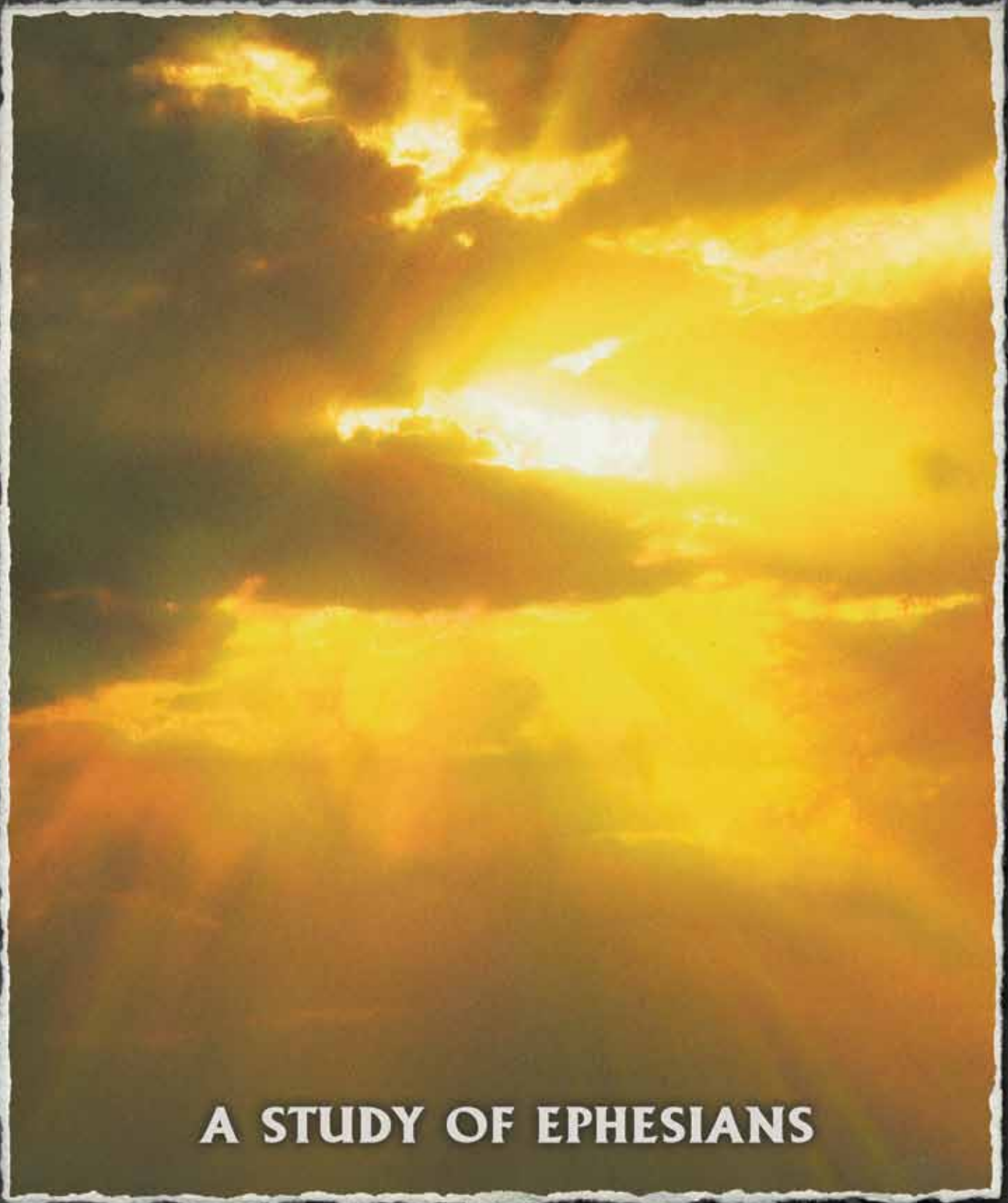


Seated on High



A STUDY OF EPHESIANS

WRITTEN BY TOM KELBY

Seated on High

A STUDY OF EPHESIANS

Written by Tom Kelby

Original illustration, layout, and design by Mark Yaeger



handstotheplow.org

Copyright© 2008 by Hands to the Plow, Inc.

Published by Hands to the Plow, Inc.

P.O. Box 567 • Webster, WI 54893

715-349-7185

First printing, 2008

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in whole or in part, or stored in a retrieval system, transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without written permission of the publisher.

“Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright© 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers.

Used by permission. All rights reserved.”

*To Andy. A great friend and brother.
Your love for the church inspires me. "Glory!"*

– Tom

*I dedicate this book to my longtime friend, John Guist.
Johnny, you have been a major blessing
throughout my entire Christian walk.
Thank you for exhorting and encouraging me these many years.*

– Mark

ABOUT THE COVER

I remember the initial conversation with Tom concerning the illustration for the cover of the Ephesians Bible study. We had a difficult time landing on any image that adequately represents the emphasis of the book Ephesians, due mostly to the fact that there are many points laid out before us in the 6 chapters of Ephesians. For instance, how do you illustrate the fact that God “chose us in him before the foundation of the world” (Ephesians 1:4)? Anything you depict will fall short of the reality. How do you illustrate the fact that God lavished grace on us (1:8)? That, too, is difficult to illustrate. The armor description in chapter 6 is more tangible and concrete (and I actually completed an illustration of a Roman soldier), but it misses so much of the letter’s umbrella message. A key idea in this book is of Christ’s ascension to the right hand of God, where he is seated “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion” (1:21). Tied to this important truth is the almost inconceivable truth that God has “raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places” (2:6). Thus, the title “Seated on High” speaks of Christ’s position and of our position. Really try to absorb that truth—we serve the Lord of Lords and the King of Kings. He sits on high—the highest! And God puts us right there with Him (not because of anything we did but because of the righteousness that is in us—namely Jesus Christ). That is awesome and sobering at the same time.

Both concepts are in view in this book. The image of the sun is like the title. It pictures Christ’s position and our position. It doesn’t limit our thoughts in the same way that another image (e.g., a throne) might.

I pray that God reveals these truths to you through this Bible study and through your probing and meditation of God’s word in the book of Ephesians.

A disciple of the living God,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "MARK". The letters are bold and slightly slanted, with a casual, personal feel.

Mark Yaeger

INTRODUCTION

Most of us would leap at the opportunity, if it were possible, to see the creation of the world. Such a vision would answer so many questions about life. Unfortunately, we will not (at least until heaven) have such an opportunity. We will have to live with the words we have been given in Genesis 1 and 2. But if such a vision would be helpful, what about a vision of the things that took place before the creation of the world? What, for instance, was God thinking about before he made the world? What motivated his actions? What sort of plan was he working out when he spoke the world into existence? Answers to such questions would answer even more questions about life. The first vision would provide us with answers to “how” questions (e.g., How did God create the animals? How did God create the universe?). The second vision would provide us with answers to “why” questions (e.g., Why would God make a world such as this? Why did God create me?). And these are the questions Paul answers in the book of Ephesians. In this great letter, Paul brings his readers back into the deepest recesses of time, providing a clear view of God’s actions before the creation of the world. He then walks his readers through subsequent actions God has taken on their behalf. He concludes the letter by outlining how the Christian ought to live in light of God’s great purposes. This is truly an amazing letter. May God grant you “a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him” (Ephesians 1:17) as you consider these truths. May you walk (you’ll see this word many times in this letter) in light of the truths you discover here.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom". The letters are stylized and connected, with a long horizontal stroke above the "T" and "o".

Tom Kelby
November 17, 2008

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

There are four parts to this nine-week study: Scripture reading, study questions to answer, study notes to read, and a weekly journal to record insights the Holy Spirit has taught you. All four are important. You will not get nearly as much out of this study if you skip any of the four. Also, do the lessons in order. Paul builds on his arguments in each verse. We need to follow the process he follows, for we will miss basic truths that are foundational to our understanding if we jump ahead.

Here's how I would recommend using this book:

On day one of each week, read the appropriate verses in Ephesians we have printed in the book. We have printed the actual verses in this study book for three main reasons. First, we believe you will be able to more freely write notes and questions in the margins, which is something you may not be comfortable doing in your "everyday" Bible. Second, most Bibles break down the verses for the reader, even titling the different sections. We have printed the verses without these breaks as it is important that you dissect the passage for yourself. Finally, many Bibles include study notes. These are helpful, but they can keep you from "wrestling" with the passage yourself.

Read the passage slowly. Once you have read through the passage, read it through a second time. God has a great deal he would like to show you in his word. As you read, ask the Lord for wisdom. Why is this passage significant? What is the truth Paul is trying to get across in this passage? How do the thoughts in this passage relate to those in the verses before it? We have printed the passages with enough spacing so that you have the room necessary to write your thoughts and questions regarding the passage, however, do no writing your first time through the passage. Simply read the passage slowly. Your second read-through of the passage should be different. This time, pay close attention to the themes Jesus is developing. Circle repeated words or phrases. Underline major themes. Break the passage down into smaller sections and title these sections. Write down other verses that relate to truths Paul is teaching in this passage. Avoid the use of a Bible commentary or the notes in a study Bible at this point. Do the work yourself. The Lord will give you wisdom.

On days two through five, answer the study questions. The questions will often bring you to other passages that will further illuminate the verses you are studying.

On day six, read the study notes. These notes will give you my perspective on the passage. Oftentimes in the notes you will find verses referred to, but not printed. These verses are important. Please take the time to look these verses up. It will help you in your overall understanding of Scripture.

Finally, after you've read the notes, write down any truths the Holy Spirit has taught you over the previous week.

You will find an additional page for notes in the back of this book.

Week One

EPHESIANS 1:1-14

WEEK ONE

Ephesians 1:1-14

DAY ONE

Read *Ephesians 1:1-14* through twice. The first time through these verses, simply read the text. Do not write any notes regarding the verses at this time. The second time through the verses, circle or underline key words or phrases and write down any questions or thoughts the verses leave you with in the margin. If the verses bring any related Scriptures to mind, please write them in the margin.

EPHESIANS 1:1-14

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

² Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴ even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, ⁸ which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight⁹ making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

¹¹ In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, ¹² so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. ¹³ In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

DAY TWO

Read *Ephesians 1:1-2*

1. How does Paul describe himself in the introduction to this letter? *Ephesians 1:1*

2. Examine the introductions to Paul's other letters (the books in your New Testament from Romans through Philemon). In which of these letters do you find a statement indicating that Paul was an apostle by God's will?

3. What does Paul's inclusion of this fact tell you about Paul and his understanding of his role?

4. What does this fact tell you about God and his manner of working? *See also Ephesians 4:11-12*

5. Why do you think Paul would tell his readers this fact?

6. How does Paul describe his readers? *Ephesians 1:1*

7. There are indications that this letter was written to more than just the church in Ephesus. Just one indication is the fact that the phrase “in Ephesus” is missing from several important manuscripts of this letter. Thus, it appears that Paul intended this letter to be circulated among many churches. What features might you expect to find in a letter written to just one church (the church in Colossae)?

8. What features might you expect to find in a letter written to many churches?

DAY THREE

Read *Ephesians 1:3-6*

9. Verse three is somewhat of an umbrella under which verses four through 14 fall. Thus, it summarizes the verses that follow. According to this verse, what has God the Father done for the believer?

10. Paul writes that the Father has blessed us with these blessings “in Christ”. How many times do you find the phrase “in Christ” or “in him” or a similar phrase in verses three through 14?

11. What do you think this phrase means, and what does it tell you about the importance of Christ?

WEEK ONE

Ephesians 1:1-14

12. When did God choose believers in him? *Ephesians 1:4*

13. Why did he do this?

14. Notice, Paul presents this as a reason that God is blessed (worthy of praise). Has the idea that God chose you before the foundation of the world ever led you to praise him? If not, why not?

15. Why did he predestine us for adoption? *Ephesians 1:6*

16. In which verses do you find this phrase repeated in verse three through 14?

DAY FOUR

Read *Ephesians 1:7-10*

17. What does verse seven indicate that we have in him?

18. This gift has been given us “according to the riches of his grace”. According to verse eight, how has this grace been given to us?

19. What comfort should this give to those who are weighed down by sins that seem too big to be forgiven?

20. What is the “mystery of his will”?

21. When will this take place?

22. Colossians 1:19-20 is very similar to this passage. Please write out these verses in the space below.

23. What do these verses tell you about the importance of Christ in the universe?

DAY FIVE

Read *Ephesians 1:11-14*

24. What does verse 11 indicate that we have in him?

25. Why has he done this? *Ephesians 1:12*

26. What else has God done for us? *Ephesians 1:13*

27. What is the purpose of this sealing? *Ephesians 1:14*

28. Why has he done this? *Ephesians 1:14*

29. Reread verses three through 14, focusing on the reasons behind God's actions. Why has he done the things he has done? What is his purpose?

WEEK ONE

Ephesians 1:1-14

30. Write out a prayer based on verses three through 14, specifically thanking and praising God for the actions he has taken on your behalf.

DAY SIX

Read the study notes for chapter 1:1-14.

31. Read the study notes and then complete the following sentence. This week the Holy Spirit has taught me . . .

EPHESIANS 1:1-14

This is a most remarkable section of this most remarkable letter. In it, you'll find Paul looking back before time began to open our eyes to the gracious work of God. The things Paul saw in the recesses of time are not easy to comprehend. But they add—greatly—to our knowledge of God and to our knowledge of his love for us and, perhaps more significantly, to our knowledge of his love for himself and his greatness.

Before we begin, let's take a moment and pray that our Heavenly Father would give us eyes to see the truths he has so graciously revealed in the letter to the Ephesians. Please pray with me: "Father, thank you for revealing your nature and goodness in your Word. I pray that you would give me eyes to see these truths. Please, by your Holy Spirit, help me to understand these words and to pattern my life according to the truths found here. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to see and know these things. Help me, by your grace, to love the truths I find here and to follow these truths to you—their author. Amen."

Ephesians begins much like the other letters written by Paul.

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God . . . Ephesians 1:1a

As was customary in his day, Paul introduces himself at the beginning of the letter. In the introduction he describes himself as "an apostle of Christ Jesus." Sometimes in the New Testament, the word apostle refers specifically to Jesus' twelve disciples. At other times, the word refers to an ordinary messenger.¹ However, when Paul used this word, particularly in reference to himself, he had another meaning in mind. Paul used this word to describe those who had been gifted by God

¹ See, for instance, Paul's reference to Epaphroditus in Philippians 2:25.

to play a foundational role in the church and had “extraordinary status”² as his messengers. The apostles’ words were to be treasured and obeyed in much the same way that the Old Testament prophets’ words were to be treasured and obeyed. It is significant that Paul begins nine of the 13 letters that bear his name by reminding his readers of his role as an apostle. Clearly, he wanted the churches to read and respond to his letters in an appropriate manner. His title ought to carry the same weight today.

As the first verse makes clear, Paul was not a self-appointed apostle. Rather, he was made an apostle “by the will of God”.³ In other words, God determined Paul’s calling. He wanted Paul to be an apostle. This isn’t something God decided to do once Paul proclaimed faith in Jesus Christ. As we learn in Galatians 1:15, God set Paul apart before he was even born and thus, before he had done anything worthy of being called an apostle. He was made an apostle because such was God’s plan. The focus on Paul’s position as an apostle and the emphasis that that was by God’s own choosing is an appropriate way to begin the book of Ephesians, for much of the book centers on God’s will for his people.

The letter is addressed to “the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 1:1b). Two things are worth noting regarding this address:

First, note the persons to whom the letter is addressed: it is addressed to the “saints” who are “faithful in Christ Jesus”. Saints are those who have been set apart by God for his purposes. If you are a Christian you are a saint (whether you act like a saint is a different matter). As saints, our lives are to be marked by our firm belief in Christ.

Second, note the location to which the letter is addressed—“Ephesus”. While it is clear that the letter was sent to Christians, it is not clear that the letter was addressed only to the Christians in Ephesus. It is possible that the words “in Ephesus” were not in Paul’s original manuscript. These words are, according to Bruce Metzger, author of *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, “absent from several important witnesses . . . as well as from manuscripts mentioned by Basil and the text used by Origen.”⁴ The absence of these words may mean that the letter was not intended for just one church (the church in Ephesus). Rather, it may have been intended for many churches. Evidence from within the letter seems to point in this direction. For instance, the fact that Paul did not refer to specific problems within the church in this letter may suggest that the letter was designed to be more generic in nature, meeting the needs of a large number of churches rather than one specific church in one location. Of course, whether Paul wrote the letter to one church or many churches does not change the fact that God intended the letter to bring blessing to the entire church. And that is exactly what has happened with this letter.

After this brief introduction, we find an extended commentary on the “blessedness” of God. In these verses, Paul praises God for the work he has done in those who have been saved. Before we consider the words found within this section, notice the length of the sentences. The English Standard Version uses five long sentences in its translation of this section.⁵ In fact, one sentence—verses seven through ten—is 70 words long! But that is nothing compared to the Greek. Paul uses just one sentence in verses three through 14. He piles word upon word, phrase upon phrase, and clause upon clause. One truth leads to another. It’s as if Paul could not stop himself.

This is not the only long sentence found within Ephesians. In fact, “Ephesians contains eight lengthy sentences (1:3-14, 15-23; 2:1-7; 3:2-13, 14-19; 4:1-6, 11-16; 6:14-20), three of which are items of praise and prayer (1:3-14, 15-23; 3:14-19).”⁶ The sheer length of the sentences within this book says something about the greatness of God and the work he has accomplished in the saints. The work he has done for us cannot adequately be described in short little disconnected sentences. Everything that God has done in our lives is connected. His actions in eternity past relate to our lives today which relate to eternity future. All are connected and must be seen together.

2 Frederick William Danker, ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, Third Edition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 122.

3 See also 1 Corinthians 1:1, 2 Corinthians 1:1, Colossians 1:1, 2 Timothy 1:1.

4 Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament, Second Edition* (Stuttgart, Germany: German Bible Society, 1994), 532.

5 The New International Version uses eight sentences in its translation of this section.

6 Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (PNTC; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999), 90.

WEEK ONE

Ephesians 1:1-14

It is worth noting the number of times the phrase “in Christ,” or related phrases appears in the first 14 verses. This phrase (or related phrases) appears in verses three, four, six, seven, nine, ten, 11, and 13. Everything we have as Christians is because of our position “in Christ.” Commentator Francis Foulkes explains this phrase as follows: “As the root in the soil, the branch in the vine (cf. Jn. xv. 1 ff.), the fish in the sea, the bird in the air, so the place of the Christian’s life is in Christ.”⁷

But while Paul places great emphasis on Jesus and the Christian’s position “in Christ” in these verses, he ultimately directs the reader’s attention to God the Father, referred to here as “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places . . . Ephesians 1:3

Interestingly, the work that God the Father has done for the believer through *Christ* causes Paul to proclaim that *God* is blessed—that is, showered with praise, honor, and thanks. God’s blessedness is revealed in the fact that he has “blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places”. The word “every” is quite significant. Nothing is withheld from the believer. The blessed God has blessed his people with all of his blessings!

Verse three is something of an umbrella under which verses four through 14 sit. While it indicates that we have been blessed with every available blessing, it does not outline the specific blessings. The specific spiritual blessings we have received for which God is praised are outlined in verses four through 14.

The first blessing may be seen in verse four.

. . . even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. Ephesians 1:4

This verse begins the list of things for which God is blessed. The first such reason is that God “chose us in him before the foundation of the world”. This is very significant. We may think that we chose God, and in a sense, that is correct. However, did anything precede your choosing to follow God (if you are a Christian)? Yes. God’s choosing of you preceded your choosing of him.⁸ He chose you before the world existed. That is, before you were born and before you had done anything worthy of being chosen (if you ever could do something worthy of being chosen), God deliberately chose you to be “holy and blameless before him”. God’s chose you by his grace. Grace has nothing to do with works or obligation. You can’t earn it. It is a gift given at the sole discretion of the giver. God chose you to be a recipient of his forgiveness, love, life, and power so that, upon receipt of these gifts, you might be “holy and blameless before him”.

It is worth noting that the Greek verb used for “he chose” in Ephesians 1:4 is in the middle voice. Voice is a grammatical term used to explain the relationship between the subject and the verb. As Daniel Wallace explains, “If the voice is active, the subject does the acting . . . if *passive*, the subject is acted upon . . . if middle, the subject acts on itself or in its own behalf, or the stress is placed on the subject.”⁹ For instance, “Tom hit the ball” is active. “Tom was hit by the ball” is passive. The middle voice demonstrates something about my intention in hitting the ball: “Tom hit the ball (for himself).” In other words, the use of the middle voice here indicates that I had some internal motivation for hitting the ball. This is the type of verb used in verse four. The idea is that God “chose us [for himself].”¹⁰ As Daniel Wallace goes on to say,

God chose us *for* himself, *by* himself, or for his own interests. This does not, of course, imply that God needed believers. Rather, just as the chief end of human beings is to glorify God and enjoy him forever, so too God is in the business of glorifying himself. And as is mentioned three times in Eph 1, the elect belong to God “for the praise of his glory.”¹¹

7 Francis Foulkes, *The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians* (TNTC; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1975), 43.

8 See John 6:44 and Romans 11:5-6.

9 Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1996), 38.

10 Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 421.

11 Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 421.

The idea that God chose us in him before the foundation of the world makes many of us uncomfortable, for the question it leads us to ask is, “What about those whom God didn’t choose?” This question inevitably leads one to question God’s “fairness.” It is important to notice the tremendous shift that takes place when we ask these questions. We go from proclaiming that God is blessed *because of this action* to using this action as a basis for questioning his character. Paul considers the fact that God “chose us in him before the foundation of the world” to be something that demonstrates God’s worthiness of praise. It is a fundamental reason that he is “blessed”. We must not use it as a reason to question his justice.

Our first response to verses like these should not be, “what about the lost?” This is somewhat akin to responding, upon receiving a Christmas gift, “What about everyone else? What have you given to them?” Our response to the knowledge that God has chosen us should be something like, “Why me? What have I ever done to deserve this? I am overwhelmed by your grace, Oh God.” The knowledge of this fact is to lead us to praise his glorious grace.

God is under no obligation to call anyone. The fact that he has called *anyone* demonstrates his mercy. If he were obligated to be merciful, his mercy would not be mercy. Commentator F.F. Bruce echoes this thought when he writes, “He is merciful and compassionate because such is his will. ‘The quality of mercy is not strained’, and least of all so when it is God who shows mercy; for if He were compelled to be merciful by some cause outside Himself, not only would His mercy be so much the less mercy, but He Himself would be so much less God.”¹²

Obviously, much of the church is divided on this issue. Traditions regarding the manner of God’s choosing abound. It is important to realize that the division is not, primarily, in whether God has chosen us; after all, verses like these and many others clearly indicate that he has chosen us. The division is in regard to how he has chosen us. Tragically, however, differences of opinion regarding the method of God’s choosing have led some to despise the choosing itself. This ought not to be. Is it possible to live with the glorious fact of God’s calling of you and to not have all the answers? I believe it is! None of us have all the answers. Should this fact keep us from celebrating the answers that we do have? What a wonder that God “chose us in him before the foundation of the world”! Think of the grace he has lavished on you! We must not ignore this wonderful truth.

In love he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ . . . Ephesians 1:4b-5

You were not a divine accident—someone who slipped into God’s family unnoticed. Rather, he specifically ordained that you would be adopted into his family through Jesus Christ. God wanted you! He planned your adoption into his family from before time began!

The question this should lead us to is, “Why have you been so good to me, God?” The answer is found in the next verses.

. . . according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. Ephesians 1:5b-6

Do you see it? God did this because the act of choosing you before you had even been born and before you had ever done any worthy of being chosen would result in praise of his glorious grace. This was his purpose. More than that, this was his good pleasure, for the word “purpose” in verse five has the idea of “pleasure” built into it. In other words, choosing you and predestining you for adoption brought God great joy and delight because God knew that this would result in his grace being seen in all its splendor.

It brings God great joy to show himself off! He is the most God-centered person in the universe! And he must be, for to put anything above himself would be idolatry. Three different times in verses three through 14 we see that the motivation behind God’s actions is “the praise of his glorious grace”.¹³ He wants his grace to be loved, admired, and praised! This is why we were created.¹⁴

¹² F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Romans* (TNTC: Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1963), 188.

¹³ See verses 6, 12, and 14.

¹⁴ See Isaiah 43:7 and 21.

WEEK ONE

Ephesians 1:1-14

Of course, we cannot miss how these blessings have come to us. They have been given to us freely “in the Beloved”. The Beloved is another way of saying, “the Beloved One,” namely Jesus.¹⁵ “The Beloved” is used here as a name or title for Jesus. However, it is also a description of Jesus’ relationship with the Father. The Father deeply loves the Son. Notice the end of the following verse.

“Father, I desire that they also, whom you have give me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.” John 17:24

Before we move on, it is appropriate to ask whether you have ever thanked and praised God for choosing you. Have you ever marveled at the wonder that he chose you to be a recipient of his grace even before the world existed? Have you praised him for predestining you for adoption into his family? These are not meant to be truths that are so controversial that we avoid them. They are not meant to divide us. They are meant to move us—together—to praise and glorify God’s wonderful grace. To ignore God’s work which was in evidence even before time began is tragic, for it leaves Christians with an impoverished view of God’s grace and it leaves God without the praise he so richly deserves.

Remember, Paul is reviewing the blessings we have in Christ (see v. 3). He has talked about those blessings that happened before time began (choosing us in him and predestining us for adoption). He now talks about blessings that happened after time began and things that will happen in “the fullness of time”.

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. Ephesians 1:7-10

We are to praise God’s glorious grace because “we have redemption through his blood”. This is another way of saying that we have “the forgiveness of our trespasses”. Our sins have been forgiven so that, as verse four says, we might “be holy and blameless before him”. Notice that our redemption and forgiveness is not according to how much we have earned it. We haven’t earned forgiveness. It is according to the riches of his grace. God didn’t randomly pour out his grace. He lavished it among us “in all wisdom and insight”. God knew what he was doing when he poured out his grace on us. He was setting things in order for his perfect plan. That plan is “to unite all things in him”. God’s desire is to unite everything in Christ.¹⁶ As John Calvin said, “all things will be brought back to God, as their alone beginning and end, that they may be closely bound to him.”

God contemplates a *regathering*, a *restoration* to that former condition when all things were in perfect unity, and normally combined to serve God’s ends. This unity was broken by the introduction of sin. Man’s fall involved the unintelligent creation (Rom. 8:20). The mystery of God’s will includes the restoration of this unity in and through Christ; one kingdom on earth and in heaven—a new heaven and a new earth in which shall dwell righteousness, and “the creation shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God.”¹⁷

The uniting of all things in Christ is “the mystery of [God’s] will”. This is where everything has been heading from before the dawn of time. And to think that God has been working on our behalf so that we might be united in Christ! Surely this uniting of everything in Christ is the time to which Romans 8:18-25 refers. Our hearts are to be set in eager longing for this great day. This day will be so great that even creation “waits with eager longing”!

¹⁵ See also Colossians 1:13.

¹⁶ See 1 Corinthians 15:24-28.

¹⁷ Marvin Richardson Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament* (Bellingham, Wash.: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2002), 3:368.

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. Romans 8:18-25

Verses 11 and 12 flesh out our purpose even further.

In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. Ephesians 1:11-12

Verse 11 in the ESV reads, “In him we have obtained an inheritance”. This is certainly a wonderful truth and amply attested throughout the New Testament. It very well may be what this verse is saying. However, it is not necessarily the only meaning of this verse. It is perhaps significant that the verb rendered “we have obtained” is in the passive voice here, which *could* indicate not that we have obtained an inheritance, but that we are the inheritance. The Holman Christian Standard Bible captures this different sense. It reads, “In Him we were also made His inheritance”.

This truth is amply attested throughout the Bible. For instance, notice how the following Old Testament passages refer to Yahweh’s relationship with Israel—they are his inheritance.

“But the LORD has taken you and brought you out of the iron furnace, out of Egypt, to be a people of his own inheritance, as you are this day.” Deuteronomy 4:20

“Remember your servants, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Do not regard the stubbornness of this people, or their wickedness or their sin, lest the land from which you brought us say, ‘Because the LORD was not able to bring them into the land that he promised them, and because he hated them, he has brought them out to put them to death in the wilderness.’ For they are your people and your heritage, whom you brought out by your great power and by your outstretched arm.” Deuteronomy 9:27-29

“When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he divided mankind, he fixed the borders of the peoples according to the number of the sons of God. But the LORD’s portion is his people, Jacob his allotted heritage.” Deuteronomy 32:8-9

“. . . forgive your people who have sinned against you, and grant them compassion in the sight of those who carried them captive, that they may have compassion on them (for they are your people, and your heritage, which you brought out of Egypt, from the midst of the iron furnace). Let your eyes be open to the plea of your servant and to the plea of your people Israel, giving ear to them whenever they call to you. For you separated them from among all the peoples of the earth to be your heritage, as you declared through Moses your servant, when you brought our fathers out of Egypt, O Lord GOD.” 1 Kings 8:50-53

Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, the people whom he has chosen as his heritage! Psalm 33:12

WEEK ONE

Ephesians 1:1-14

Then the anger of the LORD was kindled against his people, and he abhorred his heritage . . . Psalm 106:40

Israel was Yahweh's inheritance—his heritage. If this is how the Old Testament refers to Yahweh's relationship with Israel, shouldn't the church be considered his inheritance in even greater measure? Why would God want us—broken sinners with nothing good in us—as his inheritance? The answer is easy, so that we might bring glory to him.

We know that we have an inheritance and we know that we are an inheritance. Both views are possible and neither option diminishes the glory of God. Whether Paul is emphasizing the fact that we have obtained an inheritance or the fact that God chose us as his inheritance the result is the same: “so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory” (Ephesians 1:12). Our purpose is that we might display the greatness of his being.

But how do we know that we actually will bring glory to him? We know that we will—and already do—bring him glory because he has done what is necessary to preserve us for himself. He has sealed us with the promised Holy Spirit.¹⁸

In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory. Ephesians 1:13-14

Verse 14, as with verse 11, is not entirely clear. It may be translated, as in the ESV, “until we acquire possession of it”. However, as the ESV renders it in the notes, it may also be rendered, “until God redeems his possession”. Whether this passage speaks of our receiving our inheritance or God redeeming his possession, the result is the same: the praise of his glory.

Do you see the point of these 14 verses? They are all about God! From all eternity he has been working on our behalf so that we might display him. He wants to demonstrate his greatness. Strangely, this thought sometimes troubles believers. We have been taught that salvation is all about us, therefore, to learn that it is primarily all about God throws our theology on its ear. It's not about us. It's about God and his goodness. As the Westminster Shorter Catechism reads, “Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.” We enjoy him by knowing him. We know him by knowing what he has done for us.

Now that we've taken a few minutes together to introduce these verses—and much more could be said concerning them—take the time to reread these verses and to thank God for the things he has done for you and to praise him for his greatness.

You might begin in this way, “Father, thank you for blessing me in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. I praise you for choosing me in you before the foundation of the world, so that I might be holy and blameless before you . . .”. Don't stop until you have worked through this entire passage. As you do this, you will notice that the dark clouds of self that have kept you from seeing and enjoying God in all his greatness will dissipate and you will see things—perhaps for the first time—as they really are.

¹⁸ See also Romans 8:23, 2 Corinthians 1:22, 5:1-5.

Week Two

EPHESIANS 1:15-23

WEEK TWO

Ephesians 1:15-23

DAY ONE

Read *Ephesians 1:15-23* through twice. The first time through these verses, simply read the text. Do not write any notes regarding the verses at this time. The second time through the verses, circle or underline key words or phrases and write down any questions or thoughts the verses leave you with in the margin. If the verses bring any related Scriptures to mind, please write them in the margin.

EPHESIANS 1:15-23

¹⁵ For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, ¹⁶ I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, ¹⁷ that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, ¹⁸ having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might ²⁰ that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. ²² And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

DAY TWO

Read *Ephesians 1:15-17*

1. Paul typically begins his prayers for the churches with thanksgiving. Why does he give thanks to God for the saints in Ephesus (and the surrounding areas)? *Ephesians 1:15-16*

2. In the following passages, Paul outlines how he prays for the saints. For each passage note the reason(s) why he thanks God for the saints in that particular location.

Romans 1:8

1 Corinthians 1:4

Philippians 1:3-5

Colossians 1:3-5

1 Thessalonians 1:2-3

2 Thessalonians 1:3

2 Timothy 1:3

Philemon 4-5

3. What do these passages tell you about Paul's prayer life?

4. What do they tell you about his view of the church?

5. What do they tell you about his view of God?

6. What part does thanksgiving play in your prayers for the churches?

7. Why do you think Paul told the saints that he was praying for them? And why did he tell them the content of his prayers? What benefit might this bring to the church?

8. After Paul gives thanks to God, we find him making a request of God. What does he ask God to do for the church in Ephesus? *Ephesians 1:17*

DAY THREE

Read *Ephesians 1:18*

9. What do you think "having the eyes of your hearts enlightened" means? Hearts obviously do not have eyes. What is Paul asking God to do in the lives of the saints?

10. In verses 18 and 19, Paul lists three things he wants the saints to know. What are these three things?

1.

2.

3.

WEEK TWO

Ephesians 1:15-23

11. What is “the hope to which he has called you”? See also *Romans 8:18-25*

12. What influence did a knowledge of this hope play in the lives of the Old Testament saints? What did it help them to do? What did it help them to avoid?

Hebrews 11:8-10

Hebrews 11:13-16

Hebrews 11:24-27

13. What specific changes might you see in your life if you had a greater awareness and knowledge of this hope?

DAY FOUR

Read *Ephesians 1:18*

14. In verse 18, Paul tells the saints that he asks God to open the eyes of their hearts concerning “the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints”? Read this verse carefully. Whose inheritance is Paul talking about?

15. What is the inheritance?

WEEK TWO

Ephesians 1:15-23

20. The greatness of God's power directed toward the saints is connected to the work he did in Christ. How did God demonstrate his great might in Christ? *See also Psalm 110 and Philippians 2:5-11*

21. God's power in our lives is "according to" the work he did in Jesus. In other words, it is tied to the work he did in Jesus. What confidence should this give the believer in regard to God's power that is available to them?

22. According to verse 22, why did God perform these actions in Christ?

23. What does this say about the importance of the church?

24. Do you have anything in your life that you have regarded as more powerful than Christ?

25. What specific changes might you see in your life if you had a greater awareness of Christ's power and your connection to that power?

DAY SIX

Read the study notes for chapter 1:15-23.

26. Read the study notes and then complete the following sentence. This week the Holy Spirit has taught me . . .

EPHESIANS 1:15-23

Have you ever told someone how you pray for him (not that you pray for them, mind you, but how you pray for them)? This is a strangely powerful action, for it lets that person in on the heavenly business that is taking place on their behalf. It opens their eyes to the very real work God and you¹ have done on their behalf and the work that is yet to be done. It motivates them to look for God's hand at work in their life. It lets them know that you are watching them and this encourages them to move forward in their faith.

Paul told the saints how he prayed for them quite frequently. Consider, for instance, the following passages:²

I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge . . . 1 Corinthians 1:4-5

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. Philippians 1:3-5

And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. Philippians 1:9-11

The passages where Paul tells the saints how he prays for them are important, for they tell us the sorts of things for which we ought to pray. They let us gauge the content of our own prayers for the church. Do they match the depth and vigor and frequency of Paul's prayers for the saints?

These "prayer reports" in the New Testament are also important because they are filled with wonderful theology—truths about God and Jesus and the church that build faith and bring hope, encouragement, and healing. In fact, the theology is so rich in the particular passage we are considering, that, as with Ephesians 1:3-14, these verses constitute one long sentence in the Greek. Once again, it's as if Paul cannot stop himself. He presents truth after truth regarding those things for which he is praying. We will do well to learn these truths and, like Paul, to pray these same things for the saints with whom we are associated.

WEEK TWO

Ephesians 1:15-23

- 1 Of course, the work we do in prayer cannot be compared with the work God does in response to our prayers.
- 2 Colossians 1:3-14 is another wonderful example of how Paul and his companions prayed for the church. This passage is well worth reading and applying in your own prayer life.

WEEK TWO

Ephesians 1:15-23

Paul begins by telling the saints why he prays for them.

For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers . . . Ephesians 1:15-16

Thanksgiving is the bedrock of Paul's prayers for the saints. Work your way through Paul's letters and you'll see that thanksgiving marked his prayers for the saints. Paul prayed with thanksgiving, because, as is noted below, that is the right way to approach God in regard to the saints.

We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right . . .
2 Thessalonians 1:3

Paul never forgot that it was due to God's goodness and mercy and love and grace and wisdom—from before time even began—that the saints had placed their faith in Jesus. The mere existence of saints in any location demands thanksgiving, for God alone is behind their existence. We must develop a deep understanding that God is worthy of thanks regarding the faith of the saints. I would encourage you to imitate Paul and to begin your prayers for the saints with thanksgiving.

“Father, thank you for the saints in _____. Thank you that they believe in Jesus. It is a miracle that anyone in this place even knows of your existence . . . but many do know of your existence. They love you because you first loved them. Thank you for choosing these saints to be in Christ before the foundation of the world. Thank you for predestining them for adoption through Jesus Christ. Thank you for sending Jesus to die for them. Thank you for drawing them to you . . .”

Paul's thanksgiving isn't just in regard to the saints' "faith in the Lord Jesus". He also thanks God regarding their "love toward all the saints".³ This, like the saints' faith in Jesus, is also a miracle.

Notice the specific kind of love for which Paul is thankful. It isn't just generic love toward everyone. Rather, he thanks God for the love directed from the saints toward the saints. This—love directed toward the saints—was the focus of the new commandment Jesus gave to the disciples.

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” John 13:34-35

It is interesting to consider the context of Jesus' command here. This new commandment was given immediately after he had told his disciples that he was going away. He was no longer going to be physically present with the disciples. How were they to receive the love that he had, to this point, given to them? They were to receive it from one another. And this is how we are, in large measure, to receive Christ's love today. This is why we must be a part of a church. Jesus planned that we would receive love—his love—from one another.

We need to thank God for the love that is poured out from the church because that love is a miracle. It truly is God's love that is being poured out. Christians are able to love as Christ loves because "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit" (Romans 5:5). Love is, according to Galatians 5:22, fruit that accompanies the Holy Spirit's presence. It naturally appears and grows in the life of the believer. This love is a miracle, and we owe our thanks to God for its existence.

But Paul didn't just stop at thanksgiving for the saints' faith and love. He wanted God to do even more in their lives. The "even more" is outlined in verses 17 through 23. Breaking these verses into smaller sections is perhaps inappropriate, as they really do form one unit. However, because of the richness of this prayer, breaking up these verses cannot be helped. Therefore, we will strive to consider the parts of the prayer without forgetting that these parts form a whole.

³ These two things are also emphasized in Colossians 1:3-4 and 2 Thessalonians 1:3-4.

Here then, broken into smaller portions, is Paul's prayer for the saints. He asks . . .

. . . that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him . . . Ephesians 1:17

What does this mean? Paul's request is not entirely clear because the word "spirit" may mean a number of things here.

In this text we have three possibilities: (1) "a spirit" of wisdom and revelation, (2) "the Spirit" of wisdom and revelation, or (3) "spiritual" wisdom and revelation.⁴

Scholars are not agreed upon which meaning Paul actually meant. This may be seen by comparing popular English translations of the New Testament. The English Standard Version, the translation being used in this book, the Holman Christian Standard Bible, the New American Standard, the New King James Bible, and the King James Bible all favor the first option (i.e., these translations do not see the word "spirit" here as referring to the Holy Spirit). The New International Version, however, favors option number two (i.e., this translation does see the word "spirit" here as referring to the Holy Spirit). Daniel Wallace, author of *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basic: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* favors option number three (i.e., that Paul is referring to "spiritual wisdom and revelation").⁵

All three possibilities have arguments in their favor. But no matter how the word "spirit" is to be translated, the end result is the same. Paul is asking God to give the saints wisdom and revelation that they might know him better. How, exactly is this miracle of new wisdom and revelation going to be made known in the saints?

Fortunately, Paul explains himself in verses 18 and 19.

. . . having the eyes of your hearts enlightened . . . Ephesians 1:18a

Paul's prayer is that the "eyes of your hearts" might be enlightened. Obviously, physical hearts do not have eyes. But Paul is not talking about physical hearts. He is talking about his readers' spiritual hearts—that is, that part of a person that is the "center and source of the whole inner life, w[ith] its thinking, feeling, and volition".⁶ Thus, Paul is asking God to give the believers to whom he is writing "inner awareness" of spiritual truths.⁷

If you are a Christian, you have undoubtedly experienced those joyful moments when the eyes of your heart were opened to some new spiritual truth.⁸ These moments are wonderful and life-changing, and, for all-too-many-of-us, relatively rare. But this is exactly what Paul wants his readers to experience. He wants them to see certain truths for the very first time. But these truths aren't just for Paul's readers. They're for us as well, just waiting to be seen and understood in all their greatness. Outlined below are those truths:

. . . that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe . . . Ephesians 1:18b-19a

There are three truths listed here. First, Paul prays that his readers (and, by extension, all Christians) would know "the hope to which he has called you". The key word here is hope. We are to have our eyes opened to the hope to which we have been called. What is hope? It is not wishful thinking. In the New Testament, hope is "looking forward to someth[ing] with some reason for confidence respecting fulfillment".⁹ Perhaps a better word may be "expectation".¹⁰ As Christians, are we looking forward to something? We absolutely are! We have, as Paul makes clear in Ephesians 4:4, "one hope". Paul alludes to this one hope in Ephesians 1:13-14:

4 Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 90.

5 See Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 90-91.

6 Danker, ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 508.

7 Danker, ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 508.

8 The New Testament also refers to spiritual "ears." The idea is much the same as in this passage. When Jesus says, in Revelation 2:7, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches", he is referring to a person's spiritual understanding. See also Revelation 2:11, 17, 29, 3:6, 13, 22.

9 Danker, ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 319.

10 Danker, ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 319.

WEEK TWO

Ephesians 1:15-23

In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

As believers, we have an inheritance just waiting for us. We don't have it yet, but it is coming. There is a day coming when we will be glorified with Christ and when all things will be summed up in him. Just listen to how Paul describes this day in Romans 8.

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. Romans 8:18-25

Do you ever think of this day? Fixation on this hope has been a mark of true saints for thousands of years. Consider, for instance, Moses:

By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. Hebrews 11:24-26¹¹

Paul wants God to open his readers' eyes to the greatness of this hope. For if we know this hope, we will abandon lesser things. Like Moses, we will "consider the reproach of Christ greater wealth" than anything else we might encounter. Are the eyes of your heart open to the hope of your calling? If not, pray. But don't just pray about your eyes being opened to this truth, read about it, and talk about it. The more you think about "the hope of your calling" the more your present life will be changed.

Next, Paul asks God to open the eyes of his readers' hearts to the "riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints". It is important to notice whose inheritance to which Paul refers. It is not our inheritance, but God's. Why would Paul want our eyes opened to the riches of God's inheritance? How would that help us? It helps us because when our eyes are opened to God's inheritance—that is, when we see his inheritance with spiritual eyes—we will naturally begin to treasure that inheritance. And what is God's inheritance? It's us! We are God's glorious inheritance.

When we see and understand that we are God's inheritance and that he sees us as a glorious inheritance, we begin to see ourselves in a new light. We treasure the church as we have never treasured her before, for she is glorious—full of beauty and splendor. We care for her and nourish her because she is God's inheritance. We protect her and help her, for we love the one who has inherited her.

God loves the church! It is a glorious inheritance. The reason it is glorious is because her very being is a direct result of Jesus' work. Notice how the church and Jesus are referred to in the following passage.

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. Ephesians 5:25-27

¹¹ The important connection between persevering faith and this future "hope" may be seen throughout Hebrews 11.

Notice, the church does not make herself holy and without spot or wrinkle. This is the work of Christ! He cleanses her “so that he might present the church to himself in splendor”! We ought to love and treasure the church as Jesus loves and treasures her. Do you love God’s inheritance? Do you see the church as glorious and good? If not, pray. But don’t just pray about your eyes being opened to this truth, read about it, and talk about it. The more you think about “the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints” the more your present life will be changed.

Finally, Paul asks God to open the eyes of the saints’ hearts to “the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe”. How much has God done in behalf of the saints? How much is he doing right now? How does his power compare to that of the devil? How does his power compare to that of the evil people we see working against him? How does his power compare to the evil we sometimes see within ourselves? We need to know—really know—the greatness of our God and the extent of his greatness in our lives today.

Paul takes the next several verses to explain exactly how immeasurable this great power toward us is.

. . . according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. Ephesians 1:19b-21

God’s power toward us is “according to” the work he did in Jesus. That is, it is tied to the work he did when he raised Jesus from the dead and “seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places”. Paul is not using Jesus as an example of God’s great power at work in our lives. That is, he is not just saying something like, “Look at what God did in Jesus’ life. He raised him from the dead. He seated him at his right hand. Just think what he can do in your life.” Rather, he is using Jesus as the reason for God’s great power at work in our lives. That is, he is saying something like, “God’s great might is real and true and evident in your lives because of the work he did in Jesus, when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand. His great might at work in your life is tied to the work he did in Jesus.”

Since God’s power toward us is “according to” the work he did in Jesus, it seems obvious that we need to have the eyes of our hearts opened to the work he did in Jesus; for if we really understand the work he did in Jesus and our connection to that work, we will understand the greatness of his power toward us. If we truly understand this, we will not feel weak and powerless. Rather, we will know that God is on our side and is working mightily on our behalf and that “in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us” (Romans 8:37).

Jesus’ position at the Father’s right hand is “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion”. It is also “above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come”. There is no one greater to whom we could be tied. No one and nothing will ever surpass him in power—and that includes the devil, demons, sickness, death, the future, the economy, politicians, people bent on destroying the church, etc., etc., etc.. God “put all things under his feet”. Jesus is over everything!

But how is Jesus’ position of authority connected to our lives? Notice verses 22 and 23, for they are very significant.

And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. Ephesians 1:22-23

Do you see it? The church is the beneficiary of Jesus’ headship! God was thinking of us when he seated Jesus at his right hand. He was thinking of us when he placed all things under Jesus’ feet. He was thinking of us when he made him head over all things. The church is no afterthought. We are not an insignificant accident necessitated by God’s response to Adam’s sin. Rather, the church has been part of God’s plan for all time. It is “the fullness of him who fills all in all”.

WEEK TWO

Ephesians 1:15-23

It is important to note that the church has no significance—indeed, no existence—outside of Christ. “Its glorious place in the divine plan, however, provides no grounds for boasting, arrogance, or the display of a ‘superior air’, for the church is wholly dependent on Christ. In itself, it is nothing. Its privileged position comes from its relationship to the One who as head graciously fills it with his presence.”¹² All eyes turn toward Jesus. He is the reason the church has any importance. He is the reason there is life and health and power within her.

Every conceivable power is encompassed within the mighty reign of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the so-called ‘hymn’ of Philippians 2:6-11 God exalted the humiliated Jesus and gave him ‘the name which is above every name;—his own personal name ‘Lord’—together with all the honours and authority that this name involved. It was the Father’s intention that universal acclamation and homage should be accorded to the one whose position outranked all others.¹³

Do you see “the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe”? If not, pray. But don’t just pray about your eyes being opened to this truth, read about it, and talk about it. Read about the death and resurrection and ascension of Jesus. Think about what these truths mean. The more you think about “the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe” the more your present life will be changed.

These, then, are the things for which Paul prayed concerning the church. An obvious response to seeing his prayer is to duplicate that prayer in your life. But don’t just stop there. Pray for the saints within your church. Pray that the eyes of their hearts might be opened to these truths. We must know the hope of our calling. It must become very real to us. We must value the church as God’s inheritance. She must become precious to us. And we need to understand the greatness of God’s power at work in our lives. We must see it as connected to the work God did in Jesus.

As we pray for these things, we will begin to see these things . . . and seeing them in small measure will give us desire to see them in greater measure . . . and this will cause us to pray with more fervency. Why not start now?

¹² Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (PNTC; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999), 152.

¹³ O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 142.

Week Three

EPHESIANS 2:1-10

WEEK THREE

Ephesians 2:1-10

DAY ONE

Read *Ephesians 2:1-10* through twice. The first time through these verses, simply read the text. Do not write any notes regarding the verses at this time. The second time through the verses, circle or underline key words or phrases and write down any questions or thoughts the verses leave you with in the margin. If the verses bring any related Scriptures to mind, please write them in the margin.

EPHESIANS 2:1-10

¹ *And you were dead in the trespasses and sins* ² *in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—* ³ *among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.* ⁴ *But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us,* ⁵ *even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—* ⁶ *and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,* ⁷ *so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.* ⁸ *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,* ⁹ *not a result of works, so that no one may boast.* ¹⁰ *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*

DAY TWO

Read *Ephesians 2:1-3*

1. How does Paul describe his readers in verses one through three?

2. Whom else does Paul include in the indictments he makes in verses one through three?

3. Using these verses as a basis for your answer, complete the following statement: “People sin because . . .”

4. Paul uses the phrase “children of wrath” in verse three. Whose wrath is Paul talking about? See *Ephesians 5:6*; *Colossians 3:5-6*

5. Why would Paul want to remind his readers of these truths? What good would it accomplish?

WEEK THREE

Ephesians
2:1-10

DAY THREE

Read *Ephesians 2:4-7*

6. How does verse four describe God? Why is this verse significant in this passage?

7. Compare those described in verses one through three with those described in verses four through six.

1-3

4-6

<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>

8. Are the events in verses five and six portrayed as events that will happen or events that did happen? Why is this significant?

9. What should change in the Christian's life as a result of these things? *Colossians 3:1-3*

WEEK THREE

Ephesians 2:1-10

10. Why has God done these things for the believer? *Ephesians 2:7*

DAY FOUR

Read *Ephesians 2:8-9*

11. Describe the salvation process. How is a person saved?

12. What part do a person's good works or actions play in salvation?

13. What is grace? *(If possible use a Bible dictionary in formulating your answer)*

14. What is faith? *(If possible use a Bible dictionary in formulating your answer)*

15. Write Ephesians 2:8-9 in the space below. If you have not already done so, memorize these verses.

16. What is the significance of verse nine? Why would God care about this? See also 1 Corinthians 1:26-31; Ephesians 1:6, 12, 14

DAY FIVE

Read *Ephesians 2:10*

17. Paul discusses works in verse nine and in verse ten—yet in very different ways. What is the difference between the works described in verse nine and the works described in verse ten?

18. What importance are good works to play in the life of the Christian?

Matthew 5:16

2 Corinthians 5:10

2 Corinthians 9:8

Galatians 5:6

Galatians 6:10

Colossians 1:10

Titus 3:8

WEEK THREE

Ephesians *2:1-10*

19. God has prepared good works beforehand, that we might walk in them. What does this mean? What confidence does this truth give you in regard to the good works God wants you to do?

20. Using Ephesians 2:1-10 as a starting point, write out a prayer, thanking God for the work he has done for you in your life in regard to your salvation. Be as specific as possible.

DAY SIX

Read the study notes for chapter 2:1-10.

21. Read the study notes and then complete the following sentence. This week the Holy Spirit has taught me . . .

EPHESIANS 2:1-10

WEEK THREE

Ephesians 2:1-10

Have you ever forgotten where you are? Most of us have probably experienced this unnerving feeling before. Perhaps you've been on a business trip and have woken up in the middle of the night in a hotel. Your eyes open and you see things you're not used to seeing. Things in the room are strange and strangely positioned. You hear noises you're not used to hearing. The smells are also strange. "Where am I?" Slowly, you begin to put the pieces together. "I'm not at home. I'm . . . I'm . . . in Ohio for the sales conference."

Less common, and certainly more disconcerting, is forgetting who you are. This sometimes happens to people after traumatic accidents or surgeries. They wake up and cannot remember their own identity. Family members look like strangers. Once familiar names and places lose all meaning.

While physical amnesia seems to be relatively rare, spiritual amnesia is quite common. We have all experienced it to one degree or another. We don't know exactly who we are. And we forget who we were. Maybe we lost sight of these things, and maybe we never knew them. In either case, we need someone to remind us of our identity. That is exactly what Paul does in Ephesians 2. He reminds the saints of who they were (before Christ) and of who they are (with Christ).

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. Ephesians 2:1-3

Paul begins by reminding the saints of who they were. They hadn't always been holy and righteous before God. They hadn't always been sealed with the Holy Spirit. Rather, at one time, they were "dead in the trespasses and sins in which [they] once walked". The fact that Paul's readers were dead in their sins does not mean that they were inactive. Like zombies, they had been walking in sin and trespasses—following the devil and the desires of their sin-saturated bodies and minds.

The idea of "walking" in trespasses and sins graphically illustrates the saints' former relationship to sin. They hadn't just sinned once or twice. Rather, sin marked their behavior. It's how they lived. It is what they did as a habit.

This isn't the last time we'll see the idea of walking in Ephesians. After introducing this metaphor in Ephesians 2:2, Paul uses the same idea in 2:10, 4:1, 4:17, 5:2, 5:8, and 5:15. How one walks—that is, how one lives and conducts oneself—is a major theme of this book.

While Paul is describing his reader's lives, his words shouldn't be limited to this small group of people in Ephesus and the surrounding areas, as if they were the worst derelicts in history. Instead, Paul says that "we all once lived" in this way. We all were carried along "in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath". Do you know this about yourself? Do you know that you were wicked, being led by the passions of your flesh? You weren't born with some sort of spiritual silver spoon in your mouth, doing God's will from infancy. Rather, you were born in sin and you walked in sin, doing your will and the devil's will from the very beginning.

The Bible is very clear that mankind, without Christ, is thoroughly wicked. Understanding this fact is essential if we are ever to understand the work that God has done in us and to thank him for it.

Consider the following verses:

Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned . . . Romans 5:12

. . . we have already charged that all, both Jew and Greeks, are under the power of sin, as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one." Romans 3:9-12

WEEK THREE

Ephesians 2:1-10

. . . *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God* . . . Romans 3:23

These verses describe who we are by nature. We don't learn to hate God and his ways. Rather, we're born that way. No one is surprised that a baby Rattlesnake is full of venom and strikes at those who harass it. No one is surprised that Rattlesnakes make unsuitable pets. Why? Because we know that all Rattlesnakes are poisonous. We know that it is in their nature to strike. We know that they cannot become suitable pets, no matter how much they are trained. In the same way, we should understand that humans are naturally filled with sin,¹ and it is our nature to oppose God and his commandments and to follow our own will and the devil. To think that we would ever be considered God's "glorious inheritance" is too much to believe. But that is exactly what we are.

God has done an amazing work within us. He has given us a position for which we are absolutely unqualified. A rat as the guest of honor at a dinner party is more fitting than a human in God's presence. But he hasn't just brought us into his presence. He has brought us to Christ's own throne! Read these verses carefully, for the truths held within them are stunning.

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus . . . Ephesians 2:4-6

In these verses, Paul outlines three events that have taken place in the life of every believer. The three actions are as follows: one, God "made us alive together with Christ"; two, God "raised us up with him"; and three, God "seated us with him in the heavenly places."² He took these actions, we read, because God is "rich in mercy," and "because of the great love with which he loved us". God's mercy and love, then, are showcased in these three events.

It is important to notice that these three events are not described in the future tense—that is, these are not actions that will one day take place in the life of the believer. Rather, these three events are in the past tense. If you are a believer, these are events that have already taken place in your life: God has already made you alive together with Christ, God has already raised you up with him, and he has already seated you with him.

It is also important to notice that the things that God has done for the believer were not done for the believer in isolation. Rather, they happened "with" Christ.³ This connection between Jesus and the believer is vividly portrayed by the three words Paul used in Ephesians 2:5-6 to describe these actions: *synezoo-poiē-sen* (he made us alive with him), *syne-geiren* (he raised us up with him), and *synekathisen* (he seated us with him). These three words appear to have been invented by Paul because available vocabulary simply was not able to describe the work God has done for the believers with Christ!

The apostle Paul . . . coined words from time to time. In Ephesians 2:5-6 there are three of them. . . . Since nothing like this had been known in the history of the world before Christ, it is not surprising that in Paul's day adequate words did not yet exist to describe what happened.⁴

But how can Paul speak of the believer's ascension with Christ as if it were already a reality? How can he speak of the believer's enthronement with Christ as if the believer were already seated with him? Obviously, the Ephesian Christians to whom Paul was writing were not, at the moment he wrote this letter, physically sitting with Christ on his throne in heaven. Believers reading these words today are in the same situation. The union Paul speaks of in Ephesians 2:5-6 is not, at least in a physical sense, reality. In what way, then, should these "with Christ" statements be understood?

1 This is an important concept to grasp. When Adam sinned, all sinned. See Romans 5:12.

2 These three "with Christ" statements are clearly connected to Paul's words in Ephesians 1:19-20. In these verses, Paul details the work God performed in Christ when he raised him from the dead. The work God performed in Christ is described in the following way: ". . . according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places".

3 Ephesians 2:5-7 is not the only passage in which Paul refers to the believer as being "with Christ." The "with Christ" theme may be seen in Colossians 2:12-14, Colossians 3:1-3, Galatians 2:19-20, and Romans 6:1-11. Clearly the Christian's participation with Christ in his death, resurrection, ascension, and enthronement at the right hand of God played a significant role in Paul's theology.

4 James Montgomery Boice, *Ephesians: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2007), 57-58.

One explanation is that Christians have been made alive with Christ, raised with him, and seated with him because we are legally considered to be “in him.” As Wayne Grudem says, the phrase “in Christ” means that “whatever Christ did as our representative, God counted it as being something we did, too.”⁵ Thus, in the same way that all humans were “in Adam” when he sinned and therefore sinned with him,⁶ all believers are “in Christ” and therefore God counted it as if we were with him in his death, resurrection, ascension, and enthronement.

However, while this “legal” view of our union with Christ is clearly true, it is not complete. Commentator James Montgomery Boice suggests that another way to describe the believer’s relationship with Christ “is as a vital or experiential union.”⁷ Your connection to Christ is far more than just legal. Based on Jesus’ words in John 14 and 15⁸ and Paul’s words in Colossians 3:1-4 and Romans 6:11, it is clear that the believer’s union with Christ is something that is to be experienced on a daily basis.

This is not to say that the legal aspect of our relationship is unimportant. Knowledge of your legal connection to Christ is vitally important. In fact, in order to experience Christ on a daily basis, the believer must understand, at least to some extent, the “legal” aspect of this union.

It is evident, by the frequency with which Paul used the phrase “in Christ”—a phrase probably based on Jesus’ teachings in passages like John 15—that Paul viewed believers as legally and experientially united with Christ. His writings are saturated with the thought that believers are “in Christ.” In fact, according to James Montgomery Boice, Paul used the phrases “‘in him,’ ‘in Christ’ or ‘in Christ Jesus’ . . . 164 times in his writings.”⁹ In Ephesians 1 alone, references to the believer being in Christ appear in verses 1, 3, 4, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13 (2x), and 20.

Given that the believer’s union with Christ is both legal and vital in its nature, one would expect that this truth would make a discernible impact on a believer’s life. Indeed, based on the Scriptures, the believer’s union with Christ should radically alter the believer’s life.

First, an understanding that the believer has died and been raised with Christ should result in personal victory over sin. In Romans 6:11, Paul tells the believers “you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus”. It is interesting to note that Paul does not, in this passage, urge believers to avoid sin because it is morally wrong. Sin should be avoided because the Christian has died with Christ and has been raised with him.

Second, an understanding that the believer has been raised with Christ and seated with him “in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 2:6) should transform the Christian’s thought patterns. In Colossians 3:1-2, Paul tells his readers that, “If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth”. Notice, the impetus behind the believer setting his mind on things above is the fact that he has been raised with Christ.

Third, an understanding that the believer has been seated with Christ should dramatically alter the believer’s relationship with “the rulers”, “authorities”, “cosmic powers”, and “the spiritual forces of evil” (Ephesians 6:12) against whom he is wrestling. Christ is seated—and the believer is with him—“far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named” (Ephesians 1:21). The Christian’s awareness that he has been seated with Christ in this preeminent place should dramatically change the Christian’s view of the battle in which he is involved. Wayne Grudem describes the believer’s position well.

. . . because of our union with Christ in his ascension, we are able to share now (in part) in Christ’s authority over the universe, and we will later share in it more fully. This is what Paul points to when he says that God “raised us up with him, and made us *sit with him in the heavenly places* in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:6). We are not physically present in heaven, of course, for we remain here on earth at the present time. But if Christ’s session at God’s right hand refers to his reception of authority, then the fact that God has made us sit with Christ means that we share in some measure in the authority that Christ has¹⁰

5 Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1994), 841.

6 See Romans 5:12.

7 Boice, *Ephesians*, 60.

8 See also Matthew 26:26-28, John 4:1-14, 6:35, 17:22-23.

9 Boice, *Ephesians*, 58.

10 Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 619-620.

WEEK THREE

Ephesians 2:1-10

The commands to be bold and courageous are more easily followed when one knows—beyond a shadow of a doubt—that he is in a position of authority.

Unfortunately, these truths are rarely discussed in today's confessing church.¹¹ It seems that the church today is more focused on its future union with Christ than its current union with him. This lack of knowledge leads to many problems. Among them:

(1) *Ongoing problems with sin.* How can a believer “consider [himself] dead to sin and alive to God” (Romans 6:11) if he doesn't know that these facts are true?

(2) *Muted impact of many biblical passages.* For instance, in Hebrews 12:22-24, the author refers to believers as already having come to “the heavenly Jerusalem” (Hebrews 12:22). How can the believer understand the author's meaning here if he does not know that he has already been raised to the heavenly places with Christ? Unfortunately, heaven, for most Christians, is entirely something of the future.^{12, 13}

(3) *Incorrect understanding of many biblical passages.* How can a Christian who does not understand these truths possibly understand the meaning or ramifications of Paul's teachings in Romans 6, Ephesians 2, Galatians 2, and Colossians 2 and 3?

(4) *Lack of clarity regarding this life.* The Christian who does not understand his current position with Christ will wait for his new life to begin, rather than living the resurrected life now. Paul did not do this. He recognized his union with Christ and understood that Christ lived in him (see Galatians 2:19-20). The believer who does not see himself as a current citizen of heaven will be more likely to think of himself as a citizen of earth and will think from an earthly perspective.

(5) *Inability to stand against the devil.* To live the victorious life, the Christian must understand that he is seated with Christ “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come” (Ephesians 1:21).

There are, of course, more negative outcomes that could be presented. However, this short list is enough to demonstrate the problems associated with a lack of teaching regarding the believer's union with Christ.

Why has God done all this? Why has he been so kind to us? Surely we must ask this question. The answer to this question is found, in part, in verse four, where we find God's mercy and love moving him to do these things.

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us . . .
Ephesians 2:4

But is that all? Did he simply do these things because of these character traits? The answer is no. He did these things, we learn in verse seven, “so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus”. God is interested in displaying his greatness. He wants us to see, for all eternity, the infinite measure of his grace. But he doesn't just want us to see his grace and to admire it in the same way that we might admire a painting at an art museum. Rather, he wants us to see his grace and to know it and to admire it and to love it from within, as ones who have experienced his grace firsthand. He wants us to know the inner-workings of this grace—that we received it “in Christ”. He wants us to know—through experience—that we have no grace outside of Christ.

Paul doesn't define grace here. He demonstrates it. He shows his readers that God's grace-filled fingerprints cover their entire existence. He wants them to revel in the lavishness with which God's goodness has been poured out upon them. Your entire salvation, as we read below, is based on grace.

11 There are indications that the early church had at least some understanding of these truths. Based on Paul's words to the church in Rome, Paul expected the Romans, whom he had never visited, to know certain facts about their union with Christ. He writes, “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?” (Romans 6:3). The very way he phrased his question indicates that he expected them to know this truth. In 2 Timothy, Paul refers to a “trustworthy saying” (probably an early hymn or creedal statement) regarding the believer's union with Christ: “If we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him” (2 Timothy 2:11-12). The fact that the church had a hymn or creedal statement regarding the believer's union with Christ in his death demonstrates that this was a subject that was known and discussed (at least to some extent) in the church.

12 See Philippians 3:20.

13 The Christian who understands his history with Christ will understand passages like Psalm 110:1, which refers to the Lord being seated at the right hand of the “LORD,” in a far different (and more accurate) light than a Christian who does not understand his position with Christ.

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. Ephesians 2:8-9

Here, Paul emphasizes that grace is the cause of our salvation. In other words, as Daniel Wallace points out, our salvation is “on the basis of grace.”¹⁴ But how is this salvation, which exists on the basis of grace, received? We receive it “through faith”. Faith “expresses the means”¹⁵ by which we attain salvation.

Lest anyone think that they deserve this salvation, Paul emphasizes that “this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God”. Much discussion has centered on the word “this” here. To what does “this” refer? Is Paul saying that grace is not our own doing and that it is the gift of God? Or is he saying that faith is not our own doing and that it is the gift of God?

For grammatical reasons, it appears that “this” refers to neither grace nor faith. In the Greek, demonstrative pronouns (“this,” “that,” “these,” or “those”) almost always follow the gender established by their antecedent (the thing to which the demonstrative refers). That is, if the antecedent is feminine, the demonstrative pronoun will also be feminine. In verse eight, both grace and faith are feminine. However, “this” is not feminine. Rather, it is neuter. This makes it highly unlikely that “this” refers back to either grace or faith. To what, then, does “this” refer? Many scholars believe “this” may be referring “to the concept of a grace-by-faith salvation.”¹⁶ That is, the entire grace-through-faith salvation package is God’s gift. None of it is attained by works.¹⁷

Since our entire salvation is God’s gift, we are left with no grounds for praising ourselves. God purposely worked our salvation so that this would be the case. He left no room for boasting—except boasting in him. By divine intention, all attention is to be focussed on God. These things have been done by him “to the praise of his glorious grace” (Ephesians 1:6). God is intensely jealous for the praise of his name.

Verse ten reemphasizes verses eight and nine.

For we are his workmanship . . . Ephesians 2:10a

We are not Christians by virtue of our own labors. We have not saved ourselves. There is no innate goodness within us that somehow earned God’s notice, compelling him to deliver us. Rather, “we are his workmanship”. From start to finish, God has done the work within us.

But verse ten does more than rephrase verses eight and nine. It also adds in a new, very important, aspect of our salvation.

. . . created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. Ephesians 2:10b

We have been created for good works. While your salvation is “not a result of works”, it is to result in good works. Good works are to be a normal part of your life now that you have been saved. Jesus constantly emphasized the need to do good works.

“In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” Matthew 5:16

These good works have nothing to do with earning your salvation. They have everything, however, to do with your salvation itself. Good works demonstrate your salvation to the world. They show the greatness of God in real ways. These good works demonstrate his love, compassion, mercy, kindness, etc., etc., etc.

14 Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 168.

15 Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 168.

16 Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 335.

17 It is also possible that the word “this” is not tied to a noun but is functioning in an adverbial sense here. The meaning in this case would be something like “and at that, and especially.” (Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 335.) As Wallace goes on to say, “If this is the force in Eph 2:8, the text means ‘for by grace you are saved through faith, and [you are saved] especially not by your own doing; it is the gift of God.’”

WEEK THREE

Ephesians **2:1-10**

Incredibly, Paul states that these good works have been “prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them”. This statement is worthy of much contemplation. In chapter one, we saw that God “chose us in him before the foundation of the world” (Ephesians 1:4). Here we learn that he has prepared good works beforehand “that we should walk in them”. When confronted with statements like these, we must ask ourselves, “What kind of Being are you, O God? What is the extent of your power and greatness?”

However great we might think God to be, we must know that he is far greater. He has done more than we know. His hands are involved in far more than we can imagine. His fingers have shaped the ages. Should it surprise us, then, that his fingers have also been shaping events in our lives? God’s fingerprints covering all aspects of our lives should give us great confidence for the days ahead.

Do you see the road we have traveled in these ten verses? Paul begins by reminding us of the ungodly manner in which we once walked. He ends by describing the godly manner in which we now walk. And in-between all this walking? Well, that’s the story of God’s grace.

Week Four

EPHESIANS 2:11-22

WEEK FOUR

Ephesians 2:11-22

DAY ONE

Read *Ephesians 2:11-22* through twice. The first time through these verses, simply read the text. Do not write any notes regarding the verses at this time. The second time through the verses, circle or underline key words or phrases and write down any questions or thoughts the verses leave you with in the margin. If the verses bring any related Scriptures to mind, please write them in the margin.

EPHESIANS 2:11-22

¹¹Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—¹²remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility ¹⁵by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, ¹⁶and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. ¹⁷And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, ²¹in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. ²²In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

DAY TWO

Read *Ephesians 2:11-12*

1. Why does Paul refer to his Gentile readers as “the uncircumcision” in verse 11? What were the Jews saying when they called the Gentiles this? See *Genesis 17:1-14*

2. How did David refer to Goliath in 1 Samuel 17:26 and 36? What was he saying when he called Goliath by this name?

3. What, specifically, does Paul want his Gentile readers to remember?

4. What practical value would there be in remembering these things?

5. Paul says that the Gentiles were “strangers to the covenants of promise”. These covenants were strong agreements made between God and the Israelites. Outlined below are significant covenants from which the Gentiles were separated. For each verse, describe the covenant—specifically, what was promised and to whom it was promised.

Genesis 12:1-3

Genesis 15:7-21

Genesis 17:1-21

Genesis 26:1-5

Genesis 28:13-15

Exodus 24:1-8

2 Sam 7:1-17

6. Based on Ephesians 2:11-12, summarize in your own words the condition of those Gentiles who are without Christ.

DAY THREE

Read *Ephesians 2:13-17*

7. Verse 13 describes a great change that has taken place in the Gentiles. What is this change and how was it brought about?

8. Verses 14-17 concern the relationship between Jews and Gentiles. How has this relationship changed because of Jesus’ death and resurrection?

WEEK FOUR

Ephesians 2:11-22

9. Paul refers to “the dividing wall of hostility” that stood between Jews and Gentiles. What was this wall? How was it dealt with?

10. While Jesus’ death changed the relationship between believing Jews and believing Gentiles, it took some time for the believing Jews to come to an understanding of this truth. How did the Jews in the early church come to an awareness of this truth?

Acts 10:1-48

Acts 11:1-18

Acts 15:1-21

11. Why do you think it was so hard for the first Christians to acknowledge that God could accept the Gentiles?

DAY FOUR

Read *Ephesians 2:18*

12. Verse 18 includes a reference to all three members of the Trinity. Based on this verse, describe the roles filled by the different members of the Trinity.

Jesus

Father

Holy Spirit

13. John 14:6 doesn't mention the Holy Spirit, but it is very similar to Ephesians 2:18. Outline the roles filled by Jesus and by the Father as described in this verse.

Jesus

Father

14. How does the Holy Spirit help the believer relate to the Father? *Romans 8:14-17*

15. Is there any other way to access the Father other than the way outlined in these verses?
Ephesians 2:18, John 14:6

16. What do you think Paul means by his use of the phrase "in one Spirit"?

DAY FIVE

Read *Ephesians 2:19-21*

17. How does Paul describe the Gentiles in verses 19-21?

18. If you were a Jewish Christian living in or around Ephesus during the first century, do you think you would have had a hard time accepting Paul's statements here? Why or why not?

WEEK FOUR

Ephesians 2:11-22

19. Do you think it would be harder for a believing Jew in Jerusalem to accept these truths than for a believing Jew in Ephesus? Why or why not?

20. What importance do the apostles and prophets play in the structure that God is building?

21. Practically speaking, how do you think we should demonstrate our understanding of this truth?

22. How is Jesus described in these verses? What does Paul mean by this description?

23. Why is this a fitting description of Jesus' work? *See also 1 Peter 2:4-8*

24. We are "being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit". What does this say about the importance of the church?

25. Would others say that you live as if this were true?

DAY SIX

Read the study notes for chapter 2:11-22.

26. Read the study notes and then complete the following sentence. This week the Holy Spirit has taught me . . .

WEEK FOUR

Ephesians 2:11-22

EPHESIANS 2:11-22

I would like you to read the following passage from Joshua. It recounts Yahweh's words to Joshua before Joshua led the Israelites across the Jordan and into the Promised Land. Most likely, you've read this story before. But, for reasons that will soon be apparent, I would like you to read it again.

After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, "Moses my servant is dead. Now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the people of Israel. Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, just as I promised to Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun shall be your territory. No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you. Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them. Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go." Joshua 1:1-9

If you are like me, you probably read this story as if it were the story of your history. I read this story from the perspective that it is the story of my God promising to help one of my heroes wipe out the bad guys and take the land that has been promised to them.

There's one problem with this perspective. I am not Jewish. I would guess that most of you are not Jewish, either. As Gentiles, we must realize that we would have been, at the time this story was written, the bad guys. We would have been, if we lived in that part of the world, a part of the nations that were to be wiped out. God was promising to help Joshua fight against us. How does that make you feel? God had a special covenant with Israel. But if you're a Gentile, you must realize that you were not a part of that covenant. He was not your God. You were separate from Israel. You were part of the nations that were to be crushed by the Israelites. This was not a story of victory. Rather, it was story of great defeat.

WEEK FOUR

Ephesians 2:11-22

With this perspective in mind, read the following story. As with our first example, this is taken from the book of Joshua. It is a record of the conversation between Rahab the prostitute and the Israeli spies who were hiding on her roof.

Before the men lay down, she came up to them on the roof and said to the men, “I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you devoted to destruction. And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man because of you, for the LORD your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath. Now then, please swear to me by the LORD that, as I have dealt kindly with you, you also will deal kindly with my father’s house, and give me a sure sign that you will save alive my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and deliver our lives from death.” And the men said to her, “Our life for yours even to death! If you do not tell this business of ours, then when the LORD gives us the land we will deal kindly and faithfully with you.” Joshua 2:8-14

Can you identify with the terror of the inhabitants of Jericho? They know that Yahweh, the Almighty God, is for Israel and is against them. They know that great nations have already been wiped out by Yahweh, and they know that they are next. Rahab begs for mercy from the spies, knowing that, unless they show her favor, her entire family will soon be destroyed by Yahweh.

If you are not Jewish, you must understand that, if you were a character in this story, you would have been one of the residents of Jericho, not one of the Israelites. You would have been the attacked. Not the attacker. You would have heard the stories about the Red Sea and about the kings of the Amorites, and these stories, instead of encouraging you, would have filled you with terror. More terrifying still would be the knowledge that the people of Yahweh had set their sights on destroying you and all that you hold dear.

While I am not encouraging you to adopt this perspective every time you read the Old Testament, I think it is helpful, at least on occasion, to read your Old Testament from this vantage point. This is precisely the perspective Paul encourages his readers to take.

Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. Ephesians 2:11-12

What a disastrous position in which to be found! Paul recounts the Gentile’s pitiful state in rapid succession: “separated from Christ”, “alienated from the commonwealth of Israel”, “strangers to the covenants of promise”, “having no hope”, and “without God in the world”.

Why would Paul encourage the Gentiles (referred to as “the uncircumcision” here) to think about the awful condition from which they had been rescued? Can anything good come from thinking about such things? It absolutely can. Those of us who are Gentiles need to know—and to think about—about our former state, because knowledge of this truth leads to greater understanding of the work that Jesus has done. This leads to greater thankfulness, greater love of Christ, and greater glory to God.

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one

new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near.
Ephesians 2:13-17

Those of us who are Gentiles have been “brought near” because of Jesus’ death. We have been brought near not only to God but also to the believing Jews (so near, in fact, that when you read the history of the Jews in the Old Testament, you probably read it as your history!). This union between Jews and Gentiles is no small miracle. A great wall separated Jews and Gentiles. Paul refers to this wall as “the dividing wall of hostility”. The hostility existing between Jews and Gentiles was evidenced by a literal wall that stood in the temple in Jerusalem.

In Jerusalem, between the temple proper and the Court of the Gentiles, there was a stone wall on which there was an inscription in Greek and Latin ‘which forbade any foreigner to go in, under pain of death’. It is strangely significant that Paul was finally arrested and condemned by the Jews in Jerusalem on the basis of a false accusation that he took an Ephesian, Trophimus, beyond this barrier (Acts xxi. 29f.).¹

The dividing wall to which Paul refers in this passage was not the wall in the temple. It was “the law of commandments expressed in ordinances”, that is, “the Mosaic law itself with its detailed holiness code.”² The Jews kept the law (or so they thought). They were fastidious about ceremonial purity, diet, fasting, the keeping of Sabbath days, etc., etc., etc. The Gentiles, however, did not keep—or attempt to keep—the Mosaic law. Because of this, they were, in the minds of the Jews, unclean. So unclean, in fact, that it was, according to the apostle Peter, unlawful for a Jew to “associate with or to visit anyone of another nation” (Acts 10:28).

This is the hostility that was broken down “in his flesh”—that is, in the body of Jesus. By his death, Jesus *nullified* the law (this is perhaps preferable to saying that he *abolished* the law), thus opening the door to Jews and Gentiles being able to fellowship together without the Mosaic law standing as a wall between them. A new law—the law of Christ—now joined them together. It is significant that the one writing this epistle to the Gentiles was a Jew. As a Jew, Paul would have had to come to terms with this truth himself, for at one time he, too, would have hated the Gentiles.

No longer was there to be Jew and Gentile, divided by walls related to one’s ancestry or to one’s adherence to a set of external laws. Rather, Jesus created “in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace”. This “one new man” was neither Jew nor Gentile. He was a brand new creation. Nothing like him had ever existed before. This new creation was made when Jesus died, thus “killing the hostility” between Jews and Gentiles. This action allowed both groups to come near to God (the Jews were not as close to God as they might have supposed—both groups needed a miracle in order to have access to the Father).

Verse 18 summarizes Paul’s words. Here he states that both Jews and Gentiles must follow the same path to the Father.

For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. Ephesians 2:18

At first glance, this verse seems to repeat the idea Paul presents in verse 16. Peter O’Brien has neatly outlined the parallels as follows:

Verse 16

‘[that] he might reconcile to God’
‘them both’
‘in one body’
‘through the cross’

Verse 18

‘we have access to the Father’
‘we both’
‘in one Spirit’
‘through him’.³

1 Foulkes, *The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians*, 81-82.

2 O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 196.

3 O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 208.

WEEK FOUR

Ephesians 2:11-22

But this verse does more than just parrot verse 16. While verse 16 emphasizes our reconciliation to God, verse 18 emphasizes our ongoing access to the Father. Our reconciliation (verse 16) happened “in one body” (i.e., Christ). Our ongoing access (verse 18) happens “in one Spirit” (i.e., the Holy Spirit).⁴

As Paul repeatedly uses the words ‘in Christ’ in this Epistle, so a number of times he says ‘in the Spirit’, to emphasize that for the new life of the Christian ‘the Spirit is, as it were, the surrounding, sustaining power’ (Westcott).⁵

What a tremendous change has taken place here! Paul started this section by describing the pitiful condition of the Gentile apart from Christ. He ends this section by describing the glorious position of the Gentile in Christ.

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. Ephesians 2:19-22

Describing the Christian’s new position is no easy task. Paul is forced to use three different “metaphor-like” phrases here. He refers to the Gentiles as members of a country, members of God’s house, and as a growing temple. I say “metaphor-like” phrases because these are not actually metaphors. Paul is not employing figures of speech here to help explain what the Christian life is like (i.e., “my grandpa is a teddy bear”). Rather, all these things are actually true. We truly are “fellow citizens with the saints”. We have been brought into God’s kingdom, with all the rights and privileges of full-citizens. We truly are “members of the household of God”. We are God’s children, having been adopted into his family. We are co-heirs with Christ! And we truly are— together with other Christians—“being built together into a dwelling place for God” by the Spirit. We may properly be called the temple of the Lord. God dwells within us. This is true individually and it is true corporately.

No dividing wall of hostility may be found within this temple. How could such a wall exist in this temple? Jesus is the cornerstone upon which this temple is built. The foundation is the apostles and prophets (this is why the teaching of the apostles and prophets must be foundational for us today). Jesus has built upon this foundation with stones drawn from near (Jews) and far (Gentiles). While these stones may have been pulled from different quarries, they have been fashioned by the same Worker and in the same way. By his work he made them fit for the temple of God. The temple’s walls run straight and true because they align with him.

What a miracle! God has pulled the Gentiles off of the trashheap of history and transformed them into “fellow citizens”, “members of the household of God”, and “a holy temple in the Lord”! The change is so great, in fact, that now I may read the Old Testament as if it were my story and as if it were about my people and about my God . . . for that is actually what it is.

⁴ Ephesians 4:4 refers to “one body” and “one Spirit”.

⁵ Foulkes, *The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians*, 85.

Week Five

EPHESIANS 3

WEEK FIVE

Ephesians 3

DAY ONE

Read *Ephesians 3* through twice. The first time through these verses, simply read the text. Do not write any notes regarding the verses at this time. The second time through the verses, circle or underline key words or phrases and write down any questions or thoughts the verses leave you with in the margin. If the verses bring any related Scriptures to mind, please write them in the margin.

EPHESIANS 3

¹ For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles—
² assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, ³ how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. ⁴ When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁵ which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. ⁶ This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

⁷ Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. ⁸ To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, ⁹ and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, ¹⁰ so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. ¹¹ This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, ¹² in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him. ¹³ So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.

¹⁴ For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, ¹⁶ that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

²⁰ Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

DAY TWO

Read *Ephesians 3:1-6*

1. Paul begins verse one by describing himself as a prisoner. However, earlier in the letter, he described Christ as victorious (Ephesians 1:20-23) and the believer as seated with Christ in the heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6). If Christ is victorious and the believer is seated with Christ (thus sharing in his victory), why is Paul living as a prisoner?

2. What is the “mystery” that was made known to Paul?

3. How did Paul learn about this mystery?

4. The “sons of men in other generations” were not aware of this mystery. Why do you think this mystery was kept hidden until the time of Paul?

5. What, if anything, does this tell you about the way God works in the world?

DAY THREE

Read *Ephesians 3:7-13*

6. How did Paul become a minister of the gospel?

7. What, if anything, does this tell you about the way God works in the world?

8. How does Paul describe himself in verse 8?

9. Paul was called to complete two different tasks, what were they? *Ephesians 3:8-9*

10. What was the successful completion of these tasks to accomplish? *Ephesians 3:10*

WEEK FIVE

Ephesians 3

11. Verse 11 reads, “this was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord”. Review verses seven through ten carefully. What, specifically, was God’s eternal purpose?

12. What does Christ’s work give to the one who believes? *Ephesians 3:11-12*

13. How does Paul describe his sufferings in verse 13 (remember, he was writing this in prison)? Based on verses seven through 13, why is he justified in describing them in this way?

DAY FOUR

Read *Ephesians 3:14-19*

14. Verses 14 through 19 describe a prayer that Paul prays for the saints. To whom is the prayer directed? How does Paul describe this person in the prayer?

15. What, exactly, does Paul want to see happen as a result of this prayer?

16. What tasks does Paul ascribe to the various members of the Trinity in these verses?

Father

Holy Spirit

Christ

17. Paul prays that the saints may be able to comprehend “the breadth and length and height and depth” but he doesn’t explain to what these dimensions refer. To what do you think these dimensions are connected?

18. What needs to happen in a saint’s life if he or she is to “be filled with all the fullness of God”?
See also 2 Peter 1:3-11

19. What are a few things that might indicate whether a saint is or is not “filled with all the fullness of God”?

DAY FIVE

Read *Ephesians 3:20-21*

20. Verses 20 and 21 are a doxology—“A command to praise God”.¹ Why do you think Paul inserted a doxology at this point in the letter?

21. How does Paul describe God the Father in this doxology?

22. How, specifically, is God the Father to be praised?

¹ Leland Ryken and Philip Graham Ryken (gen. eds.), *The Literary Study Bible: ESV* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2007), 1887.

WEEK FIVE

Ephesians 3

23. What do these verses tell you about the eternal importance of Jesus and of the church?

Jesus

The Church

24. Why is glory to be directed to God the Father if the work of our salvation has been done through Jesus? *See also John 3:16*

DAY SIX

Read the study notes for chapter 3.

25. Read the study notes and then complete the following sentence. This week the Holy Spirit has taught me . . .

EPHESIANS 3

Ephesians three begins with an incomplete statement. Paul writes a few words and then, realizing that these few words require some explaining, stops before getting to his main point. The dash appearing at the end of verse one highlights the fact that Paul has not completed his sentence. Here is the incomplete statement.

*For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles—
Ephesians 3:1*

Paul eventually does complete his statement. He does so in verse 14. For this reason, before we consider verses two through 13, it is worth turning to verse 14. Notice that this verse begins in the same way as verse one, albeit without the dash. Paul completes his thoughts here.

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father . . . Ephesians 3:14

Based on this verse, it is evident that Paul's intent in verse one was to tell the Ephesians how he prays for them. Why did he cut himself mid-sentence? The answer may be found by examining the content of verses two through 13—they are all related to Paul's condition as a "a prisoner for Christ Jesus".

It is important that Paul takes this digression (if that's what it should be called), because, to this point in Ephesians, he has discussed the victory of Christ and the victory of the saints. He has boldly claimed that Christ is "far above all rule and authority and power and dominion" (Ephesians 1:21). He has emphasized that the saints have been raised with Christ and are seated with him.² If these things are true, why is Paul a prisoner? Doesn't Paul's imprisonment show weakness? Doesn't it prove that Christ is not above all rule and authority?

Verses one and 13 bracket this section. In verse one, Paul starts by talking about himself as God's prisoner. This leads him to explain to the Gentiles why he is a prisoner. In verse 13, Paul concludes his explanation by telling the Gentiles not to lose heart on account of his sufferings as if things were going badly. They're going according to God's eternal plan. Far from his imprisonment showing God's defeat, it shows his power. He is using the weak (those imprisoned) to shame the strong.

Paul is not looking for pity. Imprisonment for him does not equal lack of productivity. Nor does it mean failure. Indeed, based on Jesus' words to Paul while he was imprisoned in Jerusalem, Paul's imprisonment in Rome was all a part of God's plan.

The following night the Lord stood by him and said, "Take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome."

Acts 23:11

Suffering does not disprove God's victory. Rather, it highlights it—showcasing God's strength in the midst of human weakness. Suffering accomplishes God's purposes. While Paul may not have liked his sufferings, he was able to rejoice in them, knowing that he was suffering these things for the sake of the church.

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church.

Colossians 1:24

Far from being just another prisoner, biding his time until he was released, Paul emphasizes that he was fulfilling a most important task given to him by God.

. . . assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. Ephesians 3:2-3

God had given Paul "stewardship" of a particular aspect of his grace. He had done this for the benefit of the church. Paul's calls the grace of which he was a steward "the mystery". The word "mystery" is not used to refer to something that is "mysterious" or that needs to be searched out. It does not refer to something that is confusing. Rather, as may be seen in verses four and five, it refers to something that was previously known only by God but now has been made known.

When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. Ephesians 3:4-5

In the New Testament, the word mystery refers to various aspects of Christ's work. Here, Paul has a particular aspect of Christ's work in mind. What is this mystery?

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

² See Ephesians 2:6.

WEEK FIVE

Ephesians 3

Earlier generations of saints (almost all of whom were Jewish) could not have imagined God's plan regarding the Gentiles. They couldn't have figured out this mystery. It was hidden in the counsels of God. For whatever reason, God did not reveal this mystery until after Christ's death and resurrection. But at the right time, God revealed this mystery to the apostles and prophets. Paul was one of the apostles—the primary one—chosen for this task.

Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ . . . Ephesians 3:7-8

Paul was given God's divine ability so that he might "preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ". This was a great privilege. Paul knew that he didn't deserve this privilege. Indeed, he called himself here "the very least of all the saints". But he had been given the task and he was willing to work "harder than any of them" (1 Corinthians 15:10) in order to fulfill the task.

Fulfilling this task involved a measure of suffering. This was no surprise to Paul. The Lord Jesus himself, when speaking to Ananias, had made it very clear that Paul would suffer greatly as he fulfilled the task he had been given.

But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." Acts 9:15-16

But Paul didn't dwell on his sufferings. He saw them as a necessary part of fulfilling his task. He knew that his work would make a tremendous impact. It would impact the church. Beyond this, it would impact "the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places".

. . . and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. Ephesians 3:9-10

Once again, we see that God is interested in the display of his glory. In this case, he is interested in making his "manifold" (i.e., many-sided) wisdom known to "the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places". Clearly, there are things the angels do not know.³ But, in this passage in Ephesians, is Paul referring to good or evil heavenly beings? He doesn't answer that question, however, based on his use of these titles in Ephesians 6:12, it seems that he would primarily be referring to evil angelic beings. This begs the question, why does God care if the evil rulers and authorities see his wisdom? After all, they're not being saved. What possible value is there in displaying God's wisdom to these depraved creatures—creatures who will not change and will never grow to love God and to enjoy his attributes?

It matters because God's greatness demands display. The greatness of Christ must be brought to light—whether he is enjoyed and appreciated or loathed and feared. God could have displayed his wisdom to these "rulers and authorities" in many different ways. But he chose to show it through the church. He has brought us into the glorious process of displaying Christ's splendor! The church's existence is a demonstration that the evil powers have been defeated. The church's unity is a demonstration of Christ's work. The church is no afterthought in God's plan. Rather, it has always been God's purpose to use the church for the display of his wisdom.

This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him. Ephesians 3:11-12

3 See 1 Peter 1:10-12.

Because of Christ's work—a work that has eternally been purposed by God—"we have boldness and access with confidence". Remember, Paul writes these words as a prisoner. While Paul may appear to be confined, he asserts that he has access to the very presence of God. His imprisonment hasn't, in any way, limited him. The rulers and authorities in the heavenly places have not hindered his boldness and access; neither have the rulers and authorities on earth.

This "boldness and access with confidence" is, as it is rendered in the ESV and other translations,⁴ "through our faith in him". This is certainly one way to translate this phrase and it may be the correct translation. However, many scholars translate the phrase "through his faithfulness". If this is correct, Paul is focusing attention not on what we do but on what Christ has done. His faithfulness to the Father is the reason we have "boldness and access with confidence". Thus, our boldness to approach the Father rests not on our faith but on the faithfulness of Christ. In his excellent commentary on Ephesians, Peter T. O'Brien states, "the concluding words 'through his [sc., Christ's] faithfulness' focus on his obedience to the Father's will as the means by which this marvellous privilege of coming to the throne of grace is provided."⁵

In verse 13, Paul neatly summarizes his 12 verse explanation regarding his imprisonment.

So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.
Ephesians 3:13

Paul's sufferings are not indications that the gospel is untrue or that Jesus is weak. The saints should not "lose heart" because Paul is imprisoned. Rather, they should know that his imprisonment is part of the process of making the mystery of Christ known to them. His sufferings are "the price to be paid for the blessing that has come to the Gentiles."⁶

Now that he has explained the purpose behind his imprisonment, Paul completes the thought he began in Ephesians 3:1. This is a beautiful and important passage of Scripture. It constitutes, as we have seen several times in this book, one long sentence in Greek. I would suggest you read this section slowly and, before proceeding to my comments about these verses, read it again.

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Ephesians 3:14-19

The marvelous truths Paul has been presenting to this point have moved Paul to pray for the saints in and around Ephesus. His prayer is directed to the Father "from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named".⁷ Before we look at the content of the prayer, let's look at the goal. The goal of his prayer is that the saints "may be filled with all the fullness of God". This prayer goes far beyond the typical prayers we pray for one another. This is a prayer that the saints would be utterly filled with God himself—his life and love and power and presence. This is a prayer that the saints would know and experience and enjoy and reflect and live in God's fullness.

What a daring request! Can a request like this even be answered? Can a Christian "be filled with all the fullness of God"? By experience, most Christians would say, "No." Or, perhaps more emphatically, "NO!" But, based on this prayer, Paul believed it was possible.

Would you like to "filled with all the fullness of God"? Would you like to know him in this manner? If your answer is, "Yes" (or, more appropriately, "YES!"), let's proceed through this prayer, believing that God will grant that we might receive this fullness within ourselves.

4 See, for instance, the NIV, NKJV, NASB, and HCSB.

5 O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 249.

6 A. Skevington Wood, *Ephesians* (EBC 11; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1978), 49.

7 Notice, Paul's understanding of God the Father's preeminence is so great, he recognizes that all human families are a reflection (however faint) of God.

WEEK FIVE

Ephesians 3

Paul prays that the Father would strengthen the saints with power through the Spirit in the “inner being”. This phrase is connected to the phrase which immediately follows (“Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith”). In fact, many commentators see the two phrases as parallel, with the second phrase (“Christ may dwell . . .”) further explaining the first phrase (“strengthened with power . . .”). In other words, the way in which we are “strengthened with power through his Spirit” is by Christ dwelling in our hearts.

At first sight it seems strange for Paul to pray that Christ may dwell in the hearts of believers. Did he not already live within them? In answer, it is noted that the focus of this request is not on the initial indwelling of Christ but on his continual presence. The verb used in this prayer is a strong one, signifying a permanent indwelling rather than some temporary abode.⁸

Paul is praying that there would be a deep and abiding fellowship between the believer and Christ. “If Christ has taken up residence in our hearts, he is at the centre of our lives and exercises his rule over all that we are and do.”⁹ How does this indwelling happen? It is “through faith”. The believer’s vibrant trust in Christ—trust in who he is and what he has done and what he is currently doing—is critical to maintaining this deep and abiding fellowship. When this happens—when Christ abides in us—we find that we are no longer the same. With Christ in our hearts, we are rooted and grounded in love.

We are rooted in love so that we “may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge”. Interestingly, Paul doesn’t explain the object of which the saints are to learn the breadth and length and height and depth. To what, exactly, is he referring? It seems, based on the following phrase (“to know the love of Christ”), that Paul is referring to Christ’s love. In other words, Christ dwells within us, rooting and grounding us in love, so that we might be able to understand the dimensions of his love! Notice—you know this love not in the same way that you would know of an external thing. You know it as one who has and is experiencing it because you have been rooted and grounded in it. You have tasted it and seen it and savored it and loved it and this enables you to comprehend it and to know it. When we know God’s love we are “filled with all the fullness of God”.

Obviously, Paul is not talking about the kind of knowledge that may be attained by study (although study is certainly important). Christ’s love “surpasses knowledge”. Paul is talking about experiential knowledge: the Spirit empowering you and Christ indwelling you. Is this what you want in your life? Don’t you want to know—from the inside—the dimensions of Christ’s love? If this stirs your heart, pray this prayer for yourself. Pray this pray for your church.

As you receive the answer to this prayer, you will, like Paul, begin to praise God.

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen. Ephesians 3:20-21

Paul’s prayer for the church is not uttered from the lips of an impassionate observer. It flows from the heart of one who has been filled with all the fullness of God. He comprehends the dimensions of Christ’s love. His deep understanding of the person of Christ is evidenced by the praise he offers to God. If he didn’t praise, it would be proof that he didn’t understand. The same may be said of us.

⁸ O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 258-259.

⁹ O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 259.

Week Six

EPHESIANS 4:1-16

WEEK SIX

Ephesians 4:1-16

DAY ONE

Read *Ephesians 4:1-16* through twice. The first time through these verses, simply read the text. Do not write any notes regarding the verses at this time. The second time through the verses, circle or underline key words or phrases and write down any questions or thoughts the verses leave you with in the margin. If the verses bring any related Scriptures to mind, please write them in the margin.

EPHESIANS 4:1-16

¹ I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³ eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. ⁷ But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. ⁸ Therefore it says,

“When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.”

⁹ (In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? ¹⁰ He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) ¹¹ And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, ¹⁴ so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. ¹⁵ Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

DAY TWO

Read *Ephesians 4:1-6*

1. The first three chapters of Ephesians are primarily theological. The last three are more practical. How would the reader know, based on verse one alone, that Paul was making a major transition here?

2. What does Paul urge the saints to do in verse one?

3. What similarity do you find between verse one and Ephesians 4:17, 5:2, 5:8, and 5:15?

4. What does the repeated use of this particular word tell you about Paul’s understanding of the impact the gospel should make in a person’s life?

5. What do you think Paul means by the phrase “the calling to which you have been called”?

6. Verses two and three explain how verse one is to take place. How, exactly, are Christians to “walk”? *Ephesians 4:2-3*

7. Would those who know you best say that you make a habit of doing these things?

8. Verses four through six describe things that Christians have in common. What are these things?

9. Why is it important to reflect on the things we have in common?

DAY THREE

Read *Ephesians 4:7-10*

10. To whom has grace been given, and how was this grace given?

11. Paul quotes Psalm 68:18 in verse eight. What is he attempting to prove by this quotation?

WEEK SIX

Ephesians 4:1-16

12. Turn to Psalm 68:18 and compare it to Paul's quotation in Ephesians 4:8. How do these two verses differ?

13. What does the Old Testament passage seem to be emphasizing?

14. What does Paul seem to be emphasizing in his quotation?

15. Both of these statements are true. How do you think these two statements fit together?

16. What is the point Paul is making in verses nine and ten?

17. Paul has just used one verse in the Old Testament to teach several important truths about Jesus. What does this tell you about Paul's teaching method? What does this tell you about the message of the Old Testament?

18. According to verse ten, why did Jesus ascend? What should this mean for you and the way you live your life?

DAY FOUR

Read *Ephesians 4:11-16*

19. In verse 11, Paul refers to gifts that have been given to the church. What are these gifts?

20. Why have these gifts been given? *Ephesians 4:12*

21. According to verse 12, who is to do “the work of ministry”?

22. Do you think most saints believe this? What would change if they understood this truth?

23. From what do these gifts protect the saints? *Ephesians 4:14*

24. How, practically speaking, do you think these gifts can protect the saints from this?

25. Based on these verses, describe Jesus’ goal for the church.

WEEK SIX

Ephesians
4:1-16

EPHESIANS 4:1-16

We have just crossed this letter's continental divide. Everything on the side of Ephesians we have just entered (chapters four through six) will look different from everything we have left (chapters one through three). Chapters one through three are primarily theological. Chapters four through six are primarily applicational (to coin a word). Chapters one through three pertain to realities about God and the salvation we have been given in Jesus. Chapters four through six pertain to how we are to live our lives in light of the realities presented in chapters one through three.

The transition from the theological to the applicational is marked by Paul's use of the word "therefore" in verse one.

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called . . . Ephesians 4:1

In other words, "Because of the truths to which I have already referred, this is how you ought to walk." This isn't the last time you'll see the verb "walk" in Ephesians. Paul uses the same verb in 4:17, 5:2, 5:8, and 5:15.¹ He is not referring to the physical action of walking. Rather, he is referring to how a Christian ought to live and behave.

Notice, theology (chapters one through three) is thoroughly practical (chapters four through six). We must not say that we love God but that we don't need to know about or care for theology. Theology is tied to our behavior. It is the foundation of what we do.

We are "to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which [we] have been called". The word "calling" is worth some thought. It summarizes God's invitation to us and the salvation he has prepared for us. God, by his own "divine initiative",² calls us to an "experience of special privilege and responsibility".³ We, for our part, are "to walk in a manner worthy of [that] calling".

For this reason, we must know our theology.⁴ How can we walk in a manner worthy of our calling if we don't know anything about our calling? So, if the standard for our walking is our calling, it is worth reminding ourselves of that calling. What do we know about it?

We know that "he chose us in him before the foundation of the world" (1:4). We know that "he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ" (1:5). We know that we have been blessed with grace in Christ (1:6). We know that "we have redemption through his blood" (1:7). We know that we "were sealed with the Holy Spirit" (1:13). We know that God "made us alive together with Christ" (2:5). We know that he "raised us up with him" (2:6). We know that he "seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (2:6).

The greatness of this calling is to be the standard of our behavior. It should lead us to walk in, as Paul goes on to say . . .

. . . all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Ephesians 4:2-3

Am I walking "in a manner worthy of the calling to which [I] have been called"? Paul gives us some diagnostics here. Do I walk "with all humility and gentleness"? Do I walk "with patience"? Do I bear with others "in love"? Am I "eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace"? If the answer is no to any of these questions, I am not walking in a manner worthy of the calling I have received.

Notice, walking in a manner worthy of the calling we have received relates, at least in this passage, entirely to our relation to others; specifically to those within the church.⁵ Our salvation is not, primarily, individual. It is worked out in the life of the church. It grows, matures, and is maintained in the life of the church. We must walk in unity with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

WEEK SIX

Ephesians 4:1-16

1 He also used this verb in 2:2 and 2:10.

2 Danker, ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 549.

3 Danker, ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 549.

4 See, for instance, 1 Peter 2:2-3, 1 Timothy 4:13-16, and Hebrews 5:11-14.

5 Paul discusses how we are to "walk" individually in Ephesians 4:17.

WEEK SIX

Ephesians 4:1-16

We are able to walk in unity because, as verses four through six emphasize, we have much that we hold in common.

There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. Ephesians 4:4-6

In addition to having these things in common, each believer has also been given grace.

But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.
Ephesians 4:7

Paul emphasizes that the grace believers have received has been given to them by Christ and is directly related to the victory he won through his death and resurrection.

*Therefore it says,
"When he ascended on high he led a host of captives,
and he gave gifts to men."* Ephesians 4:8

This is a quotation of Psalm 68:18—although not an exact quotation. Paul has changed a significant word in his translation of the verse. Here is the verse as it appears in Psalm 68:18.

You ascended on high, leading a host of captives in your train and receiving gifts among men . . . Psalm 68:18

Do you see the difference between Ephesians 4:8 and Psalm 68:18? In Ephesians 4 we read of Christ giving gifts. But in Psalm 68, we read of the Lord receiving gifts. Did Paul make a mistake in Ephesians? He did not. Rather, as is noted below, it seems Paul understood the Psalm to be saying that Jesus received gifts *in order to give those gifts to his followers.*⁶

In their original setting the words of the Psalm picture the Lord returning in triumph (either to the Jerusalem sanctuary, or to heaven itself), after the overthrow of Israel's enemies. He has made His enemies captive, and they follow, as it were, in His triumphal procession. As Conqueror He has received gifts that He can bestow. Like many of the Psalms, this found ready application to the Christ. He has conquered His enemies, and returned to His Father's throne in triumph, now to bestow blessings on His people.⁷

This isn't the only passage that refers to Jesus receiving something and then giving from what he has received.

This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing.
Acts 2:32-33

But Psalm 68:18 isn't just about Christ's giving of gifts. It also refers to his ascension.

(In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) Ephesians 4:9-10

In the ESV, these verses appear in parentheses, because, while they serve to further explain verse eight, they may be seen as somewhat of a diversion from Paul's main train of thought (i.e., Christ's gift of grace to his people).⁸ These verses have been taken by some to infer that Christ descended into hell after his death. However, based on the wording here, it seems preferable to see these verses as referring to the Incarnation (that is, Christ coming to earth as a human).⁹

6 The Septuagint (Greek translation of the OT) may be translated, "You received gifts for man".

7 Francis Foulkes, *The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians*, 115.

8 The NIV, NASB, KJV, and NKJV also include parentheses around these verses. The HCSB does not include parentheses around these verses.

9 Interestingly, in 2007 the text of the ESV was revised from "he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth" (a rendering which has been seen by some as referring to hell) to "he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth" (a rendering which clearly denotes earth). The text of the Apostles' Creed notwithstanding (and it appears the reference to Jesus' descent into hell was a later addition to the Apostles' Creed), there are many reasons to reject the belief that Jesus descended into hell thus incurring suffering beyond that which he suffered on the cross. See Wayne Grudem's helpful comments regarding this issue: Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 592-594.

Paul seems to be making the simple point that, in saying that Jesus ascended, the Psalm is inferring that Jesus must have also descended. In other words, this Psalm, in addition to talking about the grace given by Jesus due to Jesus' victory also refers to Jesus' birth! That's a lot of gospel packed into one verse!

Paul says that the reason Jesus ascended is "that he might fill all things". Much could be said about this statement. However, Paul does not embellish this thought. Instead he chooses to return to the subject of the gifts given by the victorious Christ.

The following verses should be read together. Once again, in the Greek, they form one long sentence. See if you can follow the cause/effect relationships Paul establishes here.

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. Ephesians 4:11-16

The specific gifts here are different from the gifts to which Paul refers in other passages. Normally, the gifts refer to a particular ability a person has (i.e., a gift of prophecy or a gift of service). But the gifts to which Paul refers here are not abilities. They are actually people (with abilities). More specifically, they are gifted people whom Jesus has given to the church. Paul refers to these gifts as apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers. At first glance, it appears there are five groups of people here. However, many scholars believe Paul refers to just four groups here. The debate centers on the phrase, "the shepherds and teachers". The fact that only one article (i.e., "the") is used to refer to both shepherds and teachers has caused many to think that these two gifts should be considered to be one gift (i.e., shepherd-teachers). Others believe that the use of one article indicates that the shepherds and the teachers are connected but does not indicate that they are one and the same gift.

But whether there are four or five gifted persons in view here, the point of this particular passage remains the same: based on his victory, Jesus gave special gifts to the church so that the saints might be equipped "for the work of ministry".

Do you see the importance of gifted leaders in the body of Christ? They must not be seen and treated as mere servants. They are far more than that. They are gifts from Jesus who have been given the express purpose of equipping the saints for ministry. There is only one proper response to the gifted leaders who have been placed in our lives. We are to obey them.

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you. Hebrews 13:17

It is important to notice that the leaders are not called to do the work of ministry. Rather, they are to prepare the saints so that the saints might do the ministry. This is how God's work is to be done on the earth.

Jesus' gift is intended to bring the church to maturity. Gifted leaders have been given to the church so that the saints might grow "to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ". In order for this to happen, the saints must "attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God". The leaders to whom Paul refers here must focus their teaching on Jesus. An understanding of him is critical to a believer growing out of immaturity.

WEEK SIX

Ephesians 4:1-16

Immaturity should be a temporary situation in any Christian's life. As a friend of mine likes to say, "A three-year-old pushing his plastic lawnmower behind his father in the yard is cute. An 18-year-old doing the same thing is not so cute anymore. It's sad." But immaturity is not just sad. It is also dangerous. As with children, immature believers are easily deceived. They are "tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes". Gifted leaders, then, are one way Jesus protects the church. Until the day we finally grow into complete maturity (and that day won't come until we see Jesus face to face),¹⁰ we will need gifted leaders speaking into our lives.

Paul concludes this section by painting a picture of what the body of Christ looks like when it does grow into maturity.

Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. Ephesians 4:15-16

Notice the centrality of Christ here. We are to "grow up in every way" into Christ. He has made this growth possible. He has equipped the body with all the necessary "joints" (i.e., people) needed to join and hold the body together. As the body moves together, receiving its life from Jesus, the whole body "builds itself up in love". This is somewhat analogous to the human body. As we exercise our bodies, our bodies become stronger. But when we neglect to exercise, our body begins to deteriorate.

In other words, the church gets healthier with use! Put the parts to work. They won't wear out. The opposite will happen. The more we work together, the stronger we become. Do your part. Embrace the grace that has been given to you by Christ. Fight for unity in the church. Revere the leaders in your life.

This all can be summed up in 14 words: "walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called".

¹⁰ See 1 Corinthians 13:9-12.

Week Seven

EPHESIANS 4:17-5:21

WEEK SEVEN

Ephesians 4:17-5:21

DAY ONE

Read *Ephesians 4:17-5:21* through twice. The first time through these verses, simply read the text. Do not write any notes regarding the verses at this time. The second time through the verses, circle or underline key words or phrases and write down any questions or thoughts the verses leave you with in the margin. If the verses bring any related Scriptures to mind, please write them in the margin.

EPHESIANS 4

¹⁷ Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. ¹⁸ They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. ¹⁹ They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. ²⁰ But that is not the way you learned Christ!—²¹ assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, ²² to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, ²³ and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

²⁵ Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. ²⁶ Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷ and give no opportunity to the devil. ²⁸ Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. ²⁹ Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. ³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. ³² Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

EPHESIANS 5

¹ Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. ² And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

³ But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. ⁴ Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. ⁵ For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. ⁶ Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. ⁷ Therefore do not become partners with them; ⁸ for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light ⁹ (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), ¹⁰ and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. ¹¹ Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. ¹² For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. ¹³ But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, ¹⁴ for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,

“Awake, O sleeper,
and arise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.”

¹⁵ Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶ making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. ¹⁸ And do not get drunk with wine, for that

is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit,¹⁹ addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart,²⁰ giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,²¹ submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

DAY TWO

Read *Ephesians 4:17-24*

1. What is the command Paul gives in verse 17?

2. How does Paul describe “the Gentiles” in verses 18 and 19?

3. What does this description have to do with the command Paul gave in verse 17?

4. How does Paul Paul describe non-Christian Jews and Gentiles in Romans 3:9-18?

5. Do you think most Christians think of those who are non-Christians in this light?

6. What difference would it make in your day-to-day life if you saw those who are non-Christians in this light?

7. In what way were the Christians to whom Paul was writing different from the Gentiles?

Ephesians 4:20-24

8. Verse 22 refers to “your old self” (sometimes translated as “your old man”). What do the following verses say about “your old self”?

Romans 6:6

Colossians 3:9-10

WEEK SEVEN

Ephesians 4:17-5:21

DAY THREE

Read *Ephesians* 4:25-32

9. Why should the Christian “speak the truth with his neighbor”? *Ephesians* 4:25

10. In verse 26, Paul tells his readers, “Be angry and do not sin”. When might anger be appropriate?

11. What is the Christian to do with his or her anger?

12. What happens if Paul’s commands in verse 26 are not followed? *Ephesians* 4:27

13. What is to be the motivation behind “doing honest work with [your] hands”? Is this a motivation behind your work? *Ephesians* 4:28

14. Based on verses 29 through 31, how do you think one grieves the Holy Spirit?

15. Review these commands. Which one, if any, do you need to address in your life?

DAY FOUR

Read *Ephesians* 5:1-14

16. Would those who know you best say that you are an imitator of God? Why or why not? *Ephesians* 5:1

17. Outline the sins the Christian is to avoid.

18. With what should the Christian replace “filthiness” or “foolish talk”? *Ephesians 5:4*

19. Paul refers to the covetous person as an idolater (*Ephesians 5:5*). In what ways might covetousness be the same as idolatry?

20. Why must the Christian avoid sin? *Ephesians 5:5-6*

21. Why is God pouring his wrath out? *Romans 1:18-25*

22. Paul warns the Christians not be deceived by empty words. Based on these verses, who would be speaking these empty words? What might they be saying? *Ephesians 5:6*

23. Based on these verses and *Romans 1:18-25*, write a response to these persons.

24. Outline Paul’s commands in verses seven through 14.

25. What effect is the Christian’s life to have on the deeds of darkness?

WEEK SEVEN

Ephesians 4:17-5:21

26. Is your life having this effect?

DAY FIVE

Read *Ephesians 5:15-20*

27. In verse 18, the Christian is commanded to “be filled with the Spirit”. Based on Ephesians 4:17 through 5:17, how do you think this happens in the Christian’s life?

28. What do you think prevents this from taking place?

29. What specific changes need to take place in your life in order for this to happen?

30. Verses 19 through 21 outline specific activities that characterize the person who is “filled with the Spirit”. What are these activities?

31. Are these activities present in your life? If not, why not?

DAY SIX

Read the study notes for chapter 4:17-5:21.

28. Read the study notes and then complete the following sentence. This week the Holy Spirit has taught me . . .

WEEK SEVEN

Ephesians 4:17-5:21

EPHESIANS 4:17-5:21

Ephesians 4 begins with Paul telling his readers how to walk (“in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called”). The chapter concludes with Paul telling his readers how not to walk.

Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. Ephesians 4:17

Most of the people to whom Paul was writing were Gentiles by birth. But here, we find Paul telling his readers not to walk as the Gentiles walk. He is referring, of course, to non-Christian Gentiles. He tells his readers that they must not live as they once lived and as their non-Christian neighbors now live. That way of life is futile—it accomplishes nothing. Paul then goes on to explain why the Gentiles walk in futility.

They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. Ephesians 4:18-19

The Gentiles are ignorant, but they must not be seen as blissfully ignorant. They have no understanding of God or of the joy and peace and life that is found in Jesus. And the Gentiles are not innocent in their ignorance. While they are callous to God and his ways, they are not callous to sin. Instead, they throw themselves headlong into their darkened pleasures, greedy to practice more and more ungodliness.

While these things are true of the Gentiles, they must not be said of those who would call themselves Christians.

But that is not the way you learned Christ!—assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. Ephesians 4:20-24

I love the first phrase in verse 20: “that is not the way you learned Christ”. We haven’t just learned a religion. We’ve learned a person—Christ! This emphasizes the centrality he must have in our lives. Have you learned Christ? Do you know him? The evidence that you have learned him is that you have put off your old self and have put on the new self. In the same way that you would quickly take off your clothes if you fell in raw sewage (and you would then throw them in the garbage—preferably far, far away from the house!), believers must put off the “old self”.

WEEK SEVEN

Ephesians 4:17-5:21

Your old self was in worse shape than your sewage-covered clothing. Your new self is “created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness”.

At this point, it is worth pausing and examining Paul’s words here. (This examination will take some time, but it is important for it sets the stage for what follows. We’ll move more quickly after this.) Paul tells his readers “to put off your old self . . . and to put on the new self”. These are commands that must be done. However, the HCSB (Holman Christian Standard Bible) reads in a very different way. Here is the HCSB’s rendering of verse 22:

. . . you took off your former way of life, the old man that is corrupted by deceitful desires; you are being renewed in the spirit of your minds; you put on the new man . . . Ephesians 4:22-24 HCSB

Do you see the difference between the way these two translations render these verses? It is enormous! The HCSB does not translate these statements as commands but as statements of fact—facts that have already been completed. So which is it? Am I to take off my old self, or have I already taken off my old self? Should I struggle to throw this sewage-covered cloak off of me, or should I walk in such a way that I demonstrate that it has already been thrown off of me?

The fact is, grammatically, both translations are possible.¹ But which is more likely? Do we have a way of knowing? Should I work on putting off my old self, or should I live as if my old self has already been put off?

First, we should define the old self (literally, “the old man”). Based on Paul’s usage of the term, the old self is not a bad aspect of your character, as in a bad temper. Rather, it seems to be “mankind in Adam” or an “unregenerate person.” Similarly, the new self (“new man”) is not an aspect of your character, such as meekness. Rather, it seems to be “mankind in Christ” or a “saved person.”

There are two other instances of the phrase “old self” appearing in the New Testament. It will be worth our time to examine these passages and to see how they refer to the old self. Let’s look at the instance in Colossians first, because there is a direct connection between Ephesians and Colossians and it appears they were written at the same time.

Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. Colossians 3:9-10

Do you see it? In this passage, Paul says that “you have put off the old self”. In other words, he sees this as something that has been done, not something that must be done. The “old self” also appears in Romans 6. Read these words carefully. Look for how Paul refers to the old self in this passage.

We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace. Romans 6:6-14

¹ See Daniel B. Wallace’s helpful comments regarding this passage in *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 603-605.

In this passage Paul says that “our old self was crucified with him”. He then tells his readers in Rome to take certain actions based on this truth: “So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus” (Romans 6:11).

What has this excursion into Colossians and Romans taught us? Well, in both of these passages we saw references to the old self, and in both of those passages we saw that Paul refers to the old self as if it had already been dealt with. That being the case, it would seem likely that the same is true in Ephesians. The point is tremendously significant. It appears that Paul is not telling his readers to throw off their old self. Rather, he is telling them that their old self has been thrown off and, because of this fact, they ought to live like that is the case. His readers need “to be renewed in the spirit of [their] minds” (Ephesians 4:23). The idea here is that the Christian needs to start thinking and acting like a Christian.

Verses 25 through 32 outline specific ways that Christians, based on the fact that they have put off their old self and have put on the new self, should live.

Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil. Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.
Ephesians 4:25-32

These are not lofty theological concepts. These are down-to-earth practical things that every Christian should practice. We should “speak the truth” with our neighbors. Neighbors, at least in this context, probably refers to our fellow believers. Notice the reason for speaking the truth with those in the church: we are members of one another. We should be angry about those things that demand anger (i.e., sin in the church). But, in the expression of that anger, we must not sin. We should deal with the source of our anger quickly. We “should not give a place to the devil by doing nothing about the sin in the midst of the believing community. Entirely opposite of the ‘introspective conscience’ view, this text seems to be a shorthand expression for church discipline, suggesting that there is biblical warrant for . . . righteous indignation.”² We should work hard. We should watch our mouths. Etc., etc., etc.. It is worth noting that most of these things are connected, in one way or another, to the way a Christian speaks. As James says, “if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body” (James 3:2). Controlling the tongue—and the rest of the body—is possible because the old man has been put off and the new man has been put on.

In all of these commands Paul provides a reason outside of the believer for taking a certain action (i.e., the believer is to work so that he or she might have something to share). As Christians, we must begin to see beyond ourselves. We must begin to think about how our actions are affecting those within the church. We must begin thinking about how our actions are affecting the Holy Spirit.

EPHESIANS 5

The first two verses of chapter five serve to complete the arguments of chapter four.

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.
Ephesians 5:1-2

² Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 492.

WEEK SEVEN

Ephesians 4:17-5:21

“How should I live as a Christian?” someone might ask. Paul’s answer is simple. Act like God. Walk (there’s that word again) in love—imitating the love Jesus displayed to and for us.

You would think that this would be enough. Tell Christians to imitate God and you’ve done your duty as a preacher, right? Wrong. Paul is not done. He saw more that needed to be renewed in the minds of the saints. For instance, they needed to be renewed in their minds regarding two especially heinous categories of sin.

But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.
Ephesians 5:3-5

The first category of sin that Paul mentions is sexual immorality. And, according to Paul, it is so heinous that it “must not even be named among you”. Sexual immorality is all sexual activity outside of the bonds of marriage. Under this broad category we may include “all impurity”. This includes “foolish talk” and “crude joking”. Today, there is great pressure on Christians to conform to the standards of the world. We must not give into this pressure. We must remember that those without Christ are “darkened in their understanding” (Ephesians 4:18). They “have given themselves up to sensuality” and are “greedy to practice every kind of impurity” (Ephesians 4:19). The world cannot set the standard, for they cannot even see the standard.

The fact that homosexuality is accepted by a growing number of people does not make it any less of a sin. The fact that the majority of people have sexual relations before marriage does not make this action any less of a sin. The fact that it is normal for people to live together outside of marriage does not make this action any less of a sin. Sin is not defined and redefined based on the feelings of the people. It is defined by God. The saints are to look to him and to his Word for their standard. We are to walk in holiness, and we are to talk with holiness.

The second category of sin is covetousness. This is the sin of desiring something that is not rightfully yours. This is surprising, for I would guess that many Christians would say, “What is so evil about covetousness?” It doesn’t seem to be as wicked, perhaps, as sexual sin. The answer may be found in verse five. There, Paul refers to the covetous person as an idolater. Idolaters worship other gods. And that is exactly what covetous people do. They place their own needs first. They serve their own appetites rather than God. They are consumed with a passion for meeting their own needs.

There are many who call themselves saints who walk in one or both of these categories of sin. That is a terrible mistake, for as Paul warns in verse five, “you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God”. Do you see the seriousness of these sins? People practice these things at the risk of their lives.

We must know that sin is not allowed among God’s holy people. If my children asked me, “How much can I carve on the dining room table?” I would simply say, “You can’t. It’s not allowed. We don’t carve on the dining room table.” The same may be said of sin. It’s not allowed . . . not even a little bit. The saints must not sin. Those who make a practice of sin, as the following verses say, prove that they are of the devil.

Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. You know that he appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God makes

a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother. 1 John 3:4-10

There are many who would argue with these verses. They will tell you, “No. God is love. He would never harm his children—and we’re all his children. These things are not sin.” Paul warns the saints to watch out for empty words like these.

Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Ephesians 5:6

Do you see the seriousness of sin? It results in wrath. Wrath is the fury of God’s anger poured out upon sinful man. People act like such an action would be out of character for God. As Wayne Grudem points out, nothing could be further from the truth.

. . . if God loves all that is right and good, and all that conforms to his moral character, then it should not be surprising that he would hate everything that is opposed to his moral character. God’s wrath directed against sin is therefore closely related to God’s holiness and justice. God’s wrath may be defined as follows: *God’s wrath means that he intensely hates all sin.*³

This is not a doctrine that was invented in the middle ages. The wrath of God is a major theme within the New Testament.⁴ As saints, we must believe that God will pour out his wrath against sin and those who sin. We must understand that God is already pouring out his wrath.⁵ The effects of his wrath may be seen today. A proper understanding of this truth explains much that is happening in the world today. Beyond this, we must come to see that it would be terrible if God did not take such action against both sin and sinner. If he loved or tolerated sin, God “would not be worthy of our worship, for sin is hateful and it is *worthy* of being hated.”⁶

These warnings should have been enough to convince the saints in and around Ephesus to stay away from sexual immorality and covetousness. The same should be said of us.

Therefore do not become partners with them; for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,

*“Awake, O sleeper,
and arise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.” Ephesians 5:7-14*

We are not sons of disobedience. We are children of light. We must walk (there’s that word again) as children of light.⁷ Children of light do not participate in the actions of the children of darkness. Rather, they think about how they might please Jesus. The life of one devoted to the Lord and his pleasure shines in such a way that it exposes the darkness in others. The godliness of the godly, even without words, reveals the wickedness of the wicked.

The conduct of the children of light will shine as a beacon to others, revealing evil deeds for what they are. To interpret the verb along these lines of exposing sin for what it is does not imply that Christians should remain silent or fail to speak out against evil. But the particular point being made here is that of living a godly lifestyle and showing evil to be evil.⁸

3 Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 206.

4 See, for instance, John 3:36, Romans 1:18, 2:5, 2:8, 5:9, Colossians 3:5-6, 1 Thessalonians 1:10, and Revelation 19:15.

5 See Romans 1:18-32.

6 Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 206.

7 See also 1 Thessalonians 5:5-11.

8 O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 371.

WEEK SEVEN

Ephesians 4:17-5:21

We must be holy . . . not just in our words, but in our walk. We live in an evil age. Darkness is celebrated. The light seems, at least in many places, to be dimming. Perhaps it seems like this because those who have the light are walking in such a way that the light cannot be seen.

Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. Ephesians 5:15-21

Jesus' will is that we would "be filled with the Spirit". This is a command, so we must obey it. But it's a passive command. A passive command is strange, for it is something you have, seemingly, no control over. If I told you, "love your wife," you could control that action. But if I told you, "be loved by your wife," you would tell me, "I have no control over whether that happens." But that is precisely the nature of this command. We are to "be filled with the Spirit". Beyond that, this command is in the present tense, suggesting that being "filled with the Spirit" is something that is to be happening to us on a continual basis.

It seems the obvious question to ask at this point is, "How can I be filled with the Spirit?" The answer, based on this chapter, is simple: "Watch your walk."

The next question is, "How will I know when I am filled?" The answer is found in the five participles that follow the command to be filled (participles are the "ing" words in this passage: "addressing", "singing", "making melody", "giving thanks", and "submitting"). These participles are, most likely, participles of result. According to Daniel Wallace, "The participle of result is used to indicate the actual outcome or result of the action of the main verb."⁹ Thus, if you find yourself doing these five things, you know you have been filled with the Spirit.

[T]he idea of result here would suggest that the way in which one measures his/her success in fulfilling the command of 5:18 is by the participles that follow (notice the progressive difficulty: from speaking God's word to being thankful for all, to being submissive to one another; such progression would, of course, immediately suggest that this filling is not instantaneous and absolute but progressive and relative).¹⁰

This is the test. Do you find yourself doing these things? Do you have a song in your heart? Are you thankful for everything? Are you submissive (which is different from cowardly), or do you always have to have your way? These participles would only be found in a person who is filled with joy and confidence. Or, another way to say that would be, filled with the Spirit. Is this what you'd like for yourself? If it is, then start walking.

⁹ Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 637.

¹⁰ Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 639.

Week Eight

EPHESIANS 5:22-6:9

WEEK EIGHT

Ephesians 5:22-6:9

DAY ONE

Read *Ephesians 5:22-6:9* through twice. The first time through these verses, simply read the text. Do not write any notes regarding the verses at this time. The second time through the verses, circle or underline key words or phrases and write down any questions or thoughts the verses leave you with in the margin. If the verses bring any related Scriptures to mind, please write them in the margin.

EPHESIANS 5

²² *Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.* ²³ *For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.* ²⁴ *Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.*

²⁵ *Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,* ²⁶ *that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,* ²⁷ *so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.* ²⁸ *In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.* ²⁹ *For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church,* ³⁰ *because we are members of his body.* ³¹ *“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.”* ³² *This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.* ³³ *However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.*

EPHESIANS 6

¹ *Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.* ² *“Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise),* ³ *“that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.”* ⁴ *Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.*

⁵ *Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ,* ⁶ *not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart,* ⁷ *rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man,* ⁸ *knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free.* ⁹ *Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.*

DAY TWO

Read *Ephesians 5:22-24*

1. In Ephesians 5:22 through 6:9, Paul outlines appropriate and inappropriate behavior for those living within families (slaves are included because they were a part of families at that time). Why would he address the subject of family relations at this point in the book, and why is this subject important?

2. What are Paul's instructions to the wives?

3. Why do you think wives would need to be told to do this?

4. How do you think God's words to Eve in Genesis 3:16 relate to this issue (see, particularly, the second half of the verse)?

5. Read the following verses and summarize the instructions given to wives.

Colossians 3:18

1 Peter 3:1-6

6. How does Paul describe the wife's relationship to her husband in 1 Corinthians 11:3?

7. What are some reasons a woman might have a hard time submitting to her husband's authority?

8. Would there ever be a time when the woman should not submit to her husband's authority?

9. If you are a wife, how are you doing in regard to the keeping of this instruction?

WEEK EIGHT

Ephesians 5:22-6:9

DAY THREE

Read *Ephesians 5:25-33*

10. What are Paul's instructions to the husbands?

11. Why do you think husbands would need to be told to do this?

12. Read the following verses and summarize the instructions given to husbands.

Colossians 3:19

1 Peter 3:7

13. Why does Paul begin talking about Christ's love for the church in these verses? What does this have to do with husbands and wives?

14. What, specifically, did Christ do for the church?

15. Why did he do these things?

16. How is Christ presently taking care of the church? *Ephesians 5:29*

17. Practically speaking, how do you think he does this?

18. How can the husband do this for his wife?

19. Verse 31 is a quotation from Genesis 2:24. The verse refers to a husband and wife, but Paul says “it refers to Christ and the church”. What do Paul’s words here tell you about God’s intent for marriage?

20. If you are a husband, how are you doing in regard to the keeping of these instructions?

DAY FOUR

Read *Ephesians 6:1-4*

21. What are Paul’s instructions to the children?

22. Why do you think children would need to be told to do this?

23. What, practically, can parents do to bring their children up in the “discipline and instruction of the Lord”?

Proverbs 13:24

Proverbs 19:18

Deuteronomy 6:6-9, 20-25

Psalms 78:4-8

24. “Honor your father and mother” is one of the Ten Commandments. It is the only commandment with a promise attached to it. What is the promise? Do you think this promise refers to earthly life or eternal life?

WEEK EIGHT

Ephesians 5:22-6:9

25. What are Paul's instructions to fathers? *See also Colossians 3:21*

26. If you are a father (or mother), how are you doing in regard to keeping these instructions?

DAY FIVE

Read *Ephesians 6:5-9*

27. What are Paul's instructions to slaves?

28. Why do you think slaves would need to be told to do this?

29. Read the following verses and summarize the instructions given to slaves.

Colossians 3:22-25

1 Timothy 6:1-2

1 Peter 2:18-21

30. What applications, if any, do these verses have to employees today? *See also Colossians 3:17*

31. If you are an employee, how are you doing in regard to keeping these instructions?

32. What are Paul's instructions to masters? *See also Colossians 4:1*

33. Why do you think masters would need to be told to do this?

34. If you are an employer, how are you doing in regard to keeping these instructions?

35. Slaves, as well as masters, made up a large percentage of the first century population in the church. How do you think these instructions would have impacted the life of the church?

DAY SIX

Read the study notes for chapter 5:22-6:9.

36. Read the study notes and then complete the following sentence. This week the Holy Spirit has taught me . . .

EPHESIANS 5:22-6:9

Paul has talked a great deal about appropriate behavior for the Christian. But while his comments in chapters four and five have covered a wide range of life, they certainly haven't provided believers with "the mind of Christ" regarding all aspects of life. One major area in which Christians need to "be renewed in the spirit of [their] minds" (Ephesians 4:23) is in regard to the family. How is a Christian to behave within the context of the family? This is the topic Paul tackles in this section. Paul addresses his comments to wives, husbands, children, slaves (slaves are included in Paul's comments in this "family" section because slaves were a normal part of family life in the first century), and masters.

Paul's first comments are related to the proper behavior of the wives and husbands within the context of marriage. Before we begin looking at Paul's specific instructions, a few preliminary thoughts are in order.

WEEK EIGHT

Ephesians 5:22-6:9

First, we must not be surprised that Paul's description of the appropriate behavior of the wife and the husband outlined in these verses differs from the world's understanding of what might be appropriate. As we have already seen, those in the world are "darkened in their understanding" (Ephesians 4:18). They are "alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them" (Ephesians 4:18). Therefore, we should not look to the world for our understanding of how relationships ought to function.

Second, we must understand that distinctions between the sexes are not as a result of the Fall (i.e., the first sin). Rather, distinctions between the sexes trace their roots to creation. We must be careful that we do not dishonor God by calling evil what he has called good.¹

Third, we must understand that we will be judged for our behavior. Disobedience to God's mandates, even if this disobedience is approved culturally, will result in God's judgment.

Fourth, obedience is tied to joy. We must not think that obedience to God's words here will lead to a terrible life. It will lead to great freedom in our lives.

Fifth, seriously examining the roles required of both women and men within the context of marriage is important. As parents we are charged with raising the next generation of Christians. How are they to learn what a godly marriage looks like if not from us? Young men need to know what it means to be a godly husband. Young women need to know what it means to be a godly wife.

Sixth, and most important, we must see that a proper understanding of marriage is essential for it is a picture of Christ and the church. If our understanding of marriage is flawed, it is likely that our understanding of the relationship between Christ and the church will be flawed. And if our understanding of the relationship between Christ and the church is flawed, our behavior, particularly within that relationship, will also be flawed.

With these thoughts in our minds, let us examine this passage. Paul starts with wives. The link between the previous section and this new section is the participle "submitting" from verse 21. Submitting, remember, is a result of being filled with the Spirit. It is to be a characteristic of all Spirit-filled believers. Paul uses this participle as the launching point to speak to wives about their relationship with their husbands.

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Ephesians 5:22-24

What is the proper response of a Christian wife toward her husband? It is to submit to him. The reason the wife is to submit is not because she is of less value than the husband. It is not because she is less intelligent than the husband. Rather, she is to submit because "the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church". Thus, submission is appropriate because of the position held by the husband. He is the "head" of the wife. He will be held accountable for the decisions made within the family structure.

It is important to note that Paul does not tell the husbands to make their wives submit. Rather, he speaks directly to the wives. He tells them, in essence, "Make the choice to submit. Submit because you respect the position held by your husband." This is further confirmed by the fact that the participle "submitting" is, in the Greek, in the middle voice. As George Knight III writes, "Here Paul's use of the middle voice focuses on what one does to oneself: one submits oneself to others. The Bauer, Arndt-Gingrich-Danker *Greek-English Lexicon* rightly describes this as 'submission in the sense of voluntary yielding in love.'"²

¹ See Genesis 2:15-25.

² John Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds., *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1991), 166.

It is easy, especially in today's culture, to rail against passages like this. Don't make that mistake. Don't expend undue energy resisting Paul's words here. These aren't the writings of a he-man-woman-hater. These words, and other passages that say the same thing,³ were "breathed out" by God.⁴

There was a time when women would not have railed against these words. That time was before mankind's fall into sin. One of the negative consequences of sin seems to speak to this very issue. Right after God told Eve, "I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing", he said these words: "Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you" (Genesis 3:16). It would appear that one result of sin was that woman (within the context of marriage) no longer naturally recognized her husband's headship. Instead, she fought for it. Her desire was for his place.

He is indicating with reference to women that rather than being submissive helpers, they will "desire" to have mastery over their husbands. (We are understanding the word *desire* here in the same sense as that of its next occurrence [Genesis 4:7], where sin has the "desire" to master Cain.)—George W. Knight III⁵

But Paul is saying that the Christian wife must not live like that. She must submit. This is, as Paul says in the parallel passage in Colossians 3:18, "fitting in the Lord".

The wife, Paul says, "should submit in everything". This does not mean, of course, that the wife would submit to sin. The husband is not Christ, and because of this, his authority is not total.

. . . the Biblical reality of a wife's submission would take different forms depending on the quality of a husband's leadership. This can be seen best if we define submission not in terms of specific behaviors, but as a *disposition* to yield to the husband's authority and an *inclination* to follow his leadership. This is important to do because no submission of one human being to another is absolute. The husband does not replace Christ as the woman's supreme authority. She must never follow her husband's leadership into sin. She will not steal with him or get drunk with him or savor pornography with him or develop deceptive schemes with him.

But even where a Christian wife may have to stand with Christ against the sinful will of her husband, she can still have a spirit of submission—a disposition to yield. She can show by her attitude and behavior that she does not like resisting his will and that she longs for him to forsake sin and lead in righteousness so that her disposition to honor him as head can again produce harmony.⁶

Notice the connection Paul makes between the wife's response to the husband and the church's response to Christ. The wife should submit to the husband in the same way that the church submits to Christ. Marriage is a picture of the relationship between Christ and the church. This theme will be further developed in the verses to come.

Next, Paul turns his attention to husbands. How ought a Christian husband treat his wife? As noted earlier, sin has had a disastrous effect on the relations between the husband and the wife. The wife, because of sin, began to desire her husband's God-given role as head of the marriage and family. The husband, because of sin, began to abandon his role as a loving provider and, instead, became an unloving dictator (see, again, Genesis 3:16).

But this is not how the husband ought to treat his wife. The husband must understand that his wife is created in God's image and is, thus, in the same measure as the husband, God's image bearer to the world.⁷ He must understand that she is a fellow heir "of the grace of life" (1 Peter 3:7). He must understand that she has absolutely equal value before God.⁸

3 See 1 Corinthians 11:3, Colossians 3:18, and 1 Peter 3:1-6.

4 See 2 Timothy 3:16.

5 John Piper, Wayne Grudem, eds., *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 346.

6 John Piper, *What's the Difference: Manhood and Womanhood Defined According to the Bible* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1990), 51-52.

7 See Genesis 1:27.

8 See Galatians 3:28.

WEEK EIGHT

Ephesians 5:22-6:9

Here, then, are Paul's words to husbands.

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. Ephesians 5:25-33

Notice the pattern of Paul's thoughts in these verses. He starts talking about husbands and marriage. But a majority of his words seem to relate to Christ and the church. It is almost as if he can't talk about the one without referring to the other. Based on this, it seems clear that marriage is to be understood within the larger context of the relationship between Christ and the church. The one is to be a picture of the other. Earthly marriage is the picture. The relationship between Christ and the church is the reality. God, in his providence, ordained that we would have a picture always set before us of the relationship between Christ and the church. That picture is a healthy marriage. A child may say, "Mom, I don't understand the church. What is it? How does it work?" The mother might start her explanation by saying to her child, "Well, it's like my relationship with daddy . . ." This is why our marriages are so important—they are a picture of Christ and the church.

Husbands, are to love their wives "as Christ loved the church". How did he love the church? He "gave himself up for her". He sacrificed himself for her so that "he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word".

Paul says that Jesus took these actions so that "he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish". What is envisioned here is the presentation of the bride (the church) to her husband (Jesus) at his marriage supper.⁹ I have heard it said that Jesus will return for his bride when she has made herself ready for him. This is NOT the meaning of this passage! The church does not present herself to Jesus. Rather, Jesus presents the church to himself. He prepares his own bride. By his actions she is sanctified. By his actions she has no "spot or wrinkle or any such thing". By his actions she is "holy and without blemish".

In verse 28, Paul brings his thoughts back to husbands. "In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies". The husband does this by nourishing and cherishing his wife. He does what is necessary for her growth and protection. We all have things we will not do because we know they will damage our bodies (e.g., "I'm not going to try and lift that refrigerator—I might throw my back out"). This is how the husband needs to think of his wife. She must be protected, because if the wife is hurt the husband is hurt.

Paul's words regarding Christ and the church speak of Christ's awareness of his bride's needs. He is actively nourishing and cherishing the church. These verbs are in the present tense, suggesting that these are continuous actions on his part. Jesus is constantly doing what is necessary for the growth and protection of the church. He did not leave 2,000 years ago, hoping the initial "inertia" created by his death and resurrection would sustain the church. The church is not like a top that started strong but, due to lost inertia, is about to tip over. It is more like a basketball spinning on the tip of one of the Harlem Globetrotter's fingers. The church is constantly being directed and redirected in the hands of the consummate professional so that it will not fall. Christ lavishes all this attention on the church "because we are members of his body".

⁹ See Ezekiel 36:25, 2 Corinthians 11:2, and Revelation 19:6-10.

In verse 31 Paul quotes Genesis 2:24. The quotation demonstrates that marriage results in the creation of “one flesh” out of two individuals. Paul notes that the mystery of this relationship is “profound”. A mystery, remember, is something that was hidden by God and then revealed at the proper time. The mystery revealed here is that earthly marriage is a shadow or picture of the relationship between Christ and the church. This should impact how you read the Creation story! Marriage wasn’t necessary simply because God wanted to populate the earth. Marriage was necessary because it showcased—way before its creation—the relationship between Christ and the church.

Paul summarizes his thoughts to husbands and wives with two commands. The husband must “love his wife as himself”, and the wife must “see that she respects her husband”. If you are married, are you doing your part?

Paul now turns his attention to the children.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.” Ephesians 6:1-3

Notice, these words are directed to the children. Paul is speaking directly to them and telling them to make the choice to obey because it is right. Paul quotes the fifth of the Ten Commandments here. As Frank S. Thielman notes, this is a commandment of unusual importance.

. . . the fifth commandment governs the first and most basic of human relationships and so appropriately stands at the head of the final five commandments in the Decalogue, which govern relations between people. The fifth commandment, therefore, occupies a place of importance in the second half of the Decalogue equal to that of the first commandment in the first half.¹⁰

Obedience sets the pattern for how the rest of life will be lived. This is why it is so important. Children must obey their parents. Those who disobey will pay a terrible price.

The eye that mocks a father and scorns to obey a mother will be picked out by the ravens of the valley and eaten by the vultures. Proverbs 30:17

But while great suffering invariably accompanies disobedience, great reward accompanies obedience. Paul reminds the children that, if they obey, it will “go well” with them and they will “live long in the land”. Those who read this promise during earlier periods of Israeli history would have understood this promise as referring to Israel. That is, they would have understood the promise to be that obedience to parents would result in the Israelites living many years in the Promised Land. However, this is not how Paul was interpreting this passage here. He read these promises from the standpoint of a New Testament Christian. This promise does not, to Paul, refer to the land of Israel. To what, then, does it refer? It may, as Thielman points out, refer simply to the fact that “children who submit to the authority of loving parents are more likely to live longer than those who do not.”¹¹ This is possible, but not entirely satisfactory. After all, we see many disobedient people living very long lives. Thielman offers another, probably better, solution when he says, “Paul may be saying that children whose obedience to their parents arises from their commitment to ‘the Lord’ (6:1) will live eternally not on a particular land with national boundaries such as ancient Israel, but rather on an earth without boundaries, as God created it to be.”¹² This solution is echoed by the notes regarding this verse in the ESV Study Bible.

In the new covenant the promise of the land is not physical land on earth but eternal life, which begins when one is regenerated here and now and comes to full reality in the age to come. Paul is not teaching salvation on the basis of works. The obedience of children is evidence that they know God, and it results in receiving blessings from God.¹³

10 G.K. Beale, D.A. Carson, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2007), 829.

11 Beale, Carson, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, 830.

12 Beale, Carson, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, 830.

13 *The ESV Study Bible, English Standard Version* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 2272.

WEEK EIGHT

Ephesians 5:22-6:9

Reading the promise in this manner sheds a whole new light on the importance of obedience. If we don't obey, we are demonstrating that we don't know God!

Sin didn't just mar the relations between husband and wife. It impacted all relations. Children, because of sin, no longer naturally obey. Father, because of sin, no longer parent as they ought.

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Ephesians 6:4

Here we find a negative command to fathers and a positive command. Do not "provoke your children to anger" is the negative. Do "bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" is the positive.

How do fathers (and mothers, grandparents, etc.) "provoke [their] children to anger"? They do it through words and actions, both said and unsaid, that demonstrate unkindness and unfairness. Fathers, because of sin, can be mean, harsh, overly critical, and unloving. These actions eventually serve to, as the parallel passage in Colossians points out, do the opposite of their intended result.

Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. Colossians 3:21

If a father does not leave room for a child to make mistakes, and if he does not parent in such a way that the child feels loved and accepted, eventually the child will become discouraged and angry.

This is not to say that fathers should overly coddle their children. Paul is not telling fathers to give their children everything they want, for that would go against other commands in Scripture. Instead, fathers are to take a measured approach to discipline. They are to know that their children have a breaking point and they are to avoid that point.

Positively, fathers are to "bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord". What is the discipline and instruction of the Lord? It is, quite simply, teaching the child that Christ is Lord and that all of life must be lived in light of this truth.

A good father will not, as the following verses make clear, neglect to discipline his child.

Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him. Proverbs 13:24

Discipline your son, for there is hope; do not set your heart on putting him to death. Proverbs 19:18

But good fathering must include much more than just correcting those things that have already happened. A good father speaks of God's truths at all times.

"And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise."
Deuteronomy 6:6-7

This is how we are to parent. We are not to reserve our talk about Christ for Sunday. Rather, all of life is to be focused on him. Thoughts of him are to flow from our lips as easily as our breath. This is how children are "brought up" in the Lord.

In contrast to the norms of the day, Paul wants Christian fathers to be gentle, patient educators of their children, whose chief 'weapon' is Christian instruction focussed on loyalty to Christ as Lord.¹⁴

¹⁴ O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 447.

While Paul's words to wives, husbands, children, and fathers readily apply to Christians today, his words regarding slaves and masters do not. We do not have a situation completely analogous to that of the first century here. We do not own slaves. They are not members of our households. Beyond that, slavery is a difficult topic for Americans to consider without thinking of our national history and mixing our history with the history of the first century Christians. For these reasons, we need to be aware that it is difficult for us to hear these words as a first century Christian might hear them.

For a first century Christian, slavery was normal. It was an important (and unfortunate) part of the culture in which they lived. Beyond this, slaves made up a large percentage of the church. In the same church you would find slaves and masters worshiping together. These are words, then, that would have been a great help to the believers in and around Ephesus. The believers—both slaves and masters—needed “to be renewed in the spirit of [their] minds” in regard to how slaves and masters were to relate to one another.

Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free. Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him. Ephesians 6:5-9

Slaves, like children, are to obey. They are to serve with the same fervency with which they serve Christ. They are to do their best at all times, even when the master is not watching. Paul tells the slaves that this is “the will of God” and that they will be rewarded for the good service they do.

How is it possible for a slave to serve in the same way he or she would serve Christ? This would only be possible if the slave saw Christ as his or her Master and, therefore, sovereign over his or her life. It would only be possible if the slave saw his or her work as spiritual work. It would only be possible if the slave were looking ahead to his reward.

Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. Colossians 3:23-24

There are obviously applications here that can be translated to how we serve as employees. We need to serve with all our hearts because we are working for Christ. Our pay, ultimately, is from him. We don't want to be slack in our work, for, unlike earthly employers, Christ sees all and knows all.

It is important to note that how we work is spiritual. It matters. Read the following verses carefully, particularly the last phrase.

Slaves are to be submissive to their own masters in everything; they are to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, not pilfering, but showing all good faith, so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior. Titus 2:9-10

Slaves—and we could say employees—are to work with all their hearts because, through their efforts, they “adorn the doctrine of God our Savior”. Do you want your job to be about more than just selling widgets? Make the decision that you will, by your actions, “adorn the doctrine of God our Savior”. Make him attractive by the way in which you work.

WEEK EIGHT

Ephesians 5:22-6:9

In one regard, we are at somewhat of a disadvantage to our first century brothers and sisters who were serving as slaves. They understood, firsthand, what it meant to be a slave. They understood what it meant to have a master. They understood what it meant to have no freedom. This needs to be our reality. We are Christ's slaves. He is our Master. He is a good Master, but he is still our Master.

Unfortunately, some modern English translations do not help matters because of their reluctance to translate the Greek word *doulos* as slave. Commendably, the Holman Christian Standard Bible has translated the Greek word *doulos* as slave throughout the New Testament. The decision to translate *doulos* as slave greatly impacts how we understand certain verses. Compare, for example, the meaning conveyed by the ESV's translation of Romans 1:1—"Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus"—with the meaning conveyed by the HCSB's translation of the same verse—"Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus". There is, in the minds of English readers, a great difference between a slave and a servant.

In the back of the Bible, the HCSB includes several pages of notes explaining "frequently used biblical terms or words" in the HCSB.¹⁵ Here is their entry for the word "slave":

The strong Greek word *doulos* cannot be accurately translated in English by "servant" or "bond servant"; the HCSB translates this word as "slave," not out of insensitivity to the legitimate concerns of modern English speakers, but out of a commitment to accurately convey the brutal reality of the Roman empire's inhumane institution as well as the ownership called for by Christ.¹⁶

If you are a Christian, you are a slave. You are owned, having been "bought with a price" (1 Corinthians 7:23). You owe all your strength, time, effort, and ability to Christ.

Paul's instructions to masters are brief. He says, in essence, "Treat your slaves well. Don't threaten them. Remember that you're a slave too. You have a Master in heaven. He's watching you and he doesn't think you're any more important than your slave. You won't receive special treatment from him simply because you were born a master and not a slave."

These, then, are God's instructions for those within the family setting. They appear here because the saints' minds need to be renewed. We need a picture—a clear picture—of what godly relationships are to look like. May God help us as we take what we have seen and begin to walk. Our families (and jobs) will never be the same.

¹⁵ Holman UltraThin Large Print Reference Bible (Nashville, Tenn.: Holman Bible Publishers, 2004), 1177.

¹⁶ Holman UltraThin Large Print Reference Bible, 1181.

Week Nine

EPHESIANS 6:10-24

WEEK NINE

Ephesians 6:10-24

DAY ONE

Read *Ephesians 6:10-24* through twice. The first time through these verses, simply read the text. Do not write any notes regarding the verses at this time. The second time through the verses, circle or underline key words or phrases and write down any questions or thoughts the verses leave you with in the margin. If the verses bring any related Scriptures to mind, please write them in the margin.

EPHESIANS 6

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. ¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. ¹³ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. ¹⁴ Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵ and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; ¹⁷ and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, ¹⁸ praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, ¹⁹ and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

²¹ So that you also may know how I am and what I am doing, Tychicus the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord will tell you everything. ²² I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage your hearts.

²³ Peace be to the brothers, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.

DAY TWO

Read *Ephesians 6:10-12*

1. How is the Christian to successfully stand against the devil's schemes?

2. What do the following passages teach about the Christian's battle with the devil?

James 4:7

1 Peter 5:8-9

3. There is a tremendous promise in 1 Peter 5:10 regarding God's provision for those against whom the devil is fighting. What is it?

4. How does Paul describe the foes against whom the Christian fights?

5. How might this knowledge change the way Christians interact with non-Christians?

6. How do the following verses describe Jesus' relationship with these foes?

Ephesians 1:21

Colossians 2:15

DAY THREE

Read *Ephesians 6:13-17*

7. The manner in which the Christian walks was the theme of earlier sections in Ephesians. What, based on verses 11, 13, and 14, seems to be the theme of this section?

8. Paul, in these verses, alludes to the book of Isaiah. To which pieces of armor does Isaiah refer in the following verse? *Isaiah 59:17*

9. Look at the verses immediately preceding verse 17 (in Isaiah). Who is wearing this armor? How does your answer here impact your understanding of the phrase "the whole armor of God". To whose armor, in Ephesians, is Paul referring?

WEEK NINE

Ephesians 6:10-24

10. Paul lists six different pieces of armor. Describe each piece of armor below. What do you think each piece of armor represents?

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

11. Practically speaking, how do you think the Christian puts on the pieces of armor?

DAY FOUR

Read *Ephesians 6:18-20*

12. Paul, in speaking of prayer, uses the word “all” four times in verse 18. Outline the four uses of this word below.

1.

2.

3.

4.

13. Paul reminds his readers to “keep alert with all perseverance”. What do these two things have to do with prayer?

14. For what, specifically, does Paul ask the saints to pray?

Ephesians
6:10-24

15. What do these prayer requests tell you about the preaching of the gospel?

16. For what, specifically, doesn't Paul ask the saints to pray (think about his present situation)?
What does this tell you about Paul?

17. For what would you have asked prayer?

DAY FIVE

Read *Ephesians 6:21-24*

18. Why was Paul sending Tychicus to the saints?

19. What do you think Tychicus did when he arrived with the saints?

20. What do you learn about Tychicus from the following verses?

Acts 20:1-6

Colossians 4:7-8

2 Timothy 4:12

Titus 3:12

21. Would Paul have been able to send you on these missions? Why or why not?

22. The word "love" is used three times in the final two verses. What does this tell you about Paul's faith and his understanding of church and his understanding of the gospel?

WEEK NINE

Ephesians 6:10-24

DAY SIX

Read the study notes for chapter 6:10-24.

23. Read the study notes and then complete the following sentence. This week the Holy Spirit has taught me . . .

EPHESIANS 6:10-24

Paul's words to the believers in and around Ephesus are drawing to a close. He has one more truth to present. In ways, this truth may be thought of as the culmination of all the truths presented to this point in Ephesians.

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Ephesians 6:10

Paul's words here demand careful attention. "[B]e strong" is a passive verb. That is, as with "be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18), it is something that we cannot, at least directly, make happen. It is something that has to happen to us. But "be strong" is also an imperative verb. This means that it is a command. Once again, we are commanded to do something we cannot do. Beyond this, the verb "be strong" is in the present tense. This focuses on the "continuous" aspect of this verb. In other words, "becoming strong" isn't a one time event in our lives. It is something that is to be happening to us all of the time.

It is important to note that we become strong not in our strength but "in the Lord and in the strength of his might". As Jesus emphasized in John 15:5, "apart from me you can do nothing". All our strength will come from him. In fact, any strength that we have is his strength.

So how do we become strong? This is the question Paul answers in verses 11 through 20.

Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. Ephesians 6:11

We become strong by putting on God's full array of armor. Remember, Paul is imprisoned as he writes (probably with the help of a scribe) these words. He is in close contact with Roman soldiers. Thus, as Paul writes he may very well have been looking over his guard, thinking about how each piece of armor correlates to a piece of God's armor.

The armor we are to put on and wear is not our own. It is not of earthly origin. It is God's armor. The book of Isaiah speaks of the Messiah as a Warrior with heavenly armor.

Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins.
Isaiah 11:5

He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head; he put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped himself in zeal as a cloak.
Isaiah 59:17

While walking was a prominent theme in earlier chapters of Ephesians, standing is the theme now. In these verses, Paul is not describing how the Christian might successfully attack Satan. Rather, he is talking about how the Christian successfully defends himself or herself against Satan. He has many “schemes” which he will employ against us (one of those schemes, referred to in Ephesians 4:14, is false teaching). We must, as the following passages affirm, stand against him.

Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. James 4:7

Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him . . . 1 Peter 5:8-9a

The reason we need to put on God’s armor is further elaborated in verses 12 and 13.

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Ephesians 6:12-13

Our battle is not, Paul emphasizes, against humans. It is against Satan and his evil army. These “spiritual forces of evil” do not have unlimited power. They have been “disarmed” by Christ and put to “open shame” (Colossians 2:15). Jesus Christ is “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion” (Ephesians 1:21). But while they have been disarmed, they are still dangerous. God has, for his own glory, allowed them to exercise limited power in the present age. These spiritual forces of evil use their limited power to fight against the saints. Paul describes the battle as a wrestling match. He envisions close hand-to-hand combat.

John Bunyon, in his classic story, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, captures the darkness, danger, and intensity of the Christian’s wrestling match against Satan’s forces. The battle described here is between the aptly named Christian and his demonic foe, *Apollyon*.

Then *Apollyon* broke out into a grievous Rage, saying, I am an Enemy to this Prince; I hate his Person, his Laws, and People: I am come out on purpose to withstand thee.

Apollyon, beware what you do; for I am in the King’s highway, the Way of Holiness; therefore take heed to yourself.

Then *Apollyon* straddled quite over the whole breadth of the Way, and said, I am void of Fear in this matter; prepare thyself to die; for I swear by my infernal Den, That thou shalt go no further: Here will I spill thy Soul!

And with that he threw a flaming Dart at his breast; but *Christian* had a Shield in his hand, with which he caught it, and so prevented the danger of that.

Then did *Christian* draw; for he saw that it was time to bestir him; and *Apollyon* as fast made at him, throwing Darts as thick as hail; by the which, notwithstanding all that *Christian* could do to avoid it, *Apollyon* wounded him in his *head*, his *hand*, and *foot*. This made *Christian* give a little back: *Apollyon*, therefore, followed his Work amain, and *Christian* again took Courage, and resisted as manfully as he could. This sore Combat lasted for above half a day, even till *Christian* was almost quite spent. For you must know that *Christian*, by reason of his Wounds, must needs grow weaker and weaker.

Then *Apollyon*, espying his opportunity, began to gather up close to *Christian*, and wrestling with him, gave him a dreadful Fall; and with that *Christian’s* Sword flew out of his hand. Then said *Apollyon*, *I am sure of thee now*: And with that he had almost pressed him to Death; so that *Christian* began to despair of Life. But, as God would have it, while *Apollyon* was fetching of his last blow, thereby to make a full end of this good man, *Christian* nimbly reached out his hand for his Sword, and caught it, saying, *Rejoyce not against me, O mine Enemy! when I fall I shall arise*; and with that gave him a deadly thrust, which made him give back, as one that had received his mortal wound. *Christian* perceiving that, made at him again; saying, *Nay, in all these things we are more than Conquerors, through him that loved us*. And with that *Apollyon* spread forth his Dragon’s wings, and sped him away, that *Christian* saw him no more.¹

¹ John Bunyon, *The Pilgrim’s Progress* (Uhrichsville, Ohio: Barbour, 1985), 62-63.

WEEK NINE

Ephesians 6:10-24

Christian's battle seems otherworldly. But it is no more otherworldly than the battle in which you are engaged. Satan and his hosts are working to destroy you. They are not playing games. Your ability to stand under such intense fighting has nothing to do with your own strength. It has everything to do with the strength of God's armor and your decision to wear the armor and to use it.

Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints . . . Ephesians 6:14-18

The key word in this passage is the verb “stand” (verse 14). The participles that follow this verb (i.e., the “ing” words) in verses 14 through 16 all explain *how* the Christian is to stand.

We stand by fastening the belt of truth around our waist. This is probably referring to personal integrity. If we are to stand against the devil, we must walk in the truth. God delights in truthfulness.² Satan, however, is “the father of lies” (John 8:44). How do we think we can stand against him if we are speaking his own language?

We stand by putting on “the breastplate of righteousness”. The righteousness which we have been given in Christ isn't just an inward reality. It must be a reality that people can see. We must walk in righteousness.

Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. Romans 6:13

We stand by putting on—like a pair of fighting sandals—“the readiness given by the gospel of peace”. This probably refers to the foundation or the readiness which the gospel gives to the believer. Like the special shoes (sandals with nails in them) worn by a well-equipped Roman soldier, an understanding of the gospel gives us sure footing in any circumstance. If we know the gospel, that is, if God's Word rests deep in our hearts, then even while we are engaged in conflict, we will be able to have peace within.

We stand by taking up “the shield of faith”. We must, like the heroes in Hebrews 11, place our trust in God. We must know that he can and will extinguish the flaming arrows of the enemy. God will, as we read below, not abandon us in our struggle against the devil. He will come to our defense.

And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. 1 Peter 5:10

Verse 17 does not begin with a participle. However, the verb used in this verse (“take”) functions much like the participles in the previous verses. It explains how we are to stand.

We stand by taking the helmet of salvation. A helmet protects the head. The helmet of salvation protects our mind. When we think about our salvation, that is, when we think about the victory Christ won through his death, burial, and resurrection, our minds are protected from Satan's deception.

² See Psalm 51:6.

We stand by taking “the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God”. The word for sword here is descriptive of the Roman soldier’s short fighting sword. It was used for hand-to-hand combat. The weapon we use in our hand-to-hand combat with Satan and his forces is the Word of God. Christ used God’s Word during his temptations. We must follow his example. The need to know and to use God’s Word cannot be emphasized enough. We, of all people in the history of the world, have the least excuse to be biblically illiterate. We must study. But let us not study as mere scholars. Rather, let us study as people in love. Our studies must go beyond our heads. They must transform our hearts.

And finally, we stand by praying (apparently, Paul ran out of armor illustrations!). We cannot hope to stand if we do not pray. We are to pray “in the Spirit”. The Holy Spirit is the one who breathes life into our prayers. We are to pray about everything. Notice the number of times Paul uses the word “all” in verse 18. We are to pray “at all times”. We are to pray “with all prayer and supplication”. We are to pray “with all perseverance”. And we are to pray “for all the saints”.

This is how we stand. This isn’t, as I think about it, a very pleasant way to end a letter. Basically, the saints have just been told that they had better put their armor on. Paul doesn’t mince words as he speaks about the evil days ahead. As “an ambassador in chains”, he knows, all too well, the power of the enemy. But he also knows the power of the risen Christ. And that is why Paul, while chained, is still standing. May the same be said of us.

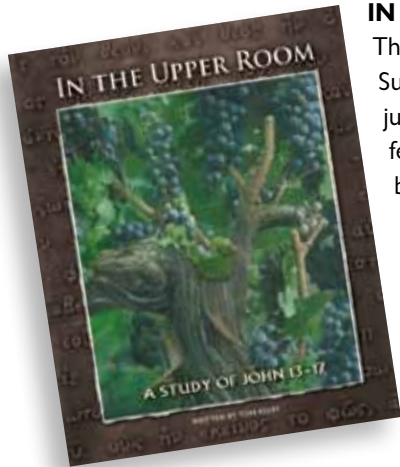
Bibliography

- Beale, G.K. and D.A. Carson, eds. *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2007.
- Boice, James Montgomery. *Ephesians: An Expositional Commentary*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2007.
- Bruce, F.F. *The Epistle to the Romans*. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1963.
- Bunyon, John. *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Uhrichsville, Ohio: Barbour, 1985.
- Danker, Frederick William, ed. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, Third Edition*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000.
- The ESV Study Bible, English Standard Version*. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Bibles, 2008.
- Foulkes, Francis. *The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians*. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1975.
- Gaebelein, Frank E., ed. *Ephesians-Philemon*. The Expositor's Bible Commentary 11. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1978.
- Grudem, Wayne. *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1994.
- Holman UltraThin Large Print Reference Bible*. Nashville, Tenn.: Holman Bible Publishers, 2004.
- Metzger, Bruce M. *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament, Second Edition*. Stuttgart, Germany: German Bible Society, 1994.
- O'Brien, Peter T. *The Letter to the Ephesians*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999.
- Piper, John and Wayne Grudem, eds. *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1991.
- Piper, John. *What's the Difference: Manhood and Womanhood Defined According to the Bible*. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1990.
- Ryken, Leland and Philip Graham Ryken, gen. eds. *The Literary Study Bible: ESV*. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2007.
- Vincent, Marvin Richardson. *Word Studies in the New Testament*. Bellingham, Wash.: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2002.
- Wallace, Daniel B. *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1996.

Additional Bible Study Resources

FROM HANDS TO THE PLOW MINISTRIES

Each book includes Scripture readings, study questions, and in-depth notes. Studies are suitable for individual or group studies. Leader's guides are available for some of these resources (please call for up-to-date list of available leader's guides). To view the first chapter of any of the studies listed below, visit our website at www.handstotheplow.org. \$12 each.

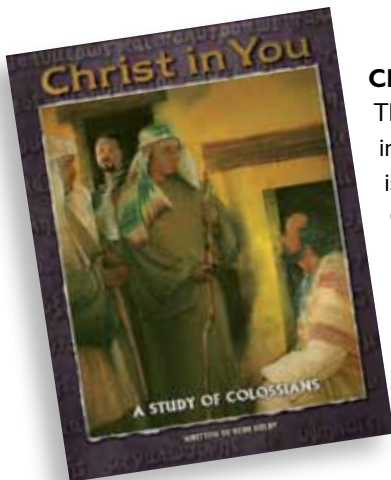
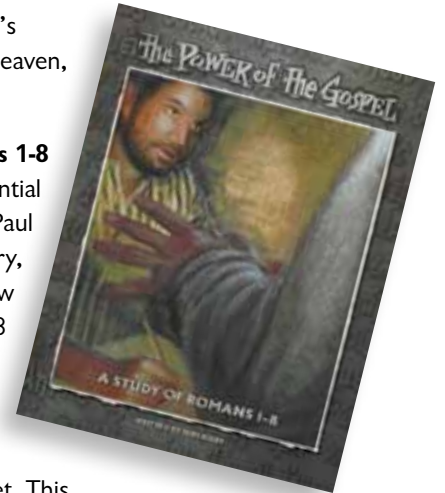


IN THE UPPER ROOM - A Study of John 13-17

This study is based on the words Jesus spoke to his disciples during and after the Last Supper. While John 1-12 covers a period of approximately three years, John 13-17 covers just a few hours. John devoted nearly 1/4 of his book to the words Jesus spoke in these few hours! Topics include the glory of God, the relationship between Jesus and the Father, the Holy Spirit, the believer's relationship with Jesus and with the Father, persecution, heaven, and much more. 100 pages. Eight-week study.

THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL - A Study of Romans 1-8

An understanding of these eight chapters is essential for every Christian and every church, for in them, Paul explains, in plain language, why salvation is necessary, how salvation has been made available to us, and how the Christian is to live in light of these truths. 128 pages. Eight-week study.

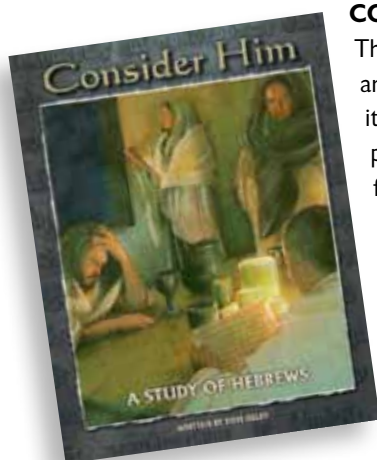
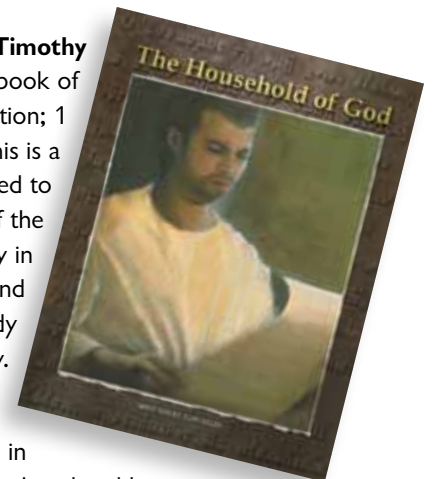


CHRIST IN YOU - A Study of Colossians

The secret of the fruitful and joyful Christian life is not found in harder work or greater discipline. Christ in you is the secret. This is the secret shared to all in the book of Colossians. Christ is in you (if you are a Christian)! He is your hope, your strength, your energy, your victory! He is where your faith needs to be placed! 96 pages. Eight-week study.

THE HOUSEHOLD OF GOD - A Study of 1 Timothy

1 Timothy is, in some respects, a counterpart to the book of Romans. Romans outlines the inner workings of salvation; 1 Timothy outlines the inner workings of the church. This is a topic of vital importance, because all Christians are called to be part of a local church. 1 Timothy presents a view of the church that is exciting to consider, and that often differs, quite radically in places, from that which many Christians have known. Pastors, elders, and deacons will be encouraged as they carefully work through this study book together. 104 pages. Eight-week study.



CONSIDER HIM - A Study of Hebrews

The letter to the Hebrews focuses on Jesus in a way not found in any other book in the Bible. Hebrews explains Jesus' high priesthood and how it relates to the day-to-day life of the believer. Without an understanding of Jesus' priestly ministry, believers grow tired and, like the Hebrew Christians, drift away from the Lord. 156 pages. 13-week study.

Hands to the Plow Ministries
P.O. Box 567, Webster, WI 54893
www.handstotheplow.org
715-349-7185

ος αποστολος χριστου ιησου ιστα
ματος θεου τοις αγιοις τοις ούτοι
ω και πιστοις εν χριστω ιησου
και ειρήνη απο θεου πατρος ημα
κυριου ιησου χριστου, ευλογητος
και πατηρ του κυριου ημων ιηου
ου, ο ευλογησας ημας εν παση
για πνευματικη εν τοις επουρανι
ουσιω, καθως εξελεξατο ημας εν
καταβολης κοσμου, ειναι ημας α
μωνους για αυτου εν α
ρισας ημας ιταν δια ιησ



www.handstotheplow.org