups.

VERSE 16

The greater purpose of reconciliation is spiritual in nature. Christ’s goal was to unite all believers to God, and this would become the basis for unity in one body, His church. The means by which He did this was through the cross. Jesus’ death as the once-for-all sacrifice for sin dealt a lethal blow to all disharmony. Paul’s picturesque phrase of the cross putting hostility to death highlights the root of divisions. Sin is at the heart of the hostility between people. Once sin has been dealt with, peace should be the result.
One of the tenets of secularism today is that in order for all peoples to come together, religious faith must either end or at least blend with all other belief systems. The gospel refutes that assertion. The only unity that will ever be realized will be the one that is grounded in Christ alone.

**The only unity that will ever be realized will be the one that is grounded in Christ alone.**

**VERSES 17-18**

In verses 17 and 18 we find the second major structural point of this passage, with the first being the identification of Christ as our peace (v. 14). Because He is our peace, Christ preaches peace and reconciliation. It is impossible to preach peace without first being a person of peace. All who bear the name of Christ should ensure that their hearts are free from hatred and racial animosity. All believers need to examine themselves and repent of any and all prejudice and hatred.

While there is racial unity in Christ, we can’t overlook a different and tragic type of unity that exists. Every race and ethnicity shares a common sinfulness and alienation from God. This is why Paul explained that the gospel of peace was proclaimed both to Jews (**those who were near**) and to Gentiles (**you who were far away**). All people equally need reconciliation with God. Everyone who comes to the cross by faith has the same basic problem of sin. The death of Jesus was the sacrifice for the sin found in all, regardless of their racial and ethnic heritage.

Thankfully, through Jesus, the dividing wall that separated us from God and from one another has been torn down. Access to God the Father is given to all who believe through the Holy Spirit. Paul used a word for **access** that denoted a person in a royal court who escorted a visitor into the king’s presence. Because of Christ, every believer can come into the presence of a holy God.

*How does the news of this past week demonstrate that we all have a common sinfulness? How does a common sinfulness lead to division while a common faith in Christ lead to unity?*
19 So then you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with the saints, and members of God’s household, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. 21 In him the whole building, being put together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. 22 In him you are also being built together for God’s dwelling in the Spirit.

**VERSES 19-20**

In marked contrast to their previous status as outsiders (v. 12), Paul explained to the Gentile believers in Ephesus that they were now numbered among the people of God. They were *fellow citizens with the saints*. This is more than mere citizenship; it is participation in the same family. Each person who believes belongs.

Just as families live in some kind of physical structure, the structure of God’s family rests on a spiritual *foundation*. A house is only as enduring as its foundation. It is the part of a structure that is never remodeled and ideally never changes. The status of the Gentile Ephesians would not be altered because Christ would never change His attitude of love toward them. The truth declared by the

**BIBLE SKILL: Review potentially related passages.**

Compare Ephesians 2:20 with Isaiah 28:16, which makes reference to the cornerstone as the foundation on which everything else is built. Read also Psalm 118:22. How does Jesus fulfill these Old Testament Scriptures? A cornerstone bears the weight of a building and serves as the standard for orientating the rest of the building. How does the metaphor fit for Jesus?
apostles and prophets guarantees that no one who comes to Christ in faith will be turned away. This is the foundation upon which the church rests—Christ and God’s eternal purpose.

VERSES 21-22
Believers have been put together in God’s family and made into one body through Christ’s cross. We become a place where God dwells, a holy temple for His glory. Each individual is like a stone, and God uses a diversity of materials to build His habitation. It is in the combination and unity of His people that the church becomes a thing of beauty. When a church demonstrates unity through diversity, it is becoming the temple God wants it to be.

Lasting inclusiveness can only be found in the exclusivity of Christ’s salvation.

Once again, this unity does not come, as the secular skeptic imagines, through the inclusion of all belief systems. Lasting inclusiveness can only be found in the exclusivity of Christ’s salvation. It is through union with Christ, in him, that we find unity with other believers. Yet it isn’t automatic, for we are being built together in the body of Christ. As we work to grow together in Jesus, God honors those efforts with His presence through the Spirit.

How does a shared citizenship in God’s family impact how believers view one another?

KEY DOCTRINE: The Church
The church is the Body of Christ which includes all of the redeemed of all the ages, believers from every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation (Rev. 7:9-10).
IN YOUR CONTEXT

• Because salvation is offered to all people and all believers are made one in Christ, we must work to break down walls of prejudice.
• Only through faith in Christ can we have genuine peace.
• All believers are included in God’s family, having a place in His kingdom.

*What could your small group do to promote unity and reconciliation between believers in your community or city?*

Examine your life for things you depend on for peace other than faith in Christ. Thank God for giving you peace and commit afresh to trust in Him more completely.

Do you know someone who needs to know he or she has a place in God’s household as a result of faith in Jesus? How can you help this believer find his or her place and be welcomed? Identify someone who appears to be an outsider from your social circle and invite that person to be a part of one of your gatherings.

Prayer Needs

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Revealed

God invites believers to proclaim the revealed mystery of the church.

Ephesians 3:1-13

Many of us love a good mystery. Some stories touted as a mystery are not really mysteries but rather entertaining stories with hints along the way. The story is interesting, but the mystery was never shrouded in doubt. Yet other stories designated as mysteries take us on twists and turns that we are unable to solve until it is revealed in the end. What keeps us engaged is the lack of any hints. In Ephesians 3, Paul revealed a mystery hidden but made known.

What are some of your favorite mystery stories or shows? What makes that story or show interesting to you?
Understanding the Context

**Ephesians 3:1-13**

In the first two chapters of his Letter to the Ephesians, Paul followed a detectable pattern. He reflected on the riches of God’s blessings in Christ Jesus (Eph. 1:3-14) and then followed up with a prayer for insight (1:15-23). In Chapter 2, he wrote about the unfolding of God’s purpose in salvation by bringing new life to those dead in sin, both Jews and Gentiles. At the beginning of chapter 3, Paul is about to once again follow up with a prayer (v. 1). Then suddenly and somewhat unexpectedly he began a discussion of God’s revealed mystery. Paul returned from this self-interruption and offered a prayer for the Ephesians’ spiritual empowerment (vv. 14-21).

A close examination can trace the connection between chapters 2 and 3. Chapter 2 concluded with an affirmation that both Jews and Gentiles were being built together into God’s family, the church. Paul affirmed that this racial reconciliation was part of the redemptive sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. In chapter 3, Paul went on to clarify that this bringing together of Jew and Gentile was actually a result of God’s eternal plan. The emergence of the church—one new community—is no parenthesis in the outworking of redemption but the intended purpose of God.

When Paul returned to the interrupted prayer begun in 3:1, he once again prayed that the Ephesians would be empowered by the revelation of the mystery of Christ and the purposes of God. This new knowledge given to the body of Christ was not simply information to be accumulated. Rather, it was directed toward a greater end—that believers would be emboldened to proclaim this mystery of Christ in an appropriate and discerning manner. Part of the motivation to share the message stems from this revelation. Those who have it realize how much they needed to be told about it and therefore want to give the same benefit to others.

*Highlight the various times Paul used the word “mystery” as you read Ephesians 3:1-13. How does the gospel message qualify as a mystery?*
THE MYSTERY (EPH. 3:1-6)

1 For this reason, I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles — 2 you have heard, haven’t you, about the administration of God’s grace that he gave to me for you? 3 The mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have briefly written above. 4 By reading this you are able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ. 5 This was not made known to people in other generations as it is now revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: 6 The Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body, and partners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

VERSES 1-2

Before he embarked upon the aforementioned digression, Paul stated two vital pieces of information about himself: his name and his status. Notice the self-awareness on the apostle’s part. He recognized the true power behind the course of his life as the prisoner of Christ Jesus. A cynic would say, “You’re the prisoner of Rome.” Paul knew better because of his great confidence in the providence of God. His actual name said something about his spiritual experience as well. While his given name was Saul, named after the first king of Israel, Paul identified himself for the Ephesians by the name he went by after conversion, which means “small.” This illustrated the trajectory of the apostle’s life, once reminiscent of the leader who sought to tower over his people into a man who was humble before them.

This suffering endured by Paul was directly related to his embrace of the Gentile mission (Acts 21:17-34). Humanly speaking, he was in prison because he dared to believe that those outside the Jewish race were recipients of God’s favor and grace and therefore proclaimed the gospel to them. To say on behalf of you Gentiles was simply a statement of fact, not an attempt to extract pity from his listeners.

Paul gave an explanation and description of his ministry: declaring the revealed mystery of God in Christ as a stewardship (administration). He assumed that for the most part the Ephesians had heard of this before. Yet the possibility remained that some hadn’t because this letter was actually circulated in areas outside of Ephesus.
The word translated administration refers to the responsibility of managing a household. Paul had been given the task of proclaiming the gospel to the Gentiles. (See Acts 9:15-16.) He saw this as something entrusted to him by God’s grace and for which he must give an account. The ultimate purpose of his calling was for the Ephesians, as Gentiles, which is seen in Paul’s words for you.

VERSES 3-6
What Paul referenced as a mystery could best be defined as an “open secret,” not a puzzling riddle. One remembers the expression “hidden in plain sight.” God’s truth is not mystical knowledge, attained through some cryptic religious code. The problem is that sin blinds the human heart, and therefore revelation must be given. Notice that Paul taught that it was made known to him by revelation. The message of salvation in general, and its particular application to both Jews and Gentiles, is a revealed truth, not the product of human discovery.

Only the Holy Spirit opens up our hearts to see the truth, but He uses both human teachers and our own diligence in study to do so.

Revelation, however, doesn’t exclude our participation. The means by which we come to understand is by reading the Word of God as revelation from Him. Only the Holy Spirit opens up our hearts to see the truth, but He uses both human teachers and our own diligence in study to do so.

We want to ask at this point: What is this mystery to which Paul kept referring? It is what he has briefly written above, that is, all of his Letter to the Ephesians up to this point. Because God made known to Paul the Gentiles’ inclusion in God’s redemptive plan, everyone who reads Ephesians, as well as the rest of Scripture, can also understand this revealed mystery.

Obviously the whole notion of mystery includes the aspect of hiddenness. Previous generations did not know all of the particulars of God’s plan. Although there was foreshadowing in the Old Testament about God’s intentions for the Gentiles, it was not obvious to all how this would come to pass. Paul explained that Gentiles had an equal status with Jews, members of the same body, all because of the revelation of the gospel.
How does the gospel demonstrate that all people can find a place in Christ’s church?

THE PROCLAMATION (EPH. 3:7-9)

7 I was made a servant of this gospel by the gift of God’s grace that was given to me by the working of his power. 8 This grace was given to me—the least of all the saints—to proclaim to the Gentiles the incalculable riches of Christ, 9 and to shed light for all about the administration of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things.

VERSES 7-9

While God is the principal character in the gospel narrative, Paul understood he had a part to play as well. His was the role of a servant. He saw his commissioning to this ministry as the gift of God’s grace that was given to him. Consider for a moment the situation in which Paul was writing: imprisoned in Rome because of his efforts to share the gospel with the Gentiles. He didn’t see himself as deserving of any honor or special status because of his sacrifice. Rather, he identified himself as the beneficiary of God’s goodness.

The first verb used by Paul to describe his delivery of the gospel was proclaim. It is not the specific word used to “preach” but rather a more general one that carries the idea of witnessing to the gospel. Every believer is tasked to tell others about the grace of God they have received in Christ. Paul’s passion for this was fueled by his self-recognition as the least of all the saints, a startling description that we might hesitate to ascribe to him. Near the end of his life, John Newton, author of the hymn “Amazing Grace,” reportedly said: “My memory is nearly gone, but I remember two things: that I am a great sinner and Christ is a great Savior.” Paul’s sense of indebtedness to God drove the engine of his witnessing efforts.

Paul’s assigned task of proclaiming the gospel especially involved the Gentiles. He reveled in the beauty of how those who were unaware of God’s desire to save them were now enlightened as to His purpose. As others have observed, it seems inappropriate to focus exclusively on sharing the good news of salvation with those
who have heard it so many times at the exclusion of those who have never heard it even once.

In verse 9 we see the second word that clarifies our proclamation of the gospel. To witness to Christ is to **shed light**. A primary characteristic of lostness is the absence of spiritual light. This heightens the urgency of the responsibility given to the church to declare the revealed mystery of verse 6, that salvation is offered to all people who believe in Jesus. This plan was conceived and executed by God who created all things.

*Is sharing the gospel more of a responsibility or a privilege? What is the difference?*

**THE PURPOSE** *(EPH. 3:10-13)*

10 This is so that God’s multi-faceted wisdom may now be made known through the church to the rulers and authorities in the heavens.

11 This is according to his eternal purpose accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. 12 In him we have boldness and confident access through faith in him. 13 So then I ask you not to be discouraged over my afflictions on your behalf, for they are your glory.

**VERSES 10-11**

It is God’s purpose to make the **multi-faceted wisdom** of the gospel known **through the church**. We might be surprised as to the audience of this declaration of truth and wisdom. It is **the rulers and authorities in the heavens**. Biblical commentators differ as to the specific composition of this audience, and whether it is made up of good angels or evil ones or both.

Peter, when speaking of God’s great salvation, said that angels long to get a glimpse of these things (1 Pet. 1:12). However, Paul also described wisdom as being withheld from demonic forces for a time leading to the crucifixion of Jesus (1 Cor. 2:6–8). Certainly if demons understood the power that the resurrection would have to defeat them, they would have not wanted to crucify the Lord of glory.

Our proclamation of the gospel before people and heavenly beings is God’s **eternal purpose** and the theme about which Paul
wrote to the Ephesians. It has always been God’s plan to use the church to make known the good news of salvation. God didn’t only purpose to bring us back to Himself through Christ’s sacrifice for our sin. He also desires that we become His instruments of grace to others. God desires the salvation of all people with intensity equal to His passion that you would come into fellowship with Him through Christ. The next time you share the gospel with another person, you can say to yourself with all truthfulness, “I was made (and saved) to do this.”

Since God’s purposes include using believers to share the gospel with all people, what roadblocks get in the way of believers fulfilling that purpose? How does Paul’s words address any of those potential roadblocks?

**VERSE 12**

**Boldness** in sharing the faith is not always characteristic of the body of Christ. Many believers are timid and fearful of having gospel conversations with lost people. The word *boldness* means...
“freedom of speech.” This confidence is grounded in our confident access to approach God the Father. Because of our faith in Christ, we have an intimate relationship with the Lord. This relationship fuels our witnessing.

I have been greatly helped by what a teacher shared about his daily devotional ritual. Every morning he prayed three things: for an opportunity to share Christ with someone, for the wisdom to see it, and the courage to take it. Let your witnessing begin with an intimate relationship with Jesus. The old adage is true: we should talk to Jesus about lost people before we talk to lost people about Jesus.

**VERSE 13**

Paul began chapter 3 by referencing his imprisonment for the gospel and then concluded by addressing the subject with his readers. He mentioned to them his afflictions on their behalf, referring to his Gentile ministry. Perhaps they saw in Paul’s difficulty the world’s growing hostility toward the gospel. Perhaps we feel the same at times, watching a culture that is increasingly becoming more hostile to God and His truth. Regardless of the reception they found and that we might find, we have great reason to continue faithfully sharing our witness. Rejection and suffering in this world are not the end of the story, for there awaits for Christ’s own people a glory beyond comprehension.

What is the relationship between circumstances and a willingness to share the gospel? How can difficulties open the door for sharing the gospel?

**KEY DOCTRINE: Evangelism and Missions**

Missionary effort on the part of all rests thus upon a spiritual necessity of the regenerate life, and is expressly and repeatedly commanded in the teachings of Christ (John 20:21).
IN MY CONTEXT

- God offers salvation to all people, providing them a place in His church.
- Believers can tell others about the grace and richness of God that they have received in Christ.
- Believers find purpose in sharing the gospel with others.

*As a group, list potential events or activities your small group could host that might offer opportunities for gospel conversations with lost people. What steps does the group need to take to plan one such event or activity?*

*What people groups in your city are in the greatest need to hear the gospel? How could you build a bridge to that group that God might use to reach them?*

*What natural gifts and abilities do you possess that God could use to share a gospel witness through you? How can you use these gifts or abilities to share Jesus with one person this week?*

Prayer Needs
Residence

God offers believers strength by Christ dwelling in us.

Ephesians 3:14-21

Sometimes, the simple presence of a friend makes all the difference. Most of us appreciate someone by our side when receiving serious medical test results or attending a legal proceeding for a family member. Strength to do the hard things in life can be found simply through a physical presence. “I’ll go with you, and we’ll face this together” may be some of the most precious words we ever hear.

Recall a time when the physical presence of a friend helped you get through a challenging situation.
UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

EPHESIANS 3:14-21

Based on the great truth that, through His cross, Jesus created a new multi-racial community of faith comprised of Jews and Gentiles (Eph. 2:11–3:13), Paul offered a prayer for the Ephesian believers.

The apostle prayed to the Father to strengthen the Ephesians. The prayers of Paul, as inspired Scripture, represent more than an example of how an ancient believer prayed. They demonstrate God’s plan for every believer and, in this case, give a description of the new life brought into existence through Jesus Christ. This prayer represents clearly what it means to be “made alive with Christ” (2:5). The presence of Christ in our lives changes everything. With Him, a new life emerges for His glory.

After concluding his prayer and chapter 3, Paul began to set forth the particulars of this new life in Christ beginning in the next chapter. There is an observable pattern in Paul’s writings, not just in Ephesians but in other New Testament letters as well. He frequently begins with doctrine, with truth, with statements of reality that are grounded in God’s redemptive work. In Ephesians, we find this in the first three chapters. At the beginning of Chapter 4, there is the all-important conjunction “therefore” that marks the transition from doctrine to practice, from the indicative (already true) to the imperative (waiting to be made true). This reminds us of that which distinguishes Christian faith from all other religions. It is God-centered, not sourced in what human beings can do to merit salvation. Essentially, the lifestyle of a follower of Jesus is a reverent response to what God has already graciously done, not an attempt to reach God through human effort and right behavior.

Notice the specific requests Paul prayed for believers in Ephesians 3:14-21. How do these requests help us understand the character of God?
EXPLORE THE TEXT

PETITIONED (EPH. 3:14-15)

14 For this reason I kneel before the Father 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named.

VERSES 14-15

Because of their status as the people of God—the church, the “one new man” created through the cross of Jesus (Eph. 2:15)—Paul prayed for the Ephesians. No doubt he was motivated to do so because of what he previously affirmed—that believers have access to God (3:12). So in this way we see the important connection between instruction and devotion, between Bible study and prayer. Both are vital in our growth as followers of Jesus. From Paul’s perspective, it was not enough to teach the Ephesians; he also felt impressed to pray for them. Information is important, but an openness of heart to receive truth is equally crucial.

We should take note that although Paul was under severe limitations in his prison cell, he could still pray for others. The adversary might stop us from doing many things through persecution. Our own physical bodies may hinder us at times. But as long as we have life, we can pray. Nothing can prevent us from lifting up others before the Father. We strengthen others by praying for them.

Paul’s reference to the Father prompted him to state a particular application of this divine characteristic. Every family derives its existence from Him. The meaning here is not so much what we might call the nuclear family but rather the sense of a group of people who have a common ancestor. (See Luke 2:4 for the same word usage.) We can see that it is family in a broader sense because it isn’t restricted to the earth but also heaven. It is a very comprehensive view of families that Paul had in mind here. His point was that every family, group, clan, or ethnicity originated with God the Father and Creator.

How might a person’s prayer requests for others reveal the requester’s understanding of God? How might a person’s understanding of God impact how they pray for the spiritual growth of others?
INDWELLED (EPH. 3:16-19)

16 I pray that he may grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with power in your inner being through his Spirit, 
17 and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. I pray that you, being rooted and firmly established in love, 
18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the length and width, height and depth of God’s love, 
19 and to know Christ’s love that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

VERSES 16-17a

The familiar adage to avoid vague prayers and instead to pray specific prayers is evident in Paul’s example. He shared with the Ephesians four specific requests of his prayer for them: spiritual strength, abiding faith, awareness of God’s love, and the fullness of God. Each of these objectives merit our study and contemplation.

The familiar adage to avoid vague prayers and instead to pray specific prayers is evident in Paul’s example.

We can see in Paul’s prayer an example to emulate. First, in his kneeling (v. 14), there is humility before God. Next, Paul called on God as Father (v. 14), expressing an intimate relationship with the One who gave him life. Finally, this man of God recognized that prayer was not so much “claiming” something from Him, as it was receiving what his Father chose to grant him. This rightly expresses the humility required to come before God in prayer.

What Paul specifically asked God to grant to the Ephesians was that they would be strengthened with power inwardly. This divine empowerment in our inner being is through his Spirit. There is an obvious contrast of the inner being with the physicality of our existence. (See 2 Cor. 4:16.) Even when the externals of our existence are in peril, believers have an inner life on which to rely. This is where we experience and encounter Christ Himself.
The degree to which we can do so is in accordance to the riches of his glory. The more we grasp His greatness, the more we will experience His power.

The request that Christ may dwell in your hearts did not express a desire by Paul that the Ephesians might be saved. The Greek word for dwell carries the idea of abiding, of living somewhere for a long period of time. It describes the experience of a familiar relationship with Christ, not one characterized by long periods of silence and isolation. This was Christ’s desire for us. (See John 15:4.) This indwelling, since it occurs in the inner being of a person, is activated and sustained through faith.

What is the connection between being strengthened by the Holy Spirit and Christ indwelling a believer? How are they similar? How are they different?

VERSES 17b-19

The fellowship of a believer with Christ is a residency of love. As we wrap our minds around the gospel—what has been done for us in Christ—our hearts are moved and a deep love for God is aroused within us. This love is the foundation on which we are firmly established. We are also to be rooted in this love, like the root system of a large tree. The love relationship between a believer and Christ is the means by which nourishment is brought to the inner being, strengthened to live out new life in Christ.

As Christ resides in us, strengthening and growing us, this in turn fosters a greater understanding of God’s love. Paul used a four-dimensional metaphor when he depicted God’s love in terms of its length and width, height and depth. No doubt his intention was to paint a vivid picture of its vastness. Nothing brings inner strength like an awareness of the greatness of God’s love.

True love not only waits, it also lasts.

The length of God’s love reminds us that it lasts forever. So much of the so-called “love” in our world is temporary. Frequently, people
commit themselves to another person in marriage not for the
duration of life, but rather as long as the emotional fervency of love
lasts. True love not only waits, it also lasts.

To talk about God’s love as wide calls to mind how inclusive it
is, and how every person is the object of His care and concern. In
the multi-cultural context in which Paul wrote to the Ephesians,
perhaps this was an important application of the all-encompassing
love of God. It is no less needed today in our divided world.

The height of God’s love may serve as a reminder that it raises
us from the sin-ravaged squalor of this world to heaven itself.
Certainly God’s desire for us is that we live forever where He is, in
heaven (John 17:24). In the heartache of life, during those times in
which we feel like we have hit the proverbial bottom, we can find
His love to be even deeper, and His arms of care are always beneath
us to lift us up (Deut. 33:27).

While this grasp of the vastness of divine love is a personal
experience, it doesn’t occur in isolation. It takes place with all the
saints. Living in biblical community with other believers creates
the environment in which our understanding of God’s incredible
love can grow. While I might be able to see how much God loves me
in my personal devotional times with Him, it is in fellowship with
other Christians that I come to realize how much He loves all of us.
This insight will revolutionize your life.

All who have experienced Christ’s love in salvation still have
more of His love to discover.

While it was certainly important for believers in Ephesus to
increase in their knowledge about their new lives in Christ, Paul
desired for them to know Christ’s love. He recognized that this was
a paradox because such love surpasses knowledge. All who have
experienced Christ’s love in salvation still have more of His love
to discover. By praying for the Ephesians to know what surpasses
knowledge, Paul was praying that they would continue to experience
more of Christ’s love as they were growing in their faith through
the presence of the indwelling Christ. Knowledge and experience of
God’s love leads to love, and love leads the believer to the fullness
of God. Those who love God want to please Him and live the way
He desires. As believers grow and experience the indwelling Christ,
they should be progressing toward complete maturity in their
relationships with God.
How does grasping the depth of Christ’s love bring power to the life of a believer? How does the love of Christ change a person from the inside out?

HONORED (EPH. 3:20-21)

20 Now to him who is able to do above and beyond all that we ask or think according to the power that works in us — 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

VERSE 20

Paul’s bold prayer for the Ephesians culminated in a request for their saturation with the fullness of God (v. 19). It is hard to imagine a greater prayer than this. Of course, he understood that only God and His grace could bring such a thing to pass. Therefore, we see the logical conclusion to this prayer: a doxology of praise to the only One who can answer it. Furthermore, this great offering of praise is a fitting conclusion to the first half of Paul’s letter, with all of its descriptions of new life in Christ.

Paul made specific bold requests on behalf of the Ephesian church. He realized, of course, that God could do much more than he could even dream. God is able to do above and beyond all that we ask or think. This is an incredible statement, given the fact that human beings sometimes have fertile imaginations. Even more incredible is the thought brought to light earlier that this power … works in us. (See Eph. 1:20.) It isn’t just that God can do feats of strength, but rather that He wants to do them in and through us.

How do people place limits on God in their prayers? What kinds of limits might they place on God? How do these limits compare to the way Paul described God?
The fame of God’s greatness spreads even apart from events that might make a big media splash.

**VERSE 21**
This verse is the natural response of grateful devotion to the truth stated in the previous verse. A God whose might exceeds our imagination should be glorified *forever and ever* and without restraint. This glorification of God comes from both *Christ Jesus* and *the church*. As Christ’s work of reconciliation continues through the church, God is honored and glorified. This is what He has called us to pursue in *all generations*. Certainly, the name of the Lord is exalted through our works of reconciliation. Yet the fame of God’s greatness spreads even apart from events that might make a big media splash. By simply allowing Christ—who lives inside us—to strengthen us for life and all its challenges, we reflect His glory.

**BIBLE SKILL:** *Use a Bible dictionary to better understand a word or phrase.*
Look up *glory* or *glory of God* in a Bible dictionary. Read Ephesians 1:6-18 and 3:13-21, noting when Paul used the word *glory*. What do you think Paul meant by the word *glory*? How is a person’s glory also wrapped up in the glory of God?
IN MY CONTEXT

- Believers can strengthen others by praying for their spiritual growth.
- Believers are changed from the inside out by the indwelling Christ.
- Believers should honor God for demonstrating His majesty.

As a group, spend time evaluating the systematic plan your small group has in place to pray specifically for the spiritual growth of one another. What might the group do to strengthen the plan?

To what can you point in your life that indicates you equally value the development of your inner being along with the outward person?

How is Christ being glorified “in all generations” through your ministry? What adjustments need to be made to bring honor to God to a greater degree?

Prayer Needs
Walking Together

Believers demonstrate the truth of the gospel by being unified in their actions.

EPHESIANS 4:1-10

Many churches have adopted recovery ministries to help people in addiction find freedom from substance abuse. In some cases, the focus in those congregations moved from “those people” to “us” as they realized their own need of deliverance. It is interesting how our perspective of others changes when we realize our own dependencies. The sense of solidarity among fellow strugglers cuts across the normal dividing lines of class, ethnicity, and political affiliations.

How can a personal struggle or crisis bring us into a relationship with another person with whom we would not have connected under normal circumstances?
UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

EPHESIANS 4:1-10

As we approach the fourth chapter of Ephesians, we see a characteristic pattern of Paul’s writing. He begins with the word “therefore,” connecting Ephesians 1–3 with chapters 4–6. The former focused on the new life offered in Christ. The latter addresses the new walk that should characterize His followers because of that new life.

Some scholars see Paul’s approach here as the “indicative/imperative” principle of the Christian life. The indicative describes the mood of a verb in the original language of Scripture. It is used for an action that is already true. On the other hand, the imperative (a command) is used for an action that has not yet taken place. In other words, the walk of a believer should express the new life he or she has received in Christ.

The persistent danger for the church throughout the ages has been to reverse the proper order of the indicative and imperative. At times some have taught that by doing Christian things we become Christian people. Nothing could be further from the truth. We obey God’s commands in Scripture because we are saved, not in order to be saved. The command to live worthy in Ephesians 4:1 should be interpreted in this manner. Actions do not make us worthy of salvation; rather, having received it, we live in light of its magnificence.

This is what is true about every person: we are broken by sin. Here is what God wants to see as true about us—that we live in unity with other believers. At the cross, we all stand in need of the Lord’s forgiveness. Thus, our unity in Christ demonstrates the very essence of the gospel: all have sinned, and salvation is available to all through faith in Christ.

Read Ephesians 4:1-10, noting the commands given. How is each command connected to a person’s salvation?

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EXPLORE THE TEXT

WALKING WORTHY (EPH. 4:1-3)

1 Therefore I, the prisoner in the Lord, urge you to live worthy of the calling you have received, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

VERSE 1
Paul wrote to the Ephesians as a prisoner. However, he was not prevented by his imprisonment in making a positive impact for Christ’s kingdom. Paul was not trying to enlist the Ephesians’ sympathy in reminding them of his situation. Instead, he was intensifying his appeal. As he began to call for Christian attitudes and character, no doubt the Ephesians would have realized that what takes place inside the life of a Christian is what drives the outward expression of a new life in Christ. They could see this truth in Paul himself. As Christ transforms our attitudes, our actions will change as a result.

Ultimately, the code of conduct for any believer in Christ is to live worthy of the calling upon their lives. Paul had already taught about the nature of this calling. (See Eph. 1:18). The behavior of Christians is to be in direct proportion to the greatness of God’s power He has bestowed upon them. This is why Paul took the first half of his letter to describe for his audience the glory of what it meant to be a follower of Jesus. Then with his therefore in 4:1, he drew out the implications of that holy calling on Christian behavior.

VERSES 2-3
Having highlighted the great calling upon the lives of believers, Paul proceeded to set forth how this calling can be fulfilled. The key would not primarily be external resources but rather internal character and virtue. In verse 2 he mentioned four key attitudes: humility, gentleness, patience, and bearing with one another in love.

Humility was not considered a virtue in the ancient world but became one through the influence of the gospel. It is a key virtue that Paul enjoined the Ephesians to pursue. Gentleness is frequently translated as “meekness,” which should not be equated with weakness. It is best defined as “strength under control.”
As those who are called to a future glorification, Paul encouraged the Ephesians to practice *patience* in their relationships. Having a strong sense of our future inheritance in heaven motivates us to be restrained in our reactions. *Bearing with one another* is an amplification of what it means to be patient. Both are used in Romans 2:4 to depict how God extends Himself on our behalf. Embodying these virtues is part of living worthy of our calling and demonstrating the truth of the gospel.

Not everyone who acknowledges the value of unity will exert himself or herself to create and keep it.

Though Paul previously asserted the essential unity between Jews and Gentiles in the church (2:11-22), he contended that this status (indicative) must be maintained in on going practice and experience (imperative). This unity would need to be kept through *making every effort*. Not everyone who acknowledges the value of unity will exert himself or herself to create and keep it. The godly attitudes and character set forth in verse 2 are, in part, how unity is maintained.

Though human effort would be required, ultimately unity in the Ephesians church would originate in *the Spirit*. His transforming presence in the life of every believer makes unity possible through effort and commitment. While we must work toward harmony in the church, we can’t accomplish it in our own strength. It takes the empowerment of the Spirit to see it happen.

This unity occurs in the context of *the bond of peace*. While we might be tempted to see this peace as the means to unity, remembering Paul’s previous treatment of it in his letter helps to fine tune the actual meaning. Since God has already made us one in Christ (2:14-15), our call is to affirm and embrace what is already true, not create something from scratch. This is an encouragement to us as we pursue this oneness in actual experience.

*How do the attitudes and actions identified by Paul in these verses serve as a demonstration of the gospel? How do they help us share Jesus with others?*
**BIBLE SKILL: Compare Bible passages.**

Read the following Bible passages and take note of what they say concerning the filling of the Holy Spirit: Acts 2:38; 4:31; 13:52; Romans 8:9; 1 Corinthians 12:13; and Ephesians 5:18. What do these passages teach about the filling of the Holy Spirit? Write a summary statement about what you discover.

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**LIVING UNIFIED (EPH. 4:4-6)**

4 There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope at your calling — 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

**VERSE 4**

After laying the biblical foundation for unity through a gospel-worthy lifestyle, Paul continued by including our common hope in Christ. The church is the one body of Christ. It is a single community made up of Jews and Gentiles who have been reconciled to God through Christ. Though this body meets in many places, speaks different languages, and serves in various cultures, the body of Christ is still one.

It is the Spirit that animates the church to live in a unified manner (2:18). To neglect the ministry and presence of the Holy Spirit in the church is to effectively cut off her very source of life. Unity isn’t easily attained, but thankfully we do not have to pursue it in our own power.

Notice how Paul wrote this section as three triads in verses 4-6. Each verse contains a triad focusing on a different member of the Trinity. The unity among believers should mimic the unity between the three Persons of the Godhead.
In verse 4 Paul called attention to the one hope to which every believer is called. Unity emerges among believers when eternal realities are a clear and precious fixation. When our focus becomes too oriented to this life, disharmony will enter the picture.

**VERSE 5**

In his second triad, Paul focused on Christ and how He brings unity to His church. This begins with affirming Him as Lord. The lordship of Christ was the defining statement of the early church (Phil. 2:11). In the Old Testament, “LORD” translated the covenant name of God, Yahweh. To call Jesus Lord is to acknowledge His deity and oneness with God the Father.

The one faith could have been a reference to the belief needed to embrace Jesus as Lord, or it could have been a reference to the truths about Jesus. Certainly a person is saved by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8-9). However, the word faith sometimes appears as a body of truth (1 Tim. 3:9; 4:1,6; Titus 1:4; Jude 3). In a culture marked by inclusiveness of all viewpoints, we dare not accommodate unbiblical beliefs to achieve unity. While there is no need to divide ourselves on secondary matters, we must always insist on adherence to the core tenets of Christianity.

The one baptism spoken of by Paul is debated as being either baptism in water or the baptism of the Spirit. It is not necessary to speak in either/or terms when one considers that the former is a symbol of an inward experience and thus accurately represents the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

The unity of the church is a unity of mission.

**VERSE 6**

In his final triad, Paul highlighted God the Father as the source of the church’s unity. If God is my Father, then other believers are my brothers and sisters in Him.

What we learn from this is crucial. First, unity among believers is based on the preeminence of God, that He is above us. Idolatry dismantles church unity. Second, unity must take into account the fact that God’s purpose is to work through every believer. The unity of the church is a unity of mission. Finally, God is in every believer, which forbids us from building a fellowship based on externals, such as race or class.
How should believers’ relationships with one another mirror the relationship between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

KEY DOCTRINE: Man

Only the grace of God can bring man into His holy fellowship and enable man to fulfill the creative purpose of God (Col. 1:21-22).

ENJOYING VICTORY (EPH. 4:7-10)

7 Now grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift. 8 For it says: When he ascended on high, he took the captives captive; he gave gifts to people. 9 But what does “he ascended” mean except that he also descended to the lower parts of the earth? 10 The one who descended is also the one who ascended far above all the heavens, to fill all things.

It seems like all the human grasping in life contributes to disharmony. Empty people claw after status and prestige in order to fill the gaping holes in their souls. However, when a person is assured that an ultimate triumph belongs to them in Christ, they are able to relax and live contently in a manner conducive to unity. Christ has won the victory in which every believer should rest.

VERSES 7-8

Unity in the church is biblical but so is diversity. Grace was given to each one of us. People are saved not because they deserve it or have earned it but because God is a gracious God who took the initiative to give salvation freely to all who would believe. This gift was distributed not based on the believer’s merit but according to the merit of Christ’s gift. With the gift of salvation came other gifts of God’s grace that were to be used to build up the body of Christ.

In verse 8 Paul employed a vivid picture of a military victory parade to convey the triumph of Christ. He quoted Psalm 68:18, which portrayed the Lord leading a glorious procession to Mount Zion after having defeated His enemies. In the psalm, the Lord
received tribute from those He conquered and probably distributed it
to His people. Paul clarified that, as the conquering king, Jesus gave
gifts to the church. While these gifts are the spiritual gifts mentioned
in other places in Scripture, such as 1 Corinthians 12:4-11, we should
not lose sight of the spiritual victory they represent.

VERSES 9-10
The ascension of Jesus is probably one of the most neglected
aspects of His life and ministry. Previously, Paul taught the
Ephesians about its importance in connection to the believer’s
assurance and hope (Eph. 1:20-21). The backdrop against which we
see the exaltation of Jesus is His incarnation, and how He humbled
Himself and descended to earth as a man.

An urban church in the West is not better equipped to
advance the kingdom than one in a remote area of the
third world.

He ascended far above all the heavens to fill all things. This is
how Paul described the supremacy of Christ above all creation.
Referring back to what he wrote previously (1:23), the apostle set
forth the basis by which unity is possible in the church. Christ
fills all things, including the church, because He is everywhere. A
suburban church is not more advantaged over a rural one when
it comes to demonstrating the truth of the gospel through unity.
An urban church in the West is not better equipped to advance
the kingdom than one in a remote area of the third world. In His
triumph over sin and death, Christ has equally resourced His
church with the Spirit to model His victory before a lost world.
Because He fills the church, she draws her life from Him. This
is the basis for unity, and this unity models the gospel before a
watching world.

What does walking in victory look like in the life of a believer? What
about in the life of a local church?
IN MY CONTEXT

• Believers are to live lives worthy of the gospel through their Christlike attitudes and actions.
• Believers are to live in unity with one another.
• Believers have victory in Christ.

In what particular attitude could you grow and thereby contribute to greater unity in your church?

How might the current level of unity in your church impact receptivity to the gospel in your community? How could you change this for the better?

How could your small group become more intentional in its celebration of the victory won by Jesus?

Prayer Needs
Walking Forward

Christ gives the church gifted leaders to help believers mature and minister.

EPHESIANS 4:11-16

Gift giving is part of life. On special occasions and holidays we give gifts to one another. Sometimes, they are given in a perfunctory manner with little forethought about the recipient. On other occasions they are enthusiastically received because they meet a great need. The giver of the gift is always glad to hear the other person say, “I have been needing one of these!”

_Name a gift you received that you didn’t appreciate at first but later came to realize how much you needed it._
UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

EPHESIANS 4:11-16
In his appeal for church unity, Paul previously highlighted God’s gifts to His people (Eph. 4:7-8). This lays the foundation for this week’s Bible passage, which reveals of how believers move toward maturity in Christ. A key aspect of this instruction is that gifted leaders are God’s gift to the church for the purpose of spiritual maturity.

There is a need for us to understand this new life given to us in Christ (chaps. 1–3) and how we must display a new walk in light of it (chaps. 4–6). While the Scripture is the primary means by which we come to understand what we are to do in light of the great salvation given to us, God has established a secondary means as well—gifted leaders to equip the church for service.

The overarching theme of the first half of Ephesians 4 is unity through diversity. In other places, the human body is used as the metaphor of how the church functions. (See 1 Cor. 12:12-27.) Our bodies are made up of many different “members” designed to function in an integrated manner. When this happens, we describe it as good health. Health care practitioners understand the individual parts and their functions with a view toward how each part interacts with and contributes to the working of other parts. The role of health care practitioners involves educating patients along these lines and providing medical interventions to restore or maintain good physical health.

In a similar manner, leaders of the church teach members about their individual functions and their roles in the overall ministry of the church. Some of this teaching focuses on the diversity of the body, in which individual members are helped to see how their functions vary from that of others. At other times, instruction seeks to show the unity of the body by highlighting the high degree of cooperation required in the body. At all times, the objective is the nurturing of new life in Jesus as it is lived out among God’s people.

As you read Ephesians 4:11-16, note the progression of development. How does the equipping of believers contribute to the overall health of a church?
EXPLORE THE TEXT

EQUIPPERS GIVEN (EPH. 4:11)

11 And he himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers,

VERSE 11

While previously Paul had in view the spiritual gifts themselves (Eph. 4:7), here he focused on the gifted ones. The gifts given to the church are leaders who will facilitate its growth and maturity. Every believer is given a spiritual gift, and this includes the leaders whom God gives to the church. Every leader possesses spiritual giftedness which may vary from leader to leader, just as gifts differ among church members. No human leader has all the gifts, as is true of any and all believers.

It is the work of God to call leaders to serve His church.

Paul described four different types of leaders given to the church by Christ. Part of His grace to us is that He provides us with gifted leaders. To serve a local church in a leadership role is not something one simply chooses for oneself, as if merely selecting a vocation or a career. While there is human participation in the selection and installation of church leaders, fundamentally it is the work of God to call leaders to serve His church.

What are the implications of viewing church leaders as Christ’s gifts to the church?

The first type of gifted leader given to the church is that of apostle. The word *apostles* was used in three ways in the New Testament. First, it was used to describe those who were sent with a message. The Greek word is used this way in Philippians 2:25. This actually applies to every Christian. Second, the word *apostles* often referred to the twelve disciples of Jesus who had
an important role as the first followers of Jesus (1 Cor. 15:5). These apostles were eyewitnesses of Christ and could validate the teachings and ministry of Jesus. In a strict, technical sense, this office no longer exists. A third way that *apostle* is used in the New Testament refers to those who were in leadership in the early church, providing pastoral leadership in a role similar to a modern-day missionary or church planter. (See Acts 14:14; 1 Thess. 2:6-7.)

Also foundational to the church are *prophets*. In the strictest sense of the word, a prophet received direct revelation from God to declare to the people (Jer. 23:16-18). The argument can be made that in a strict, technical sense, the office of prophet has passed into cessation with the completion of the Bible. However, the gift of prophecy is still operational—the passionate and pointed declaration of Scripture applied to contemporary issues. (See 1 Cor. 14:1-3,12.) Jesus warned that the messages of prophets are to be carefully weighed because there will always be false prophets. (See Matt. 7:15; 24:11.)

*Evangelists* can be defined as individuals with a unique gifting and calling to proclaim the gospel. Certainly, all believers are tasked with the mandate to share the gospel. Likewise, a pastor may not have the spiritual gift of evangelism, but he is still called to do that work (2 Tim. 4:5).

While some would separate *pastors and teachers* into distinct roles and ministries, grammatically it appears that Paul linked them together. Teaching the Word of God is a primary function of a pastor (1 Tim. 3:2). This is probably why there is a clear grammatical connection between the two in the original language.

Every gifted leader serves an important role in the church. No leader possesses all these gifts and callings, which is why Paul repeated the word *some* in his descriptions. The giftedness of church leaders is varied but all the gifts are needed. They are God’s appointed means to equip His church for ministry and mission.

**TO MOVE BELIEVERS FORWARD** *(EPH. 4:12-14)*

12 equipping the saints for the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ, 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God’s Son, growing into maturity with a stature measured by Christ’s fullness. 14 Then we will no longer be little children, tossed by the waves and blown around by every wind of teaching, by human cunning with cleverness in the techniques of deceit.
VERSES 12-13

After stating that Christ gave gifted leaders to the church, Paul clarified the Lord’s dual purpose in doing so. It was for *equipping the saints for the work of ministry* and *to build up the body of Christ.* To equip others is to prepare them for a particular purpose, which in this case is to do ministry and mission. The role of the leader is not to do all the work for the people of God but to train them so that they might do ministry together.

The higher purpose of training God’s people for service is the building up of the church as a whole. The Greek word translated *build up* was frequently used in ancient writings to describe constructing a building. Construction sites are always messy. One must often tear up one thing in order to replace it with something else. Sometimes things may appear to be getting worse, not better. Yet, with a carefully developed blueprint and the commitment to make progress without taking shortcuts, a building that will last is built. It is an apt metaphor for a healthy church. In spite of difficulties and obstacles, a skilled leader builds up the church by equipping its members to do ministry.

**Division among believers can be traced back to stunted spiritual growth.**

As the church is built up, it is unified. Division among believers can be traced back to stunted spiritual growth. As a church grows spiritually through sound instruction and leadership, its unity deepens. There are two particular aspects in which this is true. First, there is a *unity in the faith.* Paul had previously indicated that everyone in the church shares one Lord, one faith, one baptism (Eph. 4:5). Though *faith* has several usages in the New Testament, here it seems to refer to the body of doctrine that people believe about the gospel. Second, there is a unity *in the knowledge of God’s Son.* This knowledge may begin with intellectual understanding but it proceeds to relational intimacy with Christ. It involves both the head and the heart. Those who possess a deeply personal acquaintance with Jesus have zero desire to see His church divided.

Building up the body of Christ (v. 12) means *growing into maturity,* a progressive development out of the condition of being spiritual children (v. 14). Children are delightful and lovable but at times cause their parents frustration through their selfishness...
and shortsightedness. A mature congregation is made of believers with a stature measured by Christ’s fullness. They live generously, always willing to make the sacrifices necessary to advance the kingdom of God.

How does each action identified by Paul in verses 12-14 pave the way for the next action or result identified?

Part of maturity is the ability to evaluate different truth claims, to reject those that are unworthy of the gospel, and to embrace those that are from God.

VERSE 14

Part of maturity is the ability to evaluate different truth claims, to reject those that are unworthy of the gospel, and to embrace those that are from God. Children have to be protected because of their lack of discernment. Part of the maturity that comes through leaders’ equipping and building up the church is a deeper understanding of the gospel. In this way, members are not tossed by the waves and blown around by every wind of teaching. The deceit of false teaching that believers encounter is subtle. It isn’t always where we think it might be found. We might expect it on television or on the Internet. We might be prepared for it when neatly dressed strangers appear at our front door with religious literature. But what about when a friend or family member says something like, “Well, that’s true for you but not true for me”? How about when a coworker excitedly says, “You should read this book because it has changed my life”?

In those moments, your pastor or small group Bible study leader is not going to be present to tell you the right thing to think or say or do. However, the encouraging truth is that he or she doesn’t need to be. You can be equipped to recognize error and to gently and graciously offer a counterpoint to an erroneous belief. This type of readiness comes through the building up process described by Paul.
**KEY DOCTRINE: Sanctification**

Growth in grace should continue throughout the regenerate person’s life (1 Pet. 2:2).

**AS A BODY (EPH. 4:15-16)**

15 But speaking the truth in love, let us grow in every way into him who is the head—Christ. 16 From him the whole body, fitted and knit together by every supporting ligament, promotes the growth of the body for building up itself in love by the proper working of each individual part.

**VERSE 15**

Much of our growth and maturity as believers comes not from sitting in a classroom but from experiences where we see mature believers speaking the truth in love. Doing this requires a robust and confident faith. Let us grow in every way was the counsel given by Paul to the Ephesians. Ephesus was a very diverse and idolatrous city, with numerous challenges to the Christian faith. Paul realized that such growth and training had to be connected to and flow out of Christ, who is the head and source of His body. Christlikeness is the key to the growth and maturity of the church.

*Why might a person’s ability to express God’s love increase with spiritual maturity?*

“Tour bus Christianity” is completely opposite of God’s plan for His church.

**VERSE 16**

In our physical health, we understand the cruciality of wholeness. Problems in one part of the body affect other parts. Likewise, it is the whole body, fitted and knit together that is called to fulfill
the purposes of God in the world. Paul’s vision for the church—indeed, Christ’s vision—was never like that of a bus, where the leader drives and the rest of the church sits passively, going along for the ride and taking the occasional nap. Such “tour bus Christianity” is completely opposite of God’s plan for His church. Instead, He seeks the proper working of each individual part as part of His body. What should the motive for ministry be? Paul used a recurring phrase in his Letter to the Ephesians to highlight the right motive for ministry: in love. (See 1:4; 3:17; 4:2; 5:2.) Love for others is both an indicator of Christlikeness and the incentive for taking one’s proper place in the body of Christ. The attitude that says, “That’s someone else’s job, not mine” is not only irresponsible; it indicates a fundamental lack of awareness of Christ and the gospel.

What are some other ways of illustrating Paul’s point other than a human body?

**BIBLE SKILL: Read passages using the same imagery.**

Compare Ephesians 4 with other passages where the church is compared to a body: Romans 7:4; 12:5; 1 Corinthians 10:16-17; 12:12,27; Ephesians 3:6; and Colossians 3:15. Why do you think Jesus compared the church to a body? How does this imagery alluded to also in Genesis 15:1-5 enhance the idea of God being in covenant with His people?
IN MY CONTEXT

- Christ gives leaders to equip His church for ministry.
- With the help of godly leaders, believers can grow in their belief in and understanding of the gospel and participate more fully in the church’s mission.
- All believers are to grow in Christlikeness and strengthen the church by doing their part.

**What could your small group do to support the equipping ministry of your pastor and other church leaders?**

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**As a means to ongoing spiritual maturity in your walk with Christ, list one ministry in which you could participate more fully. What steps do you need to take to become more involved in that ministry?**

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**What is your strategy to grow in Christlikeness? What particular attributes do you need to target? Ask God to move you closer to Him.**

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Prayer Needs

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**Walking Differently**

Believers are to live a life that is different from those who reject Christ.

**EPHESIANS 4:17-32**

When going to a job interview, we carefully select what to wear. We want to make a statement in some way. We may choose something that makes us feel more confident or that makes us look like we fit the part. Most of us know that showing up in a tie for an entry-level construction job is not required. We may choose a color that matches the company logo or a sport team we believe the owner supports. Setting ourselves apart from other applicants is the goal.

*What might a person do to set themselves apart from others applying for a job?*
UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

EPHESIANS 4:17-32

The entrance of believers into a relationship with Christ is described as a calling at the beginning of Ephesians 4, as Paul transitioned from indicative truth to imperative behavior. He began the chapter with a rallying cry to walk worthy of the gracious work of God. The very notion of calling implies movement from one condition to another, from darkness to light (Eph. 5:8). The word *call* or *calling* occurs three times in the first four verses of Ephesians 4. It is one of the great words in Paul’s vocabulary, appearing in several places as a description of our salvation. (See Rom. 11:29; 1 Cor. 1:26; Eph. 1:18; Phil. 3:14; 2 Tim. 1:9.)

This idea of movement is seen in the mandate to grow in one’s Christian experience after salvation. The word *grow* or *growth* occurs three times in the first half of chapter 4, with the idea also showing up in expressions such as “reach” (4:13), “no longer” (4:14) and “building up” (4:16). Our calling to salvation as believers cannot be separated from the admonition to grow in maturity of faith.

As we see these truths of calling and growth come together in the fourth chapter of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, it becomes apparent that the Christian life is a new walk, a changed life, and a transformed lifestyle.

What Paul described in Ephesians 4 is what theologians and Bible teachers often refer to as sanctification. The apostle referred to it frequently in his letters. We can summarize by saying it begins at salvation, increases throughout life, and is completed at death and the return of Christ. As a crucial Bible doctrine, it should not be confused with justification, which occurs at a point in time and is entirely God’s work in us through faith in Christ. Sanctification is a process in which we cooperate with God through obedience to His Word. Apart from it, believers will not live a life that is distinctive and different from those who don’t know Christ.

*Reflect on the contrasts found in Ephesians 4:17-32 between what was and what should be. How does the contrast point to the power of Christ?*
THE OLD (EPH. 4:17-19)

17 Therefore, I say this and testify in the Lord: You should no longer live as the Gentiles live, in the futility of their thoughts. 18 They are darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them and because of the hardness of their hearts. 19 They became callous and gave themselves over to promiscuity for the practice of every kind of impurity with a desire for more and more.

VERSE 17

There is seriousness in Paul’s words when we read about his intention to testify in the Lord. It is a word used to solemnly assert something, to offer firsthand authentication of a fact that relates to an important issue. The important matter in view is living a life that is morally distinctive from the Gentiles. Of course, many of Paul’s listeners were Gentiles (Eph. 2:11), but here he was referring to those who were unbelievers (2:12). The lives they lived, from the perspective of the believing Ephesians, could be depicted as the old way of life.

Two important points are made about this lifestyle. First, it is marked by futility. Essentially, this word means “empty” and denotes appearance as distinct from actual being and reality. It can also carry the idea of that which is pointless. Secondly, this lifestyle originates in the thoughts of those who do not know Jesus. Every action is rooted in a thought.

The pursuits of many people are meaningless and, in the end, their lives are tragically wasted on empty things. Surely this is sufficient motivation for believers to live lives that matter, both now and forever.

In what way is life prior to knowing Christ “pointless”?

VERSE 18

Paul continued to discuss the futility of life apart from Christ and to explain the causes of this futility. Primarily it was due to darkened
minds and hard hearts. The Ephesians had come to know the truth that was in Christ (4:21), but their fellow unbelieving Gentiles had not come to that place yet. Because they did not possess the truth, they missed out on the essential nature and purpose of life itself. While lost people may possess all types of practical and helpful knowledge related to this world, the truth that ultimately matters is lost on them. Because of this ignorance they are excluded from the life of God. Paul previously affirmed the state of deadness among unbelievers (2:1).

We see this even in the story of creation: God first created light, and then He brought all life forth from that moment (Gen. 1:3ff). But if God is light and all creation declares His glory, then why would unbelievers still be in darkness? Paul asserted that it was because of the hardness of their hearts. The ignorance experienced by lost people is rooted in human sinfulness.

VERSE 19
Every time a person fails to respond in faith to the prompting of the Holy Spirit through the truth of Scripture, his or her heart becomes a little harder. With every act of disobedience, it becomes a little bit easier to disobey the next time.

As unbelievers give their lives over to more promiscuity and impurity, this pursuit breeds more desire for sin. Their calloused hearts become less sensitive to godliness and simultaneously become more attracted to sin. A vicious cycle begins, seeking fulfillment through carnal behavior but unable to find satisfaction. The picture Paul painted here was not a pretty one. It served to remind his listeners of how futile it was to live in bondage to sin. It should serve the same purpose for us today.

Why is it important for believers to remember what life apart from Christ was like?

THE CHANGE (EPH. 4:20-24)
20 But that is not how you came to know Christ, 21 assuming you heard about him and were taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus, 22 to take off your former way of life, the old self that is corrupted
by deceitful desires, to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, the one created according to God’s likeness in righteousness and purity of the truth.

**VERSES 20-21**

In a classroom setting, the teacher is distinct from the lesson. He or she teaches certain information, but they are distinct from it. Paul informed the Ephesians that Christ was both the teacher and the lesson. This is how they came to know Christ and they were taught by him.

In contrast to the desensitizing work of sin prior to their faith, Paul reminded the Ephesians that their old way of life did not lead them to freedom in Christ. Rather, they found Him and a new way of life through the message of the gospel. That truth was found in Jesus, in a relationship with Him through faith. So Christ was the teacher, the lesson, and the very classroom in which they came to know Him.

**VERSES 22-23**

What was the message that the Ephesians had been taught by Christ? It was a two-fold declaration of the gospel. First, they had heard the message to take off your former way of life, the old self. Paul reminded them of this—how they had repented of their old lives in a marvelous and beautiful experience of conversion. Why would people desire salvation if they believed their way of life was a good one—a means to personal flourishing? As they begin to question their lifestyle and behavior, then they are ready to hear the truth and realize there is a better way. The image here is that of taking off an old, dirty garment. In salvation, somehow by the grace of God and in spite of callous hearts, we are able to perceive the damage that sin inflicts on us. We come to see our behavior like soiled, putrid clothing of which we want to rid ourselves. That is where salvation begins.

While there are many things that distinguish a believer in Christ from an unbeliever, none are more decisive than that of perspective and outlook. Paul described it to the Ephesians as being renewed in the spirit of your minds. Previously, he had depicted their sinful lifestyles as being conducted in “the futility of their thoughts” (4:17). Just as a darkened understanding sustains the depraved life, so a renewed mind in Christ brings a different walk in Him.
VERSE 24
The second aspect of the gospel message taught to the Ephesians was to put full reliance in and on Christ as our salvation. The lesson that Christ teaches is that righteousness is only found in Him. In our act of faith, we *put on the new self*, like a new, clean garment, which covers our shame. In other places, the Scripture calls this “regeneration,” and, just like human births, it is not something we effect for ourselves. It is *the one created according to God’s likeness*. We put off the old out of disgust and we welcome the new in faith. This allows us to live a life free from self-condemnation and guilt.

*How is salvation like putting on a new set of clothes?*

**KEY DOCTRINE: Justification**
Justification brings the believer unto a relationship of peace and favor with God (Rom. 5:1).

**THE NEW (EPH. 4:25-32)**
25 Therefore, putting away lying, speak the truth, each one to his neighbor, because we are members of one another. 26 Be angry and do not sin. Don’t let the sun go down on your anger, 27 and don’t give the devil an opportunity. 28 Let the thief no longer steal. Instead, he is to do honest work with his own hands, so that he has something to share with anyone in need. 29 No foul language should come from your mouth, but only what is good for building up someone in need, so that it gives grace to those who hear. 30 And don’t grieve God’s Holy Spirit. You were sealed by him for the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness, anger and wrath, shouting and slander be removed from you, along with all malice. 32 And be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as God also forgave you in Christ.
VERSE 25
Paul wrote specifically about what a new walk in Christ looks like. In doing so, he employed a characteristic pattern of his—beginning with what is true and then moving to what should be done in response to that truth. The apostle offered examples of new life in Christ, with both negative and positive commands as well as a spiritual foundation on which they are based. Since those who believe in Christ have taken off the former way of life, they should be characterized by putting away lying. Falsehood is a contradiction of having come to know the truth that is in Jesus (v. 21).

VERSES 26-27
A second example of renewed Christian living involves control of one’s emotions, particularly anger. The command given here is not to be angry but to avoid sin. Anger provides a fertile opportunity for the devil to wreck havoc. Paul quoted Psalm 4:4; the second part of that verse calls for reflection. As we examine ourselves, we will realize that many of our responses of anger were sinful and selfish in nature.

VERSE 28
Living differently in Christ involves a reorientation of one’s work. Servants were notorious for petty filching of that which did not belong to them, but Paul demanded adherence to a higher standard. Not only was behavior to be different but also one’s motivation for work. It was not simply to be done to meet one’s own needs but also to fund generosity to others. This is a radical outlook on a person’s livelihood.

VERSE 29
One’s language is transformed through Christ. As with the previous examples, the negative prohibition is accompanied by a positive injunction. Paul identified a dual objective in the words we speak. They should be edifying in nature, building up someone in need. They should be vehicles of grace, ministering hope and strength to others in their own pursuit of godly character.

VERSE 30
With a direct connection to the previous verse but also to all of the examples given by Paul, the apostle connected the impact of those actions in regard to the Holy Spirit. Failure to do these things he has mentioned would grieve God’s Holy Spirit. A saying commonly
heard is, “Sin doesn’t just break God’s law. It breaks His heart.” This is perhaps the most important spiritual principle for putting off our former way of life before Christ.

**Of the practices listed by Paul, which one creates the greatest impact for the cause of Christ?**

“Sin doesn’t just break God’s law. It breaks His heart.”

**VERSES 31-32**

These verses could be viewed as a catch-all catalog of relational behaviors, both negative and positive. While using a different verb from verse 25, the idea is the same in that these things must be put off from the life of a follower of Jesus Christ. There are six types of hateful speech that must be forsaken by believers. Since the thought life is the source of behavior, Paul called for the attitudes of kindness, compassion, and forgiveness. As attitudes, they inevitably manifest themselves in corresponding actions. Most importantly, these three virtues are characteristic of the attitude of Christ toward each us. Only as they are practiced in our daily lives will the world see Christ in us as well.

**BIBLE SKILL: Compare passages that include the same phrases.**

Compare Ephesians 4:17-32 with Romans 6:6; Colossians 3:5-10; 1 Corinthians 2:14; and Galatians 5:19-23. Write down some notes about what each passage adds to your understanding of the old and new man. How can the old man still be a problem if he was crucified with Christ on the cross (Gal. 2:20)? Why is the battle between the old man and the new man such an important concept for daily living?
IN MY CONTEXT

- Believers must not forget the futility of living in bondage to sin.
- People are given a fresh start through faith in Christ so we can live without guilt.
- Believers are to live Christlike lives as a result of their salvation.

Discuss as a group ways your small group can hold one another accountable for avoiding behaviors characteristic of non-Christians without lapsing into judgmental and elitist attitudes.

With what type of lingering or free-floating guilt do you need to deal? Take time to talk to God about this guilt.

Identify a neighbor or coworker who is lost. How can you use these passages to explain salvation to the person you identified?

Prayer Needs
Walking in Love

Believers are to imitate Christ by demonstrating His love and character.

EPHESIANS 5:1-14

Gait is a word that only athletes or medical specialists use very often. It refers to the way a person walks—the movement of a person’s limbs while in motion. When there is an abnormality in a person’s gait, it can potentially cause health issues. Likewise, every person has a behavioral walk, the way they move through life. One’s manner of life is of the utmost importance. In the experience of a follower of Christ, it determines whether Christ’s love and character are demonstrated or obscured.

What does a person’s walk reveal about him or her?
UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

EPHESIANS 5:1-14

Paul began Ephesians 5 in the same way as he did the previous chapter—with the word therefore. The word refers back to the forgiveness believers have found in Christ (Eph. 4:32). In Ephesians, the concept of forgiveness is connected to two vital biblical themes: redemption and grace (1:7).

The concept of redemption has a rich Old Testament background. (See Lev. 25:25-27,47-49.) On many occasions, financial difficulties would prompt an owner of land to attempt to sell it, even though it was a family inheritance and thus quite valuable. The Old Testament law made provision for someone to buy back property in this scenario. As a result, the land could be restored to the previous owner. This is an illustration of a great principle of the gospel: Jesus replaced what Adam erased. The righteousness lost through disobedience and sin was restored in Christ (Rom. 5:14-16). As we are forgiven through faith in Christ, we experience this blessing of redemption.

What prompted this magnanimous gesture of redemption and forgiveness, this restoration of a lost status before God? Without question, the source of our forgiveness is the marvelous grace of God. Mentioned eleven times in Ephesians prior to chapter 5, grace is the source through which we are given new life in Christ. The word used for forgiveness in Ephesians 4:32 is not the typical word used. In this verse, Paul used a rarer word that is built on the root word for grace.

These two great concepts—redemption and grace—illuminate the beauty and depth of God’s forgiveness. This truth about the remission of our sin was the grounds upon which Paul’s appeal to the Ephesians was made. Why should we walk in a worthy manner as followers of Jesus Christ? Why should we strive to imitate God in our everyday lives? We should do so because of the forgiveness we have come to know through Christ.

Circle all the words in Ephesians 5:1-14 that remind you of God’s forgiveness. What is the connection between God’s forgiveness and our lifestyle?
EXPLORE THE TEXT

IMITATE (EPH. 5:1-2)

1 Therefore, be imitators of God, as dearly loved children, 2 and walk in love, as Christ also loved us and gave himself for us, a sacrificial and fragrant offering to God.

VERSE 1

It is a classic moment in the life of every father when he turns to see his young child haltingly and awkwardly following behind him. Certainly, these moments of delight put a smile on the face of any parent, but they can also create a sense of solemnity. Paul encouraged the Ephesians to be imitators of God. All of our attempts to imitate God are reminiscent of a child trying to step into a parent’s shoes. We never really even come close to approximating the greatest of God’s loving character. Nevertheless, it is to this that we are called, and it is to this that we must strive.

Our imitation of God is not an attempt to gain His favor or earn a status for ourselves. It is to be done from a status of dearly loved children. It is only as we come to understand how much love He has for us that we discover the motivation to pursue such moral and spiritual excellence. Paul had already reminded the Ephesians on several occasions of the greatness of the Father and the Son’s love. (See Eph. 1:4; 2:4; 3:19.) This is one of the challenges of daily walking in the grace of God, reminding ourselves how much He loves us and how much He has given to bring us back to Himself.

VERSE 2

In following the divine example of love, we will walk in love. Our spiritual gait is to be marked by a selfless consideration of others. Because we are “dearly loved” (v. 1), we are empowered to love as part of a daily lifestyle. Just as Christ is the model for our forgiveness of others (Eph. 4:32), so He is the same for our love. It is because He also loved us and gave himself for us that we can love others. Notice that Paul commanded more than mere sentiment. We are to follow the example of Jesus who gave and sacrificed Himself for those whom He loved.

Christ’s love for us is characterized as an offering to God, and we can apply that to our love for others. Paul described it as sacrificial
and fragrant. The latter description is rooted in the Old Testament sacrificial system (Ex. 29:18) and denoted that the offering in question pleased God and was accepted by Him. He responds the same way today when we express His love to all people.

Does walking in love define what it means to be an imitator of God? Explain.

**BIBLE SKILL: Paraphrase prohibitions as positive commands.**

Identify commands found in Ephesians 5:1-14. Express them as briefly as possible as positive imperatives (for example, love one another). What are some specific ways you could fulfill each command? How would it affect others? How would it affect you?

**ISOLATE (EPH. 5:3-7)**

3 But sexual immorality and any impurity or greed should not even be heard of among you, as is proper for saints. 4 Obscene and foolish talking or crude joking are not suitable, but rather giving thanks. 5 For know and recognize this: Every sexually immoral or impure or greedy person, who is an idolater, does not have an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. 6 Let no one deceive you with empty arguments, for God’s wrath is coming on the disobedient because of these things. 7 Therefore, do not become their partners.

**VERSES 3-5**

While love expresses the character of God, so do holiness and righteousness. The call to love others doesn’t assume participation in or approval of evil. There are standards of behavior that are
**proper for saints.** The phrase *proper for saints* does not suggest a “holier than thou” attitude; rather, a saint is someone who is set apart for the use and pleasure of a holy God. There is an imitation of holiness to which every Christian is called (1 Pet. 1:16).

Sexual purity is an expression of the holiness to be pursued by believers, and so is contentment. Just as *sexual immorality* fails to embody the character of God, so does *greed*. Paul had already associated greed with impurity (Eph. 4:19). Perhaps what these two vices share in common is that of turning the gracious gifts of God into commodities of sinful indulgence. Neither are appropriate as part of the lifestyle of a follower of Christ and *should not even be heard of among you.*

While lewd conduct is forbidden to Christ-followers, so is *obscene* conversation. It is described as *foolish* because it is of no value. It does not minister grace to those who hear it (Eph. 4:29) but has the opposite effect. Christian vocabulary should be marked by *giving thanks.* Much of the humor used by secular-minded people is cynical in nature. The lampooning of sacred things like sex, marriage, and family are grounded in a disdain for these holy gifts. It is safe to assume that *crude joking* includes forms of humor employing innuendo.

*How might a believer lovingly excuse himself from an impure conversation?*

There is a serious tone employed here: we are to *know and recognize* what is being commanded. Impure behaviors—whether that of sexual immorality or greed—are not indicative of those who *have an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.*

**VERSES 6-7**

No Christian would ever want to participate knowingly in activity that would fall under *God’s wrath,* yet we all have the capacity of self-deception. As always in every situation of life, we should each examine ourselves to see if we have bought into any *empty arguments* regarding God’s holiness.

As alluded to previously, Paul’s use of the *therefore* conjunction in verse 7 marks the objective of his teaching. The apostle has
this in mind for all believers regarding people who behave in any ungodly manner: do not become their partners. Keep in mind how Paul instructed the Ephesians in verse 1 to be imitators of God. It seems that there is an intentional parallel here, intending to contrast imitating God with forming ungodly partnerships. Imitation is not a matter of “if” but “whom.” We will either imitate God’s example or mimic the behavior of those who don’t love and follow Christ.

How can partnerships (business, social, recreational) impact a person’s spiritual life?

We will either imitate God’s example or mimic the behavior of those who don’t love and follow Christ.

ILLUMINATE (EPH. 5:8-14)

8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light— 9 for the fruit of the light consists of all goodness, righteousness, and truth— 10 testing what is pleasing to the Lord. 11 Don’t participate in the fruitless works of darkness, but instead expose them. 12 For it is shameful even to mention what is done by them in secret. 13 Everything exposed by the light is made visible, 14 for what makes everything visible is light. Therefore it is said: Get up, sleeper, and rise up from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.

VERSES 8-10

Paul enjoined imperatives (commands) of a worthy walk to indicatives (truth statements). Believers are to behave in certain ways because they are light in the Lord. Notice that in verse 8 we are not called to be light. Rather, we already are light because of the Lord. The Christian life involves a process of becoming more of who we already are, to live as who Christ has made us to be. To walk in darkness is to return to what we once were. This is a higher rationale for holy living than to simply avoid punishment.
The Christian life involves a process of becoming more of who we already are.

To call someone a “child of” something is to identify him or her as fundamentally characterized by that thing. Since believers have a nature characterized by light, God intends for them to live as children of light—as individuals whose essence is light. To be a child of the light indicates that a believer is not the source of that light.

As those marked by light, believers will inevitably manifest good fruit in their lives. Light is an essential component to all growth. Plants don’t typically grow in the dark. Darkness is the natural state of those who don’t know Christ, nor have placed their trust in Him. (See Eph. 4:18.) Their lives are void of spiritual fruit because such fruit is the result of a walk that is marked by light. The light brings goodness, righteousness, and truth into a person’s life.

What drives children of light to walk in goodness, righteousness, and truth? It is the desire to be pleasing to the Lord. Thus, motive is as important as action in the walk of a disciple. To love someone is to, on at least some level, love what he or she loves. Believers can test themselves with this question: “Do I delight in what delights the Lord?”

How do believers serve as light in the world? What is the relationship between walking in love (v. 2) and living as children of light (v. 8)?

VERSES 11-14

A defining attribute of light is the capacity to reveal. When light shines, darkness cannot obscure it. Instead, light illumines and exposes. All the light has to do is be true to its own nature, shine, and be what it is. In a similar manner, believers expose sin by walking worthy of their salvation and imitating God in their loving actions.

While believers are not to participate in the fruitless works of darkness, they must be close enough to expose them. This requires believers live among lost people and befriend them without
joining them in unholy practices. Wisdom alone would tell us that there is danger in this endeavor. It is possible that believers, in their attempt to engage ungodly people, might become entangled in sinful practices. This is neither a small matter nor one to be taken lightly.

Our motives will invariably carry the day. This is why Paul said in verse 10 to test what pleases God. The sacrifices in the Old Testament were examined by the priest before they were offered to ensure that they were pleasing to the Lord. As a royal priesthood (1 Pet. 2:9), we must examine ourselves. Is our sincere desire to do what the Lord asks of us? Are our hearts sincerely and humbly seeking His will and not the gratification of any lower desires?

Apart from walking worthy in love and seeking to imitate the Father, believers will never be able to illuminate the lost in this way.

Christ calls us to live as light in a dark world, and we must do so with Paul’s words ringing in our ears: Everything exposed by the light is made visible. This exposure prepares the way for unbelievers to see their need of Christ. Apart from walking worthy in love and seeking to imitate the Father, believers will never be able to illuminate the lost in this way. However, as we walk in humility and demonstrate love through actions, we will be able to expose the lost people’s need for Jesus.

What preparation must a believer take in order to be used by God to expose works of darkness?

KEY DOCTRINE: Evangelism and Missions

It is the duty of every child of God to seek constantly to win the lost to Christ by verbal witness undergirded by a Christian lifestyle, and by other methods in harmony with the gospel of Christ (2 Tim. 4:5).
IN MY CONTEXT

• Believers are to be imitators of God, expressing His love to all.
• Believers are to separate themselves from ungodly behavior.
• Believers are to humbly expose sin in this world through action and deed in love.

List actions of love you could show to a neighbor—actions that echo those Jesus Himself might take. What one action from your list will you take this week?

In what ways can your small group spur one another toward living a godly lifestyle in the midst of a fallen world?

Has the darkness of this world lulled you into a spiritual slumber from which you need to awaken? Ask God to examine your life and to help you be more aware of opportunities to be light.

Prayer Needs
Walking Wisely

Believers are to walk wisely, depending on the Holy Spirit for direction.

Ephesians 5:15-21

If you were traveling in an unknown remote area and could select only one form of navigational help, which would you choose? Would you prefer a map, a GPS device, or an experienced guide who had frequently traveled that area and was thoroughly acquainted with it? The wise choice would be a personal guide who possessed complete understanding to reveal the best path for you.

Who or what do you consult when planning a trip? How do you know this is a trustworthy source?
UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

EPHESIANS 5:15-21

A key characteristic of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is His divine and personal nature. The Holy Spirit is not an “it” or an impersonal force. Ephesians 4:30 speaks of grieving the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Godhead, and is to be revered and worshiped in that fashion. His work is to manifest the active presence of God. In the Old Testament, there is a frequent connection between the Holy Spirit and wisdom (Ex. 31:3; 35:31; Isa. 11:2). In Ephesians 5, the work of the Spirit is to provide wisdom for the performance of practical tasks in the service of the Lord God.

We find a robust teaching about the Holy Spirit and His ministry in Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians. As a seal, the Spirit marks and authenticates every believer, providing a spiritual proof of ownership (Eph. 1:13). As the down payment of our heavenly inheritance, He communicates to us the reality of the age to come (1:14). The work of the Spirit also is one of revelation, bringing enlightenment to those who believe (1:17).

The Spirit is the source of strength to believers (3:16). He is associated with both Scripture (6:17) and prayer (6:18). It is in these classic and timeless Christian disciplines that we receive wisdom from God, the guidance that we need to walk through life.

God doesn’t simply give His children a smattering of wisdom; He pours it out on them in abundance (1:8) as a part of a new life found in Jesus Christ. In some way that is beyond our complete understanding, believers declare this wisdom even to rulers and authorities in the heavenlies (3:10). It seems reasonable to conclude that this communication is modeled through wise living that is observed by angelic beings. A wise walk demonstrated by believers is part of God’s eternal purpose and glory.

Read Ephesians 5:15-21, looking for the commands given by Paul. How is each command related to being filled by the Spirit?
EXPLORE THE TEXT

BE WISE (EPH. 5:15-17)

15 Pay careful attention, then, to how you live—not as unwise people but as wise—16 making the most of the time, because the days are evil. 17 So don’t be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is.

VERSE 15
Wisdom in the Old Testament always had a practical dimension to it. It is really more of an approach to life than an intellectual capacity. According to Proverbs 1:7, a wise person is essentially someone who respects and fears God. God is the ultimate source of true wisdom (Prov. 2:6). As a repository of this divine understanding, the Book of Proverbs begins with a series of warnings to live carefully and avoid situations and persons of destructive influence (Prov. 1:10-33).

Trained in the Hebrew tradition of wisdom literature, Paul applied those teachings to the Christian experience. It is imperative for every Christian to pay careful attention, then, to how you live. Life is full of dangers and threats to a person’s well being. We shouldn’t assume that the greatest of these are physical or tangible. Paul would later warn the Ephesians of the spiritual warfare raging around them (Eph. 6:12-13). It is to the status of our souls that we must give constant attention. Nothing matters more than our relationship with Christ. Wise believers understand this.

VERSE 16
One of the primary areas to which wisdom should be applied is that of time management. A wise person pays careful attention to his or her time. In fact, we should guard our time as carefully as we do our finances. The old adage “time is money” is well intended. However, the truth is that time is actually more valuable because of its scarcity.

When Paul instructed his listeners about making the most of the time, he used a word that painted a vivid picture. It is a Greek word that was used for purchasing a product and it carries with it the idea of vigorous bartering or trading in order to make a profit. Many people simply spend their time; followers of Christ
are to *invest* their time, using it in intentional ways to see a more profitable and lasting result. If we invested and protected our time with the same intensity that many people do their financial resources, we might be amazed at the good that could be done for the advancement of the gospel.

**Many people simply spend their time; followers of Christ are to invest their time.**

Paul had a particular and clear view not only of time but also of the times. He saw that the *days are evil,* and the same is true of the times in which we live. The word for *evil* in verse 16 can carry the idea of worthless. Living in an evil manner is unwise for many reasons, including the fact that those activities are transitory and fleeting. It is a mark of wisdom to live for things that will outlive us—for eternal truths and things of the kingdom of God.

*Describe the difference between spending your time and investing your time.*

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**KEY DOCTRINE: Holy Spirit**

At the moment of regeneration the Holy Spirit baptizes every believer into the Body of Christ (Gal. 4:6).

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**BE FILLED (EPH. 5:18)**

18 And don’t get drunk with wine, which leads to reckless living, but be filled by the Spirit:

**VERSE 18**

Paying careful attention to one’s life (see v. 15) includes avoiding *reckless living.* Paul urged the Ephesians to walk in wisdom and avoid wild living. Sadly, there is a segment of our culture that values reckless behavior and encourages people to “just go crazy!”
This is an unworthy attitude for believers. One expression of immoral excess that God forbids among His children is to become *drunk with wine*. It has always been a problem in the world, both in Paul’s time and in ours. In the world of the Ephesians, worship of the Greek god Dionysus included participation in drunken orgies. To put oneself under the influence and control of a substance is unthinkable for the child of God.

There is a better and wiser way. Paul described it as a lifestyle in which a believer is *filled by the Spirit*. Essentially, this consists of putting oneself under the control of the Holy Spirit. As mentioned previously, Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians contains extensive instruction on the Spirit. Believers are sealed by the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13). The verb “to seal” was used for the tomb of Jesus (Matt. 27:66). It conveys securing something so that it cannot be opened and thus subject to theft or loss. Part of the work of the Holy Spirit is to secure believers in their salvation. This is a work in which Jesus Himself and the Father also participate (John 10:27-30).

The Scripture speaks clearly about the Spirit’s nature and ministry. At conversion the Holy Spirit indwells every believer, never to leave him or her. It is a thorough and once-for-all experience, with no need of a subsequent completion or update. However, there is the need for every believer to continually be filled by the Holy Spirit. The verb translated *filled* has three important characteristics that help a believer understand this important dimension of the life of a follower of Jesus. First, it is in the present tense, which means that it is to be continual, not just a one-time experience in the past. Second, it is in the passive voice, and this reminds us that we receive this filling. It is not something we accomplish in our strength but rather something that comes as we surrender to Him. Finally, it is an imperative requiring a response from us.

**Being filled with the Holy Spirit is to surrender to His control and direction.**

In summary, being filled by the Holy Spirit is to surrender to His control and direction. We place ourselves under His influence, in contrast with a person who is drunk and under the influence of alcohol. This submission necessitates an attitude of humility, a recognition of one’s need to be filled and guided by the Spirit.
While God certainly has a plan for each of our lives, it is even more incredible to realize that He gives us a perfect Guide in the Person of the Holy Spirit. Wise believers lean heavily on Him as they navigate their way through life.

*How does being controlled by the Holy Spirit compare to and contrast to being controlled by alcohol?*

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**BIBLE SKILL: Read passages to create a summary statement**

Read Luke 1:15,41,67; Acts 2:4; 4:8,31; 9:17; and 13:9,52, looking for what each passage teaches about the filling of the Holy Spirit. Are these one-time experiences or something that is repeated over time? Are these experiences that are earned or given freely by God? What are the results of the Holy Spirit’s filling in these verses? Write a summary statement based on what you discover.

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**BE GENUINE (EPH. 5:19-21)**

19 speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making music with your heart to the Lord, 20 giving thanks always for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, 21 submitting to one another in the fear of Christ.

Jesus used the illustration of the wind to teach about the Holy Spirit and His work (John 3:8). This is an apt metaphor in light of the invisibility of the Spirit and yet His obvious impact on life.
While the Spirit cannot be seen, His impact can be witnessed in the actions of those whom He indwells. Paul set forth for the Ephesians some results of being filled by the Spirit.

**VERSE 19**

The first expression of the filling of the Spirit involves music and singing. There is a horizontal direction *to one another* and a vertical direction *to the Lord* in our singing. The church teaches doctrine and theology through its music (Col. 3:16), and this is most likely what Paul meant when he wrote about the Ephesians *speaking* to each other through musical compositions.

We can see a rich variety of melodic expression outlined by Paul. The types of music mentioned are *psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs*. Psalms represent the praise songs from the Old Testament. Hymns were lyrical compositions of praise. Some Bible commentators believe there are examples of early Christian hymns located in the New Testament itself. It is less certain exactly what a spiritual song consisted of, but possibly these were more personal musical arrangements. All worship music should be sung *with your heart*.

*How does a variety of musical expression in the church edify believers in their walk with God?*

**VERSE 20**

Gratitude is a hallmark of Spirit-filled living. One dimension of the ministry of the Holy Spirit is to flood our hearts with an understanding of the depth of God’s love. In this way we are moved toward *giving thanks* for all that *God … the Father* has done for us. As offered in *the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*, this gratitude is grounded in all that He has done for us. Part of the ministry of the Holy Spirit is to highlight the work of Jesus on our behalf (John 15:26).

This gratitude is to be *always* present and offered *for everything*, in every circumstance of life. While this is not to say that we should be glad for tragedies that sometimes invade life, we can still be grateful for those experiences which elevate God’s
sustaining grace and steadfast comfort. This impulse to thank God in both bright and dark moments of life is not natural to any of us. It is a distinctive indication of the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

**VERSE 21**

If gratitude is an attitude toward which every person must be gently nudged, then perhaps submission is an action into which every person must be firmly compelled through the Word and the Spirit. It seems that at times those who most loudly proclaim the filling of the Spirit in their lives are the most brash and boastful. If there is one definitive indicator of the presence of the Holy Spirit, it would be humility. (See Eph. 4:2.)

**If there is one definitive indicator of the presence of the Holy Spirit, it would be humility.**

Humility is the precursor to the submitting that takes place within the body of Christ. While there is certainly a place for submission for duly instituted leaders (Heb. 13:17) and within the appropriate family relationships, Paul also called for a mutual submission directed toward one another. This submission would include learning from others, serving them, and receiving correction from them.

*Can a person live in submission without humility? Explain.*

Mutual submission within the body of Christ does not do violence to the cherished axiom of equality. The church is the body of Christ and as such is to be a living embodiment of interdependence. However, there is an even higher calling to which a Spirit-filled Christian will respond: the fear of Christ. This reverence for Christ is the prerequisite for wisdom. (See Prov. 9:10.) Because of our reverence for and confidence in Christ, wise believers are both able and willing to give preference to one another for the advancement of the kingdom of God.
IN MY CONTEXT

• Believers are to carefully live their lives in light of God’s wisdom.
• Believers are to surrender to the control of the Holy Spirit.
• Believer’s attitudes are impacted by the Holy Spirit living in them.

In what ways could your small group establish relational connections that tap into the collective wisdom of the entire group?

What marks of surrender to the Holy Spirit could be identified in your life by a neutral observer? What needs to change in your life and how?

What present attitudes in your life could be used as “proof of ownership” by the Holy Spirit? What adjustments do you need to make to your attitudes?

Prayer Needs
Walking as Family
Believers are to demonstrate God’s love in their family relationships.

 Ephesians 5:22–6:4
Frequently, a relationship is described in these terms: “Well, it’s complicated.” What does that really mean? It could indicate the absence of a genuinely committed relationship. On the other hand, a truly loving relationship isn’t always easy; it may indeed be complicated. Nowhere do we need this clarification more than our closest family relationships—between a husband and a wife, and between parents and children.

What factors make a marriage relationship complicated? How do these factors impact other family relationships?
UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

EPHESIANS 5:22–6:9

Paul began the fifth chapter of Ephesians with a call to “walk in love” (Eph. 5:2). In 5:22–6:9 he applied the virtues of holy love to relationships.

Household codes existed in the ancient world, with such philosophers as Aristotle setting forth their ideas about how families should function. However, the foundations for those instructions were much different than Paul’s, not just in origin but also in substance. The philosophers appealed to nature or reason as the basis for their counsel; Paul’s teaching was grounded in the Lord.

In Ephesians 2:11-22, Paul explained that Christ brought together Jew and Gentile, creating a new people through the gospel. Because of the reconciling work of Jesus on the cross, there is a new people of God—a new community of faith—which we call the church. This new community is called to a new lifestyle, a new walk in Christ. Paul began the unfolding of this distinctive behavior at the beginning of chapter 4, and we continue to read about it in this week’s passage.

Living as part of God’s new people involves our family relationships. If our relationship with God through Christ is genuine, then inevitably it will greatly impact the home. If the great defining characteristic of a disciple is love (John 13:34-35), then we would also expect to find that relationships in a family of believers would be marked by love.

In addition to instructing believers on family relationships, Paul also set forth guidelines for the interactions between slaves and masters. This proximity of this section (6:5-9) with the previous makes sense, given the fact that slaves were part of a household. In our cultural setting, the application is not specifically in the family, although it contains principles that are certainly relevant. Today, we can most appropriately apply these teachings to the employer-employee relationship.

Circle the repetitive phrase(s) you discover in Ephesians 5:22–6:4. How does Paul’s criteria of “in the Lord” impact family relationships?
KEY DOCTRINE: Family
God has ordained the family as the foundational institution of human society (Gen. 2:15-25).

EXPLORE THE TEXT

WIVES (EPH. 5:22-24)

22 Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord, 23 because the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church. He is the Savior of the body. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives are to submit to their husbands in everything.

VERSES 22-23

What Paul taught in these verses applies to the husband-wife relationship, not the male-female discussion. Nothing is said here or in the verses to follow about any general responsibilities of men and women to one another. It is a marriage relationship that is in view here.

The mandate for all Christian wives is clearly stated here: submit to your husbands. Submission involves respecting one’s husband and following his leadership. This is to be done as to the Lord, indicating an expression of devotion to Christ because He is the Savior of the body. Without this, it is impossible to possess the strength or even the motivation to obey this command. In addition, the failure of one spouse to fulfill his or her role doesn’t excuse the other to abdicate theirs.

The standard for a wife’s submission to her husband is Christ’s functioning as the head of the church. All that Paul said about the relationship between Christ and His followers comes into play at this point. We should recall that the apostle previously taught about God’s purpose and will being located “in Christ” (1:5,9-10). The degree to which the church submits to Christ stems from her understanding of God’s will and His best interests for them. There is blessing to be experienced in Christ and in obedience to Him. The command in these verses is undergirded by this truth.
How has modern society misunderstood this command for wives to submit to husbands? What does Christ’s leadership in the church say about the husband’s leadership in the home?

VERSE 24
Paul reminded his readers of the relationship between Christ and the church. What would a church look like without its voluntary submission to Christ? That church would be in chaos. Each member would be seeking his or her own way and doing what he or she pleased. A healthy church is a church where its members submit to Christ.

This is the same way for marriage. Paul reminded wives that they should submit to their husbands in everything. He did not use the word obey as he did later in 6:1 and 6:5. The wife was to submit to the husband as he himself submitted to Christ. If the husband was asking her to engage in sinful activities or behaviors, or if he were asking her to be victimized by abuse, that would negate the equation of her submitting to her husband as unto Christ.

BIBLE SKILL: Reflect on a passage.
Reflect on Ephesians 5:22-33, focusing on the imagery. What does the imagery communicate about the importance of marriage? What does it indicate about the permanency of marriage? How can a person safeguard a marriage from outside threats?
Christian marriage is to reflect the glory and goodness of God. In patterning the relationship of a husband and a wife after that between Christ and the church, we are given the opportunity to let family relationships reflect the amazing love of God. In this way, we live the gospel before a watching world.

HUSBANDS (EPH. 5:25-33)

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her 26 to make her holy, cleansing her with the washing of water by the word. 27 He did this to present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or anything like that, but holy and blameless. 28 In the same way, husbands are to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 For no one ever hates his own flesh but provides and cares for it, just as Christ does for the church, 30 since we are members of his body. 31 For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. 32 This mystery is profound, but I am talking about Christ and the church. 33 To sum up, each one of you is to love his wife as himself, and the wife is to respect her husband.

Some ancient writers, like Aristotle, described the responsibility of the husband as that of ruling, and obedience as the responsibility of the wife. He maintained that nature itself is the authority for these behaviors. Paul’s approach was quite distinct from that of the ancient philosophers. He appealed to the example of Christ to illustrate how a husband should act in marriage. Christ’s sacrifice on the cross is the barometer for a husband’s love for his wife.

VERSES 25-27

It should be noted that the husband’s fulfillment of his duty is not dependent on the wife’s fulfillment of hers. While hers is to submit, his task is to love, not to rule. While admitting the challenge of submission, the call to love your wives, just as Christ loved the church is equally difficult. This love is not mere emotion, for Christ’s example is found in the fact that He gave himself for her. This is an active love, and to fulfill this command requires a
husband to reject passivity toward his wife. Christ’s sacrifice on the cross is the barometer for a husband’s love for his wife.

**VERS 28-33**

Some misinterpret the command for husbands to love their wives as *their own bodies* as an expression of self-love, but this overlooks Paul’s basic premise. In marriage, God brings a couple together and *the two will become one flesh*. Rather than some calculated, self-serving pretense, love for one’s wife is a recognition of the unity between married couples. Awareness of this essential unity between a husband and a wife is foundational to obeying the command of love.

**Failing to love’s one wife is not merely a failure of marital responsibility but a denial of the gospel.**

The marriage relationship is a beautiful picture of the church’s union with Christ and therefore should be characterized by love. Failing to love’s one wife is not merely a failure of marital responsibility but a denial of the gospel. A Christian husband who loves His wife as Christ loves the church gives credibility to what he claims to believe about the gospel. Paul’s summary of the mutual responsibilities of husbands and wives is also a restatement of how the church should live before those who do not know Christ. In this way, we validate the truth of God.

*How does a marriage demonstrate a couple’s understanding of Christ’s love and the gospel?*

**CHILDREN (EPH. 6:1-3)**

1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, because this is right.  
2 Honor your father and mother, which is the first commandment with a promise,  
3 so that it may go well with you and that you may have a long life in the land.

**VERS 1-3**

Paul encouraged *children* to obey their *parents*. Obedience to the parents is *right*, meaning that it is a part of God’s divine pattern
for children to realize that they are living both under the authority of their parents and the authority of Christ. **In the Lord** means children are obeying the Lord when they obey their parents.

Paul most likely had in view younger children when he wrote these words regarding obedience. Regardless of our age, however, it is always appropriate to **honor your father and mother**.

Honor is a broader word than obey. To honor is to value. Honor calls for respect. Adults with aging parents honor their parents by caring for them. In Paul’s instructions to Timothy he directed children to show proper respect to parents by giving special care to them when they get older. “This pleases God,” Paul said (1 Tim. 5:4).

**Children who learn obedience and respect of authority tend to live better lives and tend to live longer.**

Honoring parents is not always an easy thing to do because unfortunately some parents do not raise their children well. It is good to be reminded that Paul attached a **promise** to this command. The promise, **that it may go well with you and that you may have a long life in the land**, comes from Deuteronomy 5:16. This promise originally was tied to the old covenant and to the occupation of the promised land. It would be wrong of us to deduce that all obedient children will live a long life. When children in any generation learn respect for authority, their lives will be made better and the stability of the community will be strengthened.

**What did it mean to obey your parents when you were a child? Which of those actions would be inappropriate as an adult? Which would be appropriate?**

**PARENTS** *(EPH. 6:4)*

4 Fathers, don’t stir up anger in your children, but bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

**VERSE 4**

After addressing wives, Paul addressed husbands. After addressing children, he addressed the parents. A family that demonstrates love
in their relationships is a family in which everyone seeks to fulfill what God expects them to do within that family.

Paul addressed fathers specifically. In the Greco-Roman and Jewish world, fathers carried the responsibility for the training and disciplining of children. We can safely assume, however, Paul’s instruction applies to mothers as well.

Parents are not to stir up anger in their children. Stir up anger means “to provoke to anger, exasperate, or rouse hostility.” This admonition means parents are to avoid actions, words, and attitudes that would drive children to exasperation and resentment, thus destroying their confidence, wounding their spirit, and repelling their love for God and family.

Further, the parents’ responsibility is to bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. The word used by Paul that is translated bring them up is a one that was used in the sense of nourishing. The same word was used in 5:29 to denote how Christ provides for the church.

It is parents’ responsibility to nurture their children in the faith.

The phrase of the Lord implies that Christian parents are to provide for more than just their children’s physical health and intellectual well being. The meaning of Paul’s instruction is clear: it is parents’ responsibility to nurture their children in the faith. If you are a parent, answer this sobering question Puritan preacher John Flavel asked, “If you neglect to instruct [your children] in the way of holiness, will the devil neglect to instruct them in the way of wickedness?”

In what ways will Christian parenting will be different from secular parenting? What are some important ways that parents can bring up their children in the training and instruction of the Lord?

IN MY CONTEXT

- Godly wives are to submit to the leadership of their own husbands.
- Godly husbands are to sacrificially and unselfishly love their own wives.
- Godly children are to follow the direction provided by their parents.
- Godly parents lovingly provide direction and discipline to their children.

As a group, discuss how the group can encourage godly marriages in your community. What actions do you need to take as an individual to encourage godly marriages?

What do you need to do to honor your parents at this point in your life?

Prayer Needs
Walking to Battle

God provides believers with all the resources needed to live Christlike lives.

Ephesians 6:10-20

We admire people who take on a challenge. The Bible is full of people who met challenges with courage and confidence. Elijah faced the prophets of Baal. David stood his ground in front of Goliath. Esther risked death to reveal Haman’s plot. Peter defied the order to stop preaching the gospel. Each of these people put their confidence in God and not solely in their own abilities. God prepared them and provided the resources for these defining moments, and He continues to do so for His followers today.

What are some of the reasons people run from a battle? Why would someone run to it?
EPHESIANS 6:10-20

The first three chapters of Ephesians set forth great doctrinal truths about God, salvation, and the church. Chapters 4–6 spell out how believers should live in light of these great truths. First we learn about our new lives in Christ then we are taught a new walk in Christ. But this new walk does not come without struggle.

In his Letter to the Ephesians, Paul has enlightened us about the lofty and high purposes of God. He has elevated the standard of behavior of believers. He has raised the bar concerning expectations in the home. But none of these noble objectives would come easy. They would involve, as Paul said, spiritual battles and warfare. Every high and holy expectation expressed by Paul—believers understanding their calling in Jesus, the church coming together as one, the proclamation of the gospel, pastors equipping saints for the work of ministry, and families reflecting the truth of the gospel—is at risk because of “the schemes of the devil” (Eph. 6:11).

Paul concluded his letter with a farewell statement (6:21-24) that mentioned Tychicus, who most likely was a messenger of the apostle and delivered the letter to its recipients. While this beloved and steadfast brother was named, there are no other personal greetings in the farewell section. This most likely indicates that Paul intended the letter to be widely circulated. We can draw some conclusions from that. First, what Paul described in Ephesians is normative for believers and churches in every era. Today’s disciples can’t plead an exemption from its teachings simply because of cultural value shifts. Secondly, we can expect that spiritual warfare will always be part of the Christian experience. If anything, the diabolical attacks of the enemy will increase as we move closer to the consummation of all things in Jesus (1:10).

Identify the actions Paul instructed his readers to take in Ephesians 6:10-20. How does each action enable the believer to honor Christ?
The word *finally* is usually interpreted in the sense of “therefore,” as a conclusion drawn from what was said previously. But the phrase used by Paul in the original language can also mean “from this point forward.” The Christian life will always be a battle until the day we leave this earth or until Christ returns.

The battle in which believers engage is serious and significant, so it requires help from the Lord and his vast strength. Having mentioned this power previously (Eph. 1:19-20), Paul encouraged his readers to lay hold of and access this vital spiritual resource. Spiritual warfare is not a fight that we can win on our own. The verb used by Paul in the phrase *be strengthened* is in the passive voice, indicating that the subject is being acted upon, rather than doing the action.

How do believers tap into the strength of the Lord for battle? We do so by putting on the full armor of God. There is no question Paul assumed the reality of the devil and his schemes to thwart the work of God. While the devil is a formidable enemy, we must always remember that he has been defeated at the cross of Jesus (1:22). He is powerful, but Jesus is all-powerful.

Failure to understand the opponent can be disastrous in any area of life. This is especially true in the spiritual realm. Paul identified the true enemy of the believer as the devil himself. Christians often think their biggest struggles are with other people. The temptation
is to focus on the human expression or emissary of evil, failing to realize the spiritual forces behind it. Paul explained that our struggle is not against flesh and blood.

The real battle is against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this darkness, against evil, spiritual forces in the heavens. These are demonic forces under the direction of Satan. Paul’s point was not to provide an organizational chart of Satan’s evil empire but rather to remind us of the many forces at play in battle. Satan is cunning, well organized, and well equipped to inflict damage on those spiritual soldiers not prepared for warfare.

**VERSE 13**
The threat against us is great. *For this reason take up the full armor of God.* While denoting the completeness of the full armor, the main focus is on its divine origin. Paul’s very language is consistent with his entire message in Ephesians. This is not something we do for ourselves. God provides us with the resources we need to combat the dark forces that would diminish Christ in our lives. In this way we are able to resist against those evil attacks.

The phrase having prepared everything translates a compound word that indicates being prepared or equipped. The result of this...
preparation is the ability to take your stand. We dare not miss the connection between the two. Resisting temptation is not a matter of our own strength or resolve. Instead, the key is appropriating what God has prepared for us in the moral and spiritual battle that we must fight. This is illustrated in Moses’ encouragement to the people of Israel: “The LORD will fight for you” (Ex. 14:14) Having this perspective is crucial in order to gain victory over the evil one.

Why does it matter that believers in Christ clearly understand that their walk in Him includes facing spiritual conflict? What dangers exist if the believer fails to recognize the possibility of spiritual battles?

PREPARED (EPH. 6:14-17)

14 Stand, therefore, with truth like a belt around your waist, righteousness like armor on your chest, 15 and your feet sandaled with readiness for the gospel of peace. 16 In every situation take up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit—which is the word of God.

VERSES 14-15

Paul identified for the Ephesians their armor (vv. 14-16) and weaponry (v. 17). The imperative to stand is connected with all of the pieces of armor listed. The order of their appearance in the text is likely the order in which a Roman soldier would have put them on. Of course, regardless of how impressive armor might look hanging in the barracks, it was of no value unless it was put on. Believers must take advantage of the resources provided by God.

As mentioned earlier, there is an emphasis on the divine origin of this armor. This is most appropriate to remember when it comes to the first two protective pieces, truth and righteousness. Both come from God, not ourselves. Ever the student of the Hebrew Scriptures, Paul seemed to have Isaiah 11:5 in mind while writing these words.

The belt that surrounded the waist held the armor in place. A tightly fitted belt indicated the soldier was prepared for action. A slackened belt indicated he was off duty. The truth that holds every piece of armor in place is the gospel.
Righteousness as armor on your chest denotes protection at our most vital and vulnerable places. Righteous living closes doors to temptation and to the schemes of the devil. But righteous living is possible only by the gift of righteousness given through Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:17).

Good footwear was vital to the success of the soldier because he traveled many miles to battle. He also traveled tough terrain. The sandals represented readiness or preparedness of the soldier. What was the soldier prepared to do? He was prepared to announce the gospel of peace.

VERSE 16
A Roman soldier’s shield was oblong and covered most of the body. This imagery seems appropriate in light of the role of faith in all of our Christian experience, not just the inception of our new lives. As with righteousness mentioned previously, there is an objective and subjective aspect to faith. There is the Christian faith on which we are to stand and believe. Yet there is also personal faith, the trust an individual places in Christ to save and deliver. Both are necessary in spiritual warfare.

What did Paul mean when he wrote about the flaming arrows of the evil one? These might include accusations of conscience or false guilt, along with other thoughts of disobedience. The main point is that Satan attacks believers but faith extinguishes those destructive attacks.

VERSE 17
Isaiah 59:17 paints a picture of the coming Savior who took on a helmet of salvation. This is a helpful reminder that the spiritual resources that we appropriate are found with the Lord and not simply within ourselves. This salvation is what Paul has described in 1:3-14 and 2:1-10. As a helmet, the knowledge of salvation protects us from believing the enemy’s lies.

The offensive weapon in our arsenal, the sword of the Spirit, is the word of God. The word for sword used by Paul is that of a short sword used in close combat. The best example of its usage is Christ’s use of Scripture in His wilderness temptations (Matt. 4:1-10). In spiritual warfare we must use the Word of God. Disaster awaits any believer who would try to contend with temptation by using ideas from best-selling books instead of the truths found in Scripture.
What might keep a believer from utilizing the armor God provides for fighting spiritual battles? What responsibility do we have in preparing for spiritual battle?

FIELD SUPPORT (EPH. 6:18-20)

18 Pray at all times in the Spirit with every prayer and request, and stay alert with all perseverance and intercession for all the saints. 19 Pray also for me, that the message may be given to me when I open my mouth to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel. 20 For this I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I might be bold enough to speak about it as I should.

VERSE 18

In addition to armor and weapons, the soldier has at his disposal field support. Our first level of field support is prayer. The wise soldier sharpens his prayer life before the battle even arrives. Both preparation and engagement in battle require prayer.

The prayer by which we equip ourselves and engage in battle has several characteristics. First, it is consistent. We are instructed to pray at all times. In every situation we need to be found praying. Paul characterized this as praying with all perseverance. Secondly, it is offered in the Spirit. The grammar of the original language emphasizes that the Spirit is the means by which prayer is offered. The Spirit is with the person praying, inspires the person to pray, guides the person in what to pray, and energizes him or her to keep praying.

Finally, this prayer is offered sincerely and from one’s innermost being. The construction of Paul’s command, with every prayer and request, is striking. The meaning is that when we pray, we should really pray. It is possible to go through the motions of praying
without “really” praying. Perfunctory, half-hearted prayers are insufficient when it comes to spiritual warfare.

Closely connected with the command to pray is the imperative to *stay alert*. The wording of verse 18 seems to put these two commands in parallel structure. Another way of saying this is that to pray is to stay alert and staying alert allows us to pray. We are reminded of Jesus’ admonition to His disciples on the eve of His crucifixion to “stay awake and pray so that you won’t enter into temptation” (Mark 14:38).

Our prayers are to be characterized by *intercession*, which means to pray on someone’s behalf. The question is how wide the scope of our intercessory prayer extends. I was challenged once by a speaker who asked, “How often do you pray for someone who doesn’t share the same last name as you?” We tend to pray for our family members and close friends, yet we are instructed to pray *for all the saints*.

**VERSES 19-20**

While we pray as part of our own spiritual warfare, we also pray for others who are engaging in spiritual battles. Paul’s request, *pray also for me*, is an example of this. Specifically, he requested prayer that *the message may be given* to him and that he might preach *with boldness the mystery of the gospel*. This is more than just a request for personal confidence, which any human speaker or teacher might desire.

Paul’s passion to take the gospel to the lost is obvious in verses 19-20. An *ambassador* lives in a foreign land but represents his home country. Paul saw himself as a stranger in the places he traveled to take the gospel, and he desired to deliver the message of the kingdom of God. Though he was an ambassador, he was in battle. He was *in chains* for preaching the gospel. Paul asked for prayer that God would grant him boldness to speak of Jesus even in the heat of battle.

*How does knowing others are praying help a person face spiritual battles?*
IN MY CONTEXT

- God provides all the resources needed for believers to prevail in spiritual battles.
- Believers must prepare themselves for spiritual battle.
- Believers must depend upon God through prayer for victory.

What actions can you take to increase your confidence in the sufficiency of God’s resources for spiritual warfare?

What spiritual battles are you currently facing? What needs to be “put on” to face these battles?

Discuss as a group ways your group can help one another fight spiritual battles. What needs to be implemented or strengthened based on this discussion? How?

Prayer Needs
WHO DOES GOD SAY YOU ARE?

Christian, don’t let the world define you! Find your identity in Christ. See yourself as God sees you. As a believer, this is who you are in God’s eyes:

A new creation in Christ
“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come!” (2 Cor. 5:17)

A child of God
“But to all who did receive him, he gave them the right to be children of God, to those who believe in his name” (John 1:12).

A branch of the true vine
“I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without me” (John 15:5).

A friend of Jesus
“I do not call you servants anymore, because a servant doesn’t know what his master is doing. I have called you friends,
because I have made known to you everything I have heard from my Father” (John 15:15).

Justified and redeemed
“They are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:24).

A fellow heir with Christ
“We are God’s children, and if children, also heirs—heirs of God and coheirs with Christ—if indeed we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him” (Rom. 8:17).

More than a conqueror
“No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us” (Rom. 8:37).

A saint
“To the church of God at Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called as saints, with all those in every place who call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord—both their Lord and ours” (1 Cor. 1:2).

A temple of the Holy Spirit
“Don’t you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God? You are not your own” (1 Cor. 6:19).

A member of Christ’s body
“Now you are the body of Christ, and individual members of it” (1 Cor. 12:27).

An ambassador for Christ
“Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us. We plead on Christ’s behalf: ‘Be reconciled to God’” (2 Cor. 5:20).

The righteousness of God
“He made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21).

No longer a slave, but free
“For freedom, Christ set us free. Stand firm then and don’t submit again to a yoke of slavery” (Gal. 5:1).

Chosen before the foundation of the world
“For he chose us in him, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless in love before him” (Eph. 1:4).

Adopted into God’s family
“He predestined us to be adopted as sons through Jesus Christ for himself, according to the good pleasure of his will” (Eph. 1:5).
Forgiven
“In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace” (Eph. 1:7).

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

Made alive in Christ
“But God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love that he had for us, made us alive with Christ even though we were dead in trespasses. You are saved by grace!” (Eph. 2:4-5)

Raised and seated with Him in the heavenly places
“He also raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavens in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:6).

God’s workmanship
“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time for us to do” (Eph. 2:10).

A child of light
“For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light” (Eph. 5:8).

A citizen of heaven
“But our citizenship is in heaven, and we eagerly wait for a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Phil. 3:20).

As a believer, this is who you are in Christ. The Christian life, then, involves the process of becoming in practice more of who you already are in Christ. (The theological word is “sanctification.”) Live, then, as who Christ has made you to be.
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<td>4</td>
<td>God Saves</td>
<td>Matthew 1:18-25; Numbers 21:6-9</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>God Calls</td>
<td>Numbers 22:22-35</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>God Commissions</td>
<td>Numbers 27:12-23</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>God Expects</td>
<td>Numbers 32:20-32</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Valued</td>
<td>Deuteronomy 5:17; 19:4-13</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Honored</td>
<td>Deuteronomy 4:1-9</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Loved</td>
<td>Deuteronomy 6:1-13</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Revealed</td>
<td>Deuteronomy 18:15-22</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Chosen</td>
<td>Deuteronomy 30:1-10,19-20</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>Promised</td>
<td>Deuteronomy 32:48-52; 34:4-7</td>
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Paul's Second and Third Journeys


PAUL'S SECOND AND THIRD JOURNEYS

City
Site of the Seven Churches of Asia
ACTS 15:36–19:14
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A basic saying of the Christian life is “become who you are.” Because we have been brought to life in Christ, we can live new and distinctive lives through the power of God’s grace. “Become who you are” actually captures the theme of Ephesians; Paul wove it into the very fabric of the book. Chapters 1–3 are about the new life given to us in Christ; chapters 4–6 are about the new lifestyle that is based on this new life. The hinge of the entire letter is found in one word: therefore (4:1). It reminds us that because we have been made alive in Christ, we are now to live and walk in a way that is worthy of the gospel. As you engage in this study of Ephesians, prepare to be challenged with this key question: “How can I become in daily life who I am already in Christ?”