FOR THE GLORY OF GOD

CHRIST AND THE CHURCH IN EPHESIANS

Edited by
ED GALLAGHER

HERITAGE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY PRESS

For the Glory of God: Christ and the Church in Ephesians

Published by Heritage Christian University

Copyright © 2021 by Ed Gallagher

Manufactured in the United States of America

Cataloging-in-Publication Data

For the glory of God: Christ and the church in Ephesians / edited by Ed Gallagher

p. cm.

Includes scripture index.

ISBN 978-1-087939339 (pbk.)

1. Bible. Ephesians—Study and Teaching I. Gallagher, Edmon, editor.

II. Title.

BT121.2 .W49 2021 231.3—dc20

Library of Congress Control Number: 2021900177

Cover design by Brad McKinnon and Brittany Vander Maas.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law.
For information:

Heritage Christian University Press
3625 Helton Drive
PO Box HCU
Florence, AL 35630
www.hcu.edu

CONTENTS

Bible abbreviations v

1. IN CHRIST IS EVERY SPIRITUAL BLESSING 1
C. Wayne Kilpatrick

2. PAUL PRAYS 10
Travis Harmon

3. SAVED BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH 16
Bill Bagents

4. LIVING SANCTUARIES 23
Kirk Brothers

5. THE GREATEST UNSOLVED MYSTERY....SOLVED! 29
Jeremy W. Barrier

6. PAUL'S PRAYER 35
Michael Jackson

7. OUR ROLE IN GROWING THE CHURCH 45
Robert Youngblood

8. TRANSFORMATION IN CHRIST 52
Jeffrey Brothers

9. FORGIVENESS 58
Arvy Dupuy

10. FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT 65
Clay McFerrin

11. SUBMIT YOURSELVES TO ONE ANOTHER 72
Nathan Guy

12. MASTERS AND SLAVES 81
Ed Gallagher

13. BE STRONG IN THE LORD 93
Justin Guin

Scripture Index 112
Credits 117
Contributors 119
Berean Study Series Titles 121

BIBLE ABBREVIATIONS

Old Testament

Gen	Genesis
Exod	Exodus
Lev	Leviticus
Num	Numbers
Deut	Deuteronomy
Josh	Joshua
Judg	Judges
Ruth	Ruth
1–2 Sam	1–2 Samuel
1–2 Kgs	1–2 Kings
1–2 Chr	1–2 Chronicles
Ezra	Ezra
Neh	Nehemiah
Esth	Esther
Job	Job
Ps	Psalms
Prov	Proverbs
Eccl	Ecclesiastes

Song	Song of Solomon
Isa	Isaiah
Jer	Jeremiah
Lam	Lamentations
Ezek	Ezekiel
Dan	Daniel
Hos	Hosea
Joel	Joel
Amos	Amos
Obad	Obadiah
Jonah	Jonah
Mic	Micah
Nah	Nahum
Hab	Habakkuk
Zeph	Zephaniah
Hag	Haggai
Zech	Zechariah
Mal	Malachi

New Testament

Matt	Matthew
Mark	Mark
Luke	Luke
John	John
Acts	Acts
Rom	Romans
1–2 Cor	1–2 Corinthians
Gal	Galatians
Eph	Ephesians
Phil	Philippians
Col	Colossians

1–2 Thess	1–2 Thessalonains
1–2 Tim	1–2 Timothy
Titus	Titus
Phlm	Philemon
Heb	Hebrews
Jas	James
1–2 Pet	1–2 Peter
1–2–3 John	1–2–3 John
Jude	Jude
Rev	Revelation

FOR THE GLORY OF GOD

1

IN CHRIST IS EVERY SPIRITUAL BLESSING

C. WAYNE KILPATRICK

Focus Passage

Ephesians 1:3–14

One Main Thing

God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly Christ.

Introduction

This letter begins (1:3–14) with blessing God for all that is implied in His eternal choice of men, both Jews and Gentiles, "in Christ," for the Divine consummation of the universe, which is His goal. This is called a doxology or a song of praise to God. When Paul wrote verse 3, he wrote the very heart of the discussion (vv. 4–14), when he said that God had blessed us "with every spiritual blessing;" but the blessings are only available in the heavenly (spiri-

tual) Christ. Wilbur Fields calls this chapter the 'blessing chapter."[1]

The remainder of Paul's discussion concerning vv. 4–14, are an amplification of v. 3, and especially of the phrase "in Christ." The numerous times he uses such phrases as "in Christ" or "in Him" or similar phrases that refer to Christ plainly shows our need to be in Christ. Throughout Paul's writings he uses the phrase "in Christ" 164 times. He wanted us to know the necessity of being in Christ. "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal 3:27, KJV).

Paul also demonstrated the necessity of praising God, by using such phrases as "to the praise of His glory." In the passages under consideration, Paul used this phrase three times (1:6, 12, 14) which echoes Psalm 148:13 and Habakkuk 3:3. Even Jesus began the model prayer: "Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (Matt 6:9–10, KJV). Our model or pattern prayer tells us to begin prayer with praise to God—exactly the way Paul began Ephesians 1:3.

In this song of praise Paul demonstrates the purpose of these spiritual blessings. (1). That we should be holy and without blemish (blame) before God (1:4). (2). That we should be "to the praise of His glory" (1:6, 12, 14). (3). That He might gather in one all things in Christ, both the things that are in heaven, and that are on the earth; (1:10). These are the main things of vv.3–14. We shall see this as we begin to look deeper into these verses.

Going Deeper

Paul declares that through God's eternal design we were marked as recipients of these blessings: "according as He hath chosen us" or "selected us." Paul used the word *exelexato* for chosen or selected. It is a form of ἐκλεκτοῖς, which is a wrongfully translated as "elect." F. J. A. Hort said of the word *eklektois*: "Elect is, in the first instance, elect as a body, and members of an elect body, not simply as individuals."[2] Thus, the idea of election is not of individuals; but rather of groups—as Israel in the Old Testament, we who have been baptized into Christ—the church of the New Testament are a selected or chosen group. Paul wrote: "For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." (Gal 3:27, NASB) These are the elect, the chosen, the selected who will go to heaven.

Conditionally, We must remain faithful to God. He did not choose some individuals to go to hell and other individuals to go to heaven. We have a choice whether to serve or to disobey Him. That determines whether we shall be saved or be lost. John said: "... be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life" (Rev 2:10, KJV).

To be in God's selected group, there is a process known as adoption. It originated as a part of God's predetermined eternal plan. Paul begins with the word "predestinated." This word simply means to determine something ahead of time, to define, mark out, set apart, beforehand. God has foreordained us unto the adoption as His sons. We are reminded that this adoption is

"according to the good pleasure of His will." This is done "to the praise of the glory of His grace (vs. 6).

Up to this point there has been only one reference of any kind to sin in vv. 7–14. The one exception is a passing notice of the fact that it has been put out of the way. The exception is found in v. 7: "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;" (Eph 1:7, KJV) The latter part of Hebrews 9:22 says: "and without shedding of blood is no remission." We understand the need for the blood in connection with forgiveness of sins which qualifies us to be in Christ and chosen, selected of God.

Paul portrays sin as an intruder, an invading outsider who comes in to hinder the progress of the Divine Purpose. It can hinder or slow it down but cannot change it. J. Armitage Robinson said: "Sin indeed has served to magnify the grace of God."[3] Paul illustrates this: "But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." (Rom 5:20, KJV) The abounding grace of God bestowed on His chosen people is part of His eternal purpose. Paul uses the term "riches" (wealth) in relationship to God's grace. He spoke of "the riches of his grace;" in (v. 7). Paul uses the term "riches" five times in Ephesians and three times in Romans—all relating to the abounding qualities of God and His Son Jesus. That relationship comes through our being God's chosen or selected people. God gives us His Grace with understanding and prudence so that it will do the most good.

Now that God has bestowed His grace upon the chosen people, He revealed His mystery to them. (v. 9) begins: "Having made known to us the mystery of His

will." Paul often refers to the mystery of the gospel. It was about the acceptance of the Gentiles. Paul reveals the mystery, later in Ephesians 3:4, 6:

> Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) ... That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel.

The knowledge of the mystery came as a free gift to those who are in Christ—the chosen or selected. God has revealed to His people that His grace is extended universally to all (Jew and Gentile) who will accept it according to His New Testament.

Paul uses the word *oikomian*. The KJV renders it as dispensation. The word literally means "steward", "house manager," or "administrator." Christ is the true administrator over God's household—His kingdom—the universal church. Jesus Christ spoke of this authority: "All power is given unto me in heaven and earth" (Matt 28:18, KJV). Paul speaks of the time when Christ will turn that power and authority back to His Father:

> Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father, when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death (1 Cor 15:24–26, KJV).

Christ will be over everything until the last enemy—

death is destroyed. To sum up (vv. 9–10), those things that are in heaven and earth have been revealed to us and we are sharing in their blessing.

Now in (v. 11) our attention is turned to a new relationship to God. We were chosen or selected beforehand, by God to be His portion or lot, or His heritage. Here Paul used the word *eklerothemen* which means heritage. Peter uses a form of this word *kleron* in 1 Peter 5:3: "Neither as being lords over God's heritage but being examples to the flock." Here Peter uses heritage as the "church" or "flock" (KJV).

Of God's heritage, Paul spoke of the Jews who first believed and trusted in Christ and were full of hope (v. 12) and in (v. 13) he spoke of the Gentile Christians as being also in Christ. It was here for first time; Paul made a distinction between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians. He gave three stages by which they became Christians—by hearing, obedience of the faith, and being sealed. This was assurance to all believers that when they heard, believed, and obeyed, God set His seal upon them, as He did for us when we obeyed. Paul said: "ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, (v. 13) and Peter said:

> Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call (Acts 2:38–39).

This gift of the Holy Ghost or Spirit of promise is authentication of our security "in Christ." The Holy Spirit is given as the earnest of our inheritance. The word "earnest" means an installment paid at once and proof of good faith—"no intention to defraud or cheat." It is a portion of the whole to be paid in full. Paul said "ye have been sealed" until "the redemption of the purchased possession." He tells us that God included Gentile Christians as well as Jewish Christians to be co-heirs of the promise in Christ.

At last, Paul closes this great doxology with the repetition for the third time of the refrain, "to the praise of His glory." This is reminiscent of Jeremiah: "... that they might be unto Me for a people, and for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory ..." (Jer 13:11, KJV).

Application

There are three purposes of the blessings as given in this text.

First: "that we should be holy and without blame before him" (God). God desires to share heaven with the saved forever. He excludes people who are spotted with sin. This should cause us to always keep a penitent attitude in our heart. Do our best—"be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life" (Rev 2:10).

Second: "That we should be to the praise of his glory ..." (vv. 6, 12, 14). We are to praise God in Song and prayer. Heaven is a place of continual praise. Hear the Psalmist: "To the end that my glory may sing praise to thee, and

not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give thanks unto thee forever" (Ps 30:12).

Third: "That in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him." (Eph 1:10, KJV) Sin broke up the unity God intended for mankind. But now through His son Jesus Christ, God is working to bring the universe into harmony once again. Sinners will be excluded; but those in Christ will receive the blessings of salvation and will be counted as children of God and brethren of Christ. We should look forward to the time when Christ returns. Then all spiritual blessings in Christ will be realized.

Conclusion

> To sum up vv. 3–14: "The blessings, for which we bless God, are of a spiritual nature, in the heavenly sphere, in the exalted Christ. Its goal is the fulness of all virtues and love. It includes an adoption through Jesus Christ. Its motive lies far back in the will of God. God's grace, freely bestowed on us in His Well-beloved son, should be gloriously manifested and eternally praised."[4]

Through this grace that God has showered upon us God has sealed us as His own provided we remain faithful to Him.

Discussion Questions

1. Through whom or in whom do the blessings come? Why?
2. Why was God's will called a mystery?
3. What does "ye were sealed" mean?
4. With what were we sealed?

Endnotes

1. Wilbur Fields, *The Glorious Church* (Joplin, MO.: College Press, 1960), 26.

2. F. J. A. Hort, T*he First Epistle of St. Peter* (New York: McMillan, 1898), 14.

3. J. Armitage Robinson, *St. Paul's Epistle To The Ephesians*,(London: McMillan, 1907), 28.

4. Robinson, *St. Paul's Epistle To The Ephesians*, 28.

2

PAUL PRAYS

TRAVIS HARMON

Focus Passage

Ephesians 1:15–23

One Main Thing

Paul loves his little church, and he does what he can for them; he teaches, and he prays. But for what?

Introduction

Paul writes to his beloved friends in Ephesus. He had spent a lot of time there and had several amazing adventures in Ephesus according to Acts 19.

Paul prays. According to his writings, he prays a lot. Here he shares just why he is praying. It is really interesting to see exactly what someone like Paul says he prays for. He says, "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of

wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better."

Paul wants what every preacher wants for the members of his congregation and for every person he baptizes: that those members and converts would get to know God better. I often think that people who do not like God really just do not know who God really is. It is an idea David and I share, according to Psalm 3:48. If a person gets to know God better, the real God of the universe, he or she will be so much better off.

Paul says that there are three things that he wants the Ephesians to know about God: the hope, the riches, and God's power. Note verses 17–19 and see the poetic wording of these blessings Paul wants for his loved ones so badly that he keeps praying for it.

Going Deeper

Hope.

When our oldest child was born, we had the standard run up. We were so excited! Our parents came to visit. The nursery was painted, and the toys bought. We had baby showers that provided mountains of diapers stacked against the wall. But when she was born, she did not cry. The "temperature" of the room changed like I have never witnessed. It got quiet, and all the nurses started working with directed purpose. It is a memory that still causes me pain. For several minutes, the tension in the room communicated to us something we could not ask. There was a problem. Finally, she made a little sound, like a kitten. That was the smallest little sound I have ever

heard but provided the greatest hope my heart has known. Hope.

Paul wants you to know the hope we have. The eyes of your heart can be opened so you can understand this level of hope! The hope of new life. I wish everyone could really understand this hope to which he has called each of us. This hope that we have is real. God is real, and this hope we have in salvation is concrete (Heb 6:19).

Riches.

Paul also prays that you know the riches of his glorious inheritance that his people will receive. When you think about riches, do you think about money? I do. When I think about inheritance, I definitely think about money. But, this inheritance that he is talking about is far above money. We do not give because God needs our money. We give because WE need God to have our money. Some things in life are more valuable than money. If you have ever watched *It's a Wonderful Life* do you remember the quote, "No man is a failure who has friends." A person who has relationships has something more valuable than money.

When I was a child, our house burned down at Christmas time. I remember standing in the snow in my pajamas thinking we had nothing as I was watching our house burn. Practically every member of our church and community came and stood in our yard with us and cried. That is another hard memory for me but for completely different reasons. I have never seen or experienced love like we did that year. Christian brothers and sisters who would have never had an opportunity to demonstrate their love and the depth of their feelings for

us were given a way to do just that. We felt it. We discovered that we had riches beyond money. Every need was met, and we ended up better off in every way, to the extent that now I almost feel sorry for Christians who haven't experienced a house fire at Christmas.

You just can't tell somebody what it feels like to be surrounded by Jesus and his people. Oh! That you knew what the glory of the riches of HIS inheritance are! The riches of his glorious inheritance will be beyond wealth. The riches of the inheritance of resurrection from ashes is hard to communicate!

Power.

There are a lot of examples of power in this world. I recently drove down to the Gulf Coast for a friend's wedding. There was damage everywhere from a recent hurricane. The power that storms can wield is hard to imagine, thunder and lighting and water and wind. The power of the fury of nature is terrible and awe inspiring.

We live in the Tennessee River Valley. It is an amazing sight to behold the lakes and dams on the river. The electricity and industry that is powered by the mighty Tennessee River provides not only the power to create but the power to inspire the poets and artists.

Many parts of nature are powerful, but a baby, that is even more so. A child changes your life. Becoming a parent changes you in a way you cannot even imagine until it happens. When I was a young preacher, I thought I could talk about parenting because I understood, but I did not. Bringing a baby home is life changing. That baby is power; they squeak, and you run. That little baby girl or boy wields a power over your life like you could

not have imagined. That six pound baby can make a 125 pound woman beat up a grizzly bear or die trying.

Faith Hill sings a song called *A Baby Changes Everything* that is accurate. It really does. It took me a while to actually listen to the lyrics of that song and to realize it was about Jesus.

Choir of angels sing
Glory to the newborn King
A baby changes everything.
A baby changes everything
My whole life has turned around
I was lost but now I'm found

A baby changes everything....

Application

Jesus's birth changed everything. Being born again to become a Christian should too. Being born again leads to the real power, the power over death. Jesus has power we cannot imagine. He had power to raise up after he was killed. Acts 2:24 says it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him. His power will raise you too.

Conclusion

I wish that you would know God better. I pray for that. I pray that you know the hope to which he has called you.

I pray that you will know the glory of the riches of His

inheritance and the exceeding greatness of His power! He will raise from death to live with Him in glory, just like Jesus did.

Do you have that hope? Do you know real riches? Do you understand his power?

Discussion Questions

1. In verses 22 and 23, the church is called the body of Christ. How do we get in the body (see 1 Cor. 12:13)?
2. Have you ever converted anybody? Discuss the feeling of responsibility for that person spiritually and what it feels like to imagine that he or she could be lost? Why don't we feel responsible for those not converted?
3. What do you think Paul would say he was praying for you and/or your congregation if he were writing to you from prison?
4. In verse 15, Paul mentions two things that he's heard about them, _____ in the Lord and _____ for all the saints. Discuss the importance of those two concepts.
5. What would Paul have heard about you or your congregation? List two or three things you would say your community knows about your congregation, and then read John 13:35.

3

SAVED BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH

BILL BAGENTS

Focus Passage

Ephesians 2:1–10

One Main Thing

Salvation cannot be earned; it comes by grace through faith.

Introduction

Romans 6:23 stands forever true: "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Ephesians 2:1–10 eloquently elaborates on that truth. Our problem with sin does not flow from any deficiency with God (Isa 59:1–3). Rather, it flows from His utter holiness and the inability of anything sinful to stand in His presence.

In that sin spiritually kills every sinner (Rom 3:23),

each of us lies before God just as dead as the dry bones of Ezekiel 37. And we are powerless to raise ourselves. To be fair, our spiritual state is far worse than that. Not only has sin killed us spiritually, it rules and uses us as we live out our few remaining days (Rom 6:6–11).

But this is not the case for Christians! We **were dead**. We **once walked** in sin. We **formerly followed** the course of this world and the prince of the power of the air. We **once lived** among the sons of disobedience as children of wrath, but no more! God has acted through His beloved Son. What we most needed and could never even begin to do, God has done. And Ephesians 2:1–10 tells us how.

Going Deeper

What are the options for salvation from sin? Several have been proposed. Ignoring Romans 3:13 and 1 John 1:10, some falsely claim never to have sinned. A modified version of this claim is "Sure, I've sinned, but never at the level that merits separation from God." What a sad misunderstanding of both God and sin!

Some propose that we can be saved by linking ourselves to the meritorious status of others—apostles, patriarchs, saints, or heroes. The Bible knows nothing of such linkage. It clearly asserts Jesus as "**the** way, **the** truth and **the** life" (John 14:6, 8:24; Acts 4:8–12).

Others propose to offset their sin by virtue of good works. On the scales of eternal justice, all that's needed is one more good deed than the accumulated weight of sin. That tips the scales to salvation and all is well. Paul will have none of that! From a legal perspective, dead people

have no standing to act before God. Creatures have no standing to accrue merit before their Creator. Think of what Jesus said even of faithful servants: "So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants, we have only done what was our duty.'"

Knowing the frailty of the argument above, others offer a modification. "Yes, salvation is by grace through faith, but that's not the whole story. God lets us do all that we can toward our eternal salvation; then by grace through faith, He mercifully supplies what we lack." This sounds so good, especially in our individualistic Western culture. But it's stunningly opposite Ephesians 2:1–10. We don't supply. We can't supply. God raises us from spiritual death, saves us by grace through faith: "It is the gift of God, not a result of works." That in no sense opposes choosing to believe God and choosing to obey the gospel. Rather, it clearly and forcefully reminds us that works of merit have nothing to do with salvation from sin.

This section of Paul's letter beautifully describes God's motivation for saving us by grace through faith. Ephesians 2:1–4 documents that God knew our hopeless state. He not only knew, He cared. He refused to leave us without recourse.

Our text extols God's virtues that led Him to send Jesus on our behalf. He is "rich in mercy," He has great love for us—how beautifully Ephesians 4:4 echoes Romans 5:6–8. He loves to unite: "He made us alive together with Christ" (Eph 4:5). He acts from, shows, and shares "the immeasurable riches of His grace" (Eph 4:7). He acts from astounding kindness (Eph 4:7). And He

loves to create people capable of sharing in the good works of His dear Son (Eph 4:10).

We often speak of grace as unmerited favor. God's grace is both unmerited and unmeritable. Without the grace of His written revelation, we could know only what creation tells us (Ps 19, Rom 1:20). From His revelation, we learn so much more of His power, goodness, and character.

Biblically we speak of faith as "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Heb 11:1). More broadly, faith is trusting, obeying, and embodying both the attitude and the doctrine of Christ. It never lacks passion, commitment, obligation, or purpose. It pulls us ever upward toward the mission and the heart of God.

How should we understand Ephesians 2:9, "not a result of works, so that no one may boast"? God is stunningly anti-pride because pride is stunningly anti-God. Human pride seeks to deny God's sovereign reign. On some level, human pride says, "I don't need God. I can handle life on my own." Ephesians 2:1–10 destroys that myth. The dead have no life, no power, no hope, and no recourse. Those who hold on to pride have no way to accept salvation by grace through faith. Such people will be saved on their terms or not at all. God offers no such option.

Ephesians 2:9 may also be preparatory. Those ruled by pride are not ready for life in the kingdom. They will chafe at God's commands, finding them burdensome (1 John 5:1–3). They will resist God's leading and deny themselves the joy of serving God fully out of love.

Scripture has a wonderful way of turning life right-

side-up. That's part of the beauty of Ephesians 2:10. We don't work to earn or merit salvation. We're saved so that we can know the blessings of serving others to the glory of God. Titus 2:13–14 elaborates: "Our great God and Savior Jesus Christ ... gave himself for us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works." We are saved in order to become God's people of good works. It's a superb part of being a new creation in Christ (2 Cor 5:17). Only through Christ are we qualified to serve God (Heb 13:15–16). In Christ, good works help form the core of our identity.

Application

What did Paul want the Ephesian Christians to do with the words of Ephesians 2:1–10? The remainder of the chapter offers three answers. We are to recognize, appreciate, and build upon our grace-created unity with all who are in Christ. We are to glorify God for His majestic gift of Jesus Christ. And we are to live up to our God-given standing as the living temple of God. We have so much to live up to. Ephesians 4:17–5:21 implores us to become what God has made us. As we continue "to grow up in every way into him who is the head" (Eph 4:15), we have boundless good news to share with others. Everyone must hear this message of hope!

From within the text itself, we are to marvel at what God has done for us. Spiritually speaking, He has raised us from the dead. He has made us alive together with Jesus. And "he has sealed us in the heavenly places in

Christ Jesus." The more those truths fill our minds, the more amazement, gratitude, and joy will fill our hearts.

Knowing the woeful prevalence and depth of misunderstanding surrounding salvation by grace through faith and the relationship between faith and works, we speak God's truth clearly and in love. Salvation by merit is false and hopeless. "So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead" (Jas 2:17). False teaching leads only to false hope.

Without doubt, Ephesians 2:1–10 calls on us to renounce and resist pride. We could not save ourselves, and we did not save ourselves. Only by grace through faith is there any hope. By grace through faith, hope abounds, anchors, and advances until it ends in glorious sight.

Finally, our text also moves us to be what we are: "his [God's] workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works." We give Him our best while asking Him to make our best better (Col 3:23–24, Matt 25:20–21 & 29).

Conclusion

What a matchless God we serve! What we could not do, He did. What we most needed, He provided at the greatest of costs. He makes us both His workmanship and His workers—allowing us the dual honor of living for Him now and living with Him forever.

Discussion Questions

1. Why does Ephesians 2:1–10 continue to stir such passionate debate among people who believe in Jesus Christ?
2. What are the spiritual dangers of thinking that we somehow earn our salvation?
3. What are the dangers of denying that Christians must be people of continual good works?
4. Why is it impossible to be saved by works of merit?
5. Make a list of good works that God has made available for you to both demonstrate and grow your faith.

4

LIVING SANCTUARIES

KIRK BROTHERS

Focus Passage

Ephesians 2:11–22

One Main Thing

The Ephesians went from being strangers to being a sanctuary.

Introduction

My family and I are fans of the SyFy channel show *Face Off*. It is a competition for professional makeup artists. They are given different challenges each week that require them to display their skills in sculpting, painting, fabricating, and costuming. At the end of each episode, there is a reveal stage in which models display the artists' work for a panel of judges. The judges examine the creations and decide both who had the best work that

week and which contestant goes home. One of my favorite parts of the show is a slow-motion montage they do for each makeup creation that reveals the transformation from the model's face and body all the way through the process of application until you arrive at the final product. The before-and-after transformation is often amazing.

Paul, too, was fond of painting spiritual before-and-after word pictures in his letters.

Going Deeper

Paul gave two before-and-after pictures in Ephesians 2. Verses 1–10 highlight individual Christians ("From Death to Life"), and verses 11–22 emphasize a group, the Gentiles ("From Strangers to a Sanctuary"). It is that second picture which garners our attention for this lesson.

The Separation

There were degrees of access in the Jewish Temple courts. There was the court of the Jewish women, and then inside of that was the court of the Jewish men. Next came an area accessible only to the priests and Levites. Only priests could enter the holy place, and the most holy place was entered only by the high priest once per year, on the Day of Atonement. Outside of all of this was the court of the Gentiles (non-Jews). Between the court of the Gentiles and the main structure of the temple was a wall. On this wall was a saying written in Greek and Latin which roughly said, "No foreigner is to enter within the

balustrade and embankment around the sanctuary. Whoever is caught will have himself to blame for his death which follows."

The Romans generally did not allow the Jews to practice capital punishment. (This is why Pilate had to put Jesus to death.) They made one exception: violating the temple. If a non-Jew went past the dividing wall and into the main portion of the temple grounds, the Jews were allowed to stone that person. Acts 21:27–35 tells us that the apostle Paul was falsely accused of taking a non-Jew past this wall. A mob in the temple courts tried to beat him to death, and the Roman commander of the nearby Fortress Antonia had to intervene to save him. Who was he accused of taking into the temple? It was Trophimus, from Ephesus. Yes, that's right, Ephesus.

The Strangers

Acts 21–28 tells us that Paul was arrested by the Roman commander in Jerusalem, then transferred to a prison in Caesarea, and finally transferred to a prison in Rome. This all began because he was accused of taking a Christian from Ephesus past the dividing wall. It is from that Roman prison that Paul wrote the letter to Ephesus that we are studying. He was in prison because of the dividing wall and because of his relationship with a member of the church in Ephesus. The Christians there would have known this story well. When we realize this, what Paul says here springs to life.

Paul sought to describe in word pictures the condition of separation from both God and the Jewish nation that

these Ephesian Christians had known before Christ. Notice the words he uses: "Uncircumcision" (code language for "lost eternally"), "separate," "excluded," "strangers, aliens," "far off," "enmity," and "without God." Because they did not have God, they did not have hope. There was no better symbol of this "stranger" status than the dividing wall. There was no better illustration of the power of this wall than Paul's imprisonment in Rome.

The Sanctuary

Paul transitioned from the before picture to the after picture with the phrase "But now" (cf. "But God" in 2:4). The words that follow are very deliberate: "near," "peace," "one," "put to death the enmity," "reconcile," "together," and "access." John Stott notes that the Greek term, *prosagōgē*, translated as "access" in verse 18, "conjures up the scene in an oriental court, when subjects are granted an audience with the king or emperor"[1] (cf. Heb 4:16). All that had once separated them had been removed in Christ. This is symbolized in the fact that Jesus symbolically "broke down the barrier of the dividing wall" (Eph 2:14). The dividing wall that resulted in Paul's imprisonment had no more power (though it was still physically standing at the time). He says that in Christ, Jews and non-Jews are brought together to become a new spiritual race ("one new man," 2:15) and to become a temple in which God's Spirit dwells (2:22).

Application

There are many applications that might be made from this passage, but here are a couple that stand out to me. First of all, Jesus is the path to racial equality. He erases the barriers that separate people. All Christians come together to form a new spiritual race. All the things that one separated us should disappear. Second of all, one of the most precious gifts that God gave His people is hope. Before Jesus, the Ephesians had no hope because they did not have God. Jesus gave them and gives us access to God, and thus access to hope. Because of that, we have a reason to rise every morning and peace when we rest each night.

Conclusion

Paul painted an amazing picture. He used the backdrop of his imprisonment and events in Jerusalem to show the Ephesians what they had in Jesus. If they had visited the temple in Jerusalem, they could not have gotten close to God. They could not have crossed the dividing wall. On the cross, Jesus destroyed the power of that wall. After Jesus, the Ephesians became temples. They could not go to God before. Through Jesus, God came to them! Praised be our God!

Discussion Questions

1. How did it impact you when you learned the backstory from Acts 21?
2. How does this backstory help us to understand this passage?
3. How can being "one new man" in Christ help us to practice racial love, unity, and equality?
4. What are the implications of God's Spirit indwelling His people?
5. What is the most valuable thing you have learned from this lesson?

Endnotes

1. John Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1979), 103.

5

THE GREATEST UNSOLVED MYSTERY….SOLVED!

JEREMY W. BARRIER

Focus passage

Ephesians 3:1–13

One Main Thing

The boundless riches of God's mercy are available to —everyone.

Introduction

What happened to Amelia Earhart? Earhart—a pioneering female aviator pilot—became instantly famous in 1928, when she became the first female to successfully fly solo across the Atlantic Ocean. However, in 1937, she would begin an even greater journey when she would attempt to circumnavigate the globe. Ever since this famous, female aviator's Lockheed Electra 10E airplane disappeared somewhere in the Pacific Ocean,

her disappearance has easily been one of the all-time most significant unsolved mysteries in the history of the United States. To this day, there is no conclusive explanation to what happened to this icon of American pop culture.

If we were to step back roughly 2,000 years, the apostle Paul was ecstatic about the fact that an unsolved mystery, shall we say *the unsolved mystery of all of history*, had just been solved. Paul knew how God would ultimately save all of humanity ... through Christ.

Going Deeper

As we near the center of Paul's beautiful letter that we call Ephesians, he tips our hand to several important insights. Of significance to our purposes is that this is the essential and proverbial "fulcrum" to the letter. Metaphorically, this is the centerpiece of a seesaw that is slowly tipping from one side to the other. On the former side (of which we are nearing the end in this chapter) is Paul laying out an argument for his listening community to consider. It is an argument that explains the activity of the Divine. Paul is providing the groundwork for his community to understand and appreciate the generosity of God. On the latter side of the seesaw's fulcrum sits the practical applications of the text. If the recipients of this letter truly understand Paul's arguments, then it will inevitably lead to changes in their life that Paul will outline in chapters four through six. An amazing moment. So what is the message of Ephesians 3:1–13? The message can be described with four basic points.

First, the old mystery of how God would save Israel, and even further all of humanity, had puzzled teachers and readers of Scripture for centuries. How would it be accomplished? The mystery had been revealed in Christ, says Paul (Eph 3:3–5). The prophets of Israel had lamented over the collapse of their nation, and had eagerly longed for a deliverer; a descendent of King David, no less (Eph 2:14, Isa 9:5 and Mic 5:4). How would God raise up a new savior for Israel who could bring peace to the nation and even the world beyond? The anointed one, the Christ, was none other than Jesus!

Second, the significance of this revelation was immense. Not only was God going to offer mercy to the people of Israel, but more important, the offer of God's grace was also being extended to all people (Eph 3:6). The designs of God were intended to not only impact Israel, but this reign of God was intended to reach out to everyone who was a non-Jew, namely a "Gentile". In other words, a Gentile refers to any people from all of the "nations" other than Israel. God's mercy was for them also.

Third, a pivotal point in Paul's writing is that *he* had been personally designated to carry this message to the nations (3:2, 7–8)! One of Paul's most important and paradoxical truths is that *he*, had personally been selected to carry this message of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles. Paul, the former persecutor of the Christ followers, was not an Apostle (Acts 9:1–22; Gal 1:15–16; 1 Cor 15:9–11).

Last, but not least, the revealing of this mystery was the equivalent of God opening the floodgates of heaven and allowing His eternal treasures to pour out over all of

humanity (3:10–11). An amazing revelation. An amazing announcement!

Application

The profound nature of Paul's insight here is often missed, if we find ourselves to unreflective about such 'deeper' truths of life. However, if one simply stops to think deeply about the reality of sin that pervades the world, then this begins to come closer to home. Without trying to be overly bleak or discouraging, one should stop and consider some of the events that we see happening across the globe. As I sit here and write these very words, there are thousands dying around the globe; Dying from illness, pneumonia, COVID-19, and unfortunately even starvation or violence. There is someone who is being killed by another human being now, by the pulling of a trigger or the through a physical assault of violence to the body. Cancers, heart attacks, automobile accidents, drug overdoses, and on and on, we could go in laying out the plight of humanity in struggling with sin and death. It is indeed a dark thought. However, it is unfortunately very real. I have sat in too many intensive care units and slept uncomfortably in hospital waiting rooms to think otherwise. I have seen the pain of death and suffering. This is the plight.

What does Paul say is the answer? God is offering relief, redemption, and hope to all of humanity—ALL of humanity—through Jesus. The blessings of God will come to all of us through the church—God's great mystery revealed. The church is the vehicle by which

Jesus Christ would make it possible to transport us out of our difficult plight of sin. This is the great reveal. This is the solution. This is the mystery solved!

Conclusion

I began this chapter by encouraging us to think about the mystery of the disappearance of Amelia Earhart. You see, while this might be a puzzle of the modern world, I think it also speaks to us in deeper ways as well. First of all, I think that so many people were shocked and concerned over the disappearance of Amelia Earhart, because there was such a public "love" for this amazing heroine and role model for so many young girls and women coming up in the world with examples like her. Her disappearance was indeed a tragedy and a public loss. If we take just a moment to stop and consider this situation, we can easily see how the apostle Paul was also wrestling with this same loss, in a sense, in a much more extensive and grander level. The tragedy and losses that each of us feel in our own private lives, in a sense, are also shared. We share in the plight of sin and death. I think Paul's point here in Ephesians 3:1–13 is that we can also share in the solution. We can share in the salvation of humanity and the outpouring of God's riches upon us all. This is a mystery revealed and a grand thought indeed!

Discussion

1. Who does Paul suggest has been selected to share the revealed mystery to the Gentiles? Who are the Gentiles? Are there Gentiles today, and who are they?
2. What is the "mystery" that Paul writes about in Ephesians 3:3–5? Why do you think he calls it a "mystery"?
3. In Ephesians 3:6, Paul suggests that the Gentiles have become "heirs" and "sharers" in the promises of God. What are they sharing? What are they inheriting?
4. In Ephesians 3:13, Paul suggests that he had been "suffering" for the readers of this letter, and further, he doesn't want them to be concerned about this. In other words, Paul's sufferings had come about in his effort to deliver this profound news of God's revealing the mystery. Have you ever struggled intently and consistently to bring about something good for others around you? How did it feel to you? Was it difficult? Did it all seem "worth it" when the "suffering" paid off and you got your desired results?

6

PAUL'S PRAYER

MICHAEL JACKSON

Focus Passage

Ephesians 3:14–21

One Main Thing

Knowing and understanding the love of Christ requires experience as much as it does any sort of mental comprehension. And even after experiencing and studying it, we will still be left trying to comprehend the incomprehensible.

Introduction

What is love?

This has been the question of philosophers, theologians, poets, writers, and musicians (especially the artist Haddaway in the early '90s). How do we understand it?

How do we comprehend it? What is its nature or substance?

Hopefully as you've taken time to work through this series of written lessons and sermons based on the magnificent letter to the Ephesians in our Bible, you have been blown away by God's provision for us as his children. I've enjoyed "digging in" myself. Can you imagine those early Christians receiving the letter for the first time, with its many interesting and challenging passages all in one reading! That would be something to take in!

At its heart, it seems to me that Ephesians is an opportunity for Paul to praise God to Christians, so that they (we) can see what God has really done for them (us), especially those who are Gentiles (not Jewish).

Going Deeper

In addition to praising God, Paul seems to also want these Christians to know some specific things as he prays for them. You can see the first prayer in Ephesians 1:15–23, and we will study the second prayer and resulting doxology here in Ephesians 3:14–21. The early part of chapter 1, all of chapter 2 and the first part of chapter 3 are Paul's reminders of all that God has done. And in chapters 4–6, Paul takes us on a journey of Christian living that flows from this understanding of God that he establishes in these first 3 chapters.

Our passage in Ephesians 3:14 opens with Paul emphasizing specifically to the readers his posture in prayer. He "bows his knees." I have known people that

choose to change their posture each time when they pray. My kids, in particular, were taught to fold their hands in prayer and bow their heads.

Why do we do that? Even now sometimes during worship, my 7-year-old forgets to pay close attention to what is happening around him. He may be drifting off in a daydream when the prayer is being led. What do I do? I give him the signal. Folded hands. This symbol tells him that it is time to stop daydreaming, time to give reverence to God, and time to focus on what is being prayed. In short, it is time to worship.

A bowed knee creates an especially visual picture of submission. I have known men who choose to take a knee when they lead public prayers in worship. It makes an impression. Submission is a matter of the heart just as much as it is a matter of body posture, but Paul is creating a visual picture of his submission to God in this prayer. He wants the reader to know that this prayer brings him to his knees in submission. And why is that?

It is an interesting question. Paul says in 3:14 that he is praying "for this reason," but when you go back and try to find exactly what his reason is, you might have a bit of a hard time. Commentators have wrestled with this in various ways.

You might find it interesting to see that Paul actually tried to start this prayer in Ephesians 3:1. He starts his prayer but then gets caught up in what he is saying! His mention of his ministry to the Gentiles causes him to expound upon the way God appointed him to be a minister to the Gentiles. It is only 14 verses later that he is

able to resume his train of thought! I know this never happens to you.

So, the "reason" for Paul's prayer can't only be something in Chapter 3, it needs to go back at least to the end of Chapter 2. As you learned in a previous lesson already, you know that the end of Chapter 2 is where Paul says that God has made Gentiles a part of the "household of God!" With Christ as the cornerstone foundation of the house, that means that Jews and Gentiles get to be a part of one family!

I know that for many of us, this kind of thing is hard to make relevant in our modern mind. "So what," we might think, being so far removed from the first century and the divisions between Jews and Gentiles. The easiest way I know how to make it relevant is to get you to consider this- how many of you reading this chapter are directly descended from Jewish ancestry? If God never brought Gentiles into the family of God, would you be a part of God's family right now? That's a pretty big deal.

Since God has brought Gentiles into the family through the mystery of God in Christ, it causes Paul to bow his knees and pray for the Gentiles that are coming into this new family. You can see this in Ephesians 3:14–15. The Father names the family. And since God has named us as part of the family, Paul says that he wants some things for us as part of the family.

In many inscriptions of Roman emperors during the timeframe of the New Testament and early Christianity, the emperor would call himself the "father of the fatherland."[1] We see here that God trumps all of that—every

family in heaven and on earth derives its name from the one true Father. It is God's right to bring us into the family and name us as one of his children.

Paul wants two things granted to the Gentiles (and conversely, to us) in Ephesians 3:16–17. He wants these things granted "according to the riches of his glory." This ties his prayer in chapter 3 with the prayer in chapter 1. See particularly verse 18 where Paul says that he prays that we will know what the riches of God's glory are. If we are pulling up our buckets from the well of God's glory, what do we expect to find within?

The answer, according to Paul's prayer, is "to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inner man," which in this instance is parallel to the idea of "Christ dwelling in our hearts through faith." We can get a bit tripped up here on Paul's meaning if we try to work too technically with his wording. If you are looking for a scientific explanation for how the Spirit works or what exactly the inner man is in physical terms, you will by definition be left with only more good questions to chase in other places. Paul isn't trying to answer those questions here.

Paul's point is that he's praying for us to be strengthened with power and for Christ to dwell in the center of our very being through faith and the Spirit. The key to it all is wrapped up in faith. Paul isn't here asking that the Gentiles he's writing to come to initial faith in Jesus. That wouldn't make any sense (look how he says he's already heard of the faith that exists among them in 1:15).

If they have faith, why is Paul praying that they have

faith? It reminds me a lot of the father in Mark 9:24 who cries out to Jesus, "I do believe; Help my unbelief!" It isn't that the Gentiles here don't have true faith. It isn't that you and I don't have true faith. What Paul prays for is the kind of growing faith that brings Christ to dwell at the center of our heart, at the center of our very being. Faith involves a relationship between two parties, we don't "let God do it all" nor do we "do it all on our own." As our faith grows, Paul says, Christ's dwelling in our heart grows with it. This is a kind of spiritual strength, powered by the riches of God's glory.

You may be wondering by now why I haven't mentioned my initial question What is love? since I brought it up at the beginning. What does my question have to do with Paul's prayer here?

As I said, everyone has explored the question of what love is at some point in their life. Little children, in relationship with their parents, even though they don't have the words to say it, certainly begin to form concepts of love early on. The oldest among us, while much wiser and with a lot better vocabulary, still seek to comprehend it more fully.

And, surprisingly, this is what Paul prays for—that they "know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge" (Eph 3:19).

To do that, Paul says that they (and we, consequently) have to be "rooted and grounded in love." These words occur in a sense which is really hard to translate into English. What this literally means is that Paul is praying that the readers who have already been rooted and grounded in love and who continue to be rooted and

grounded in love come to a comprehension or knowledge of the love of Christ.

Application

D. Marion Clark says it this way: "Note the connection. In order for them to have real understanding of the love of Christ, they need to be grounded themselves in love. They cannot be expected to understand what is not taking place within themselves to some degree."[2]

In other words, knowing and understanding the love of Christ requires experiencing it as much as it does any sort of mental comprehension. And even with all of our experience and study, we will still be left trying to comprehend the incomprehensible.

I think Ephesians 3:18 makes this point better than anything I could ever say myself. Paul, when trying to describe what he is talking about, isn't able to complete his thought, but rather decides to say, "I pray that you will comprehend what is the breadth and length and height and depth." It reminds me a lot of the old adage, "How far is east from west? How far is north from south? Where does one end and the other begin?"

Paul says, I want you to comprehend that! I want you to know it! I want you to understand it! I want to pray for it for you! This God that I have been praising throughout this letter, who made you a part of his own family, who loved you with the love of sacrifice by sending his own Son to be the price for your sins—I want you to understand that love! The love from East to West and North to South, from the top to the bottom and the left to the

right, to the heights and depths and everything in between, I pray for you to comprehend that!

And the way he indicates that we can comprehend it is by experiencing it and practicing it ourselves. As John would say in his letter in 1 John 4:8: "Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love." Mental assent is not enough. Intellectual comprehension does not suffice. What we cannot experience ourselves—if only to a small degree—we cannot adequately understand. And, thus, to know the truth of God one must be able to love.

Conclusion

What is the goal of this prayer for Paul? Well, it is the same as a theme mentioned several times in the letter-that we may be filled up to all the fullness of God! Now there's a thought!

What happens if we have faith such that Christ dwells in our hearts, and love such that we begin to comprehend the love of Christ? Then we begin to be filled up to all the fullness of God! And what is that? We find more specifics in Ephesians 4:13—it is maturity, it is "growing up," it is becoming more of what God has designed us to become, it is becoming his true church and body. Paul says as much at the close of the first prayer in Ephesians 1:23.

We see this several times in Paul's writings ... where he is so overwhelmed with the beauty of the thought that he breaks out into praise and worship of God in Ephesians 3:20–21. May this same praise be on our lips:

> Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever! Amen!

Discussion Questions

1. What is significant about Paul mentioning his posture in prayer as he prays for the Ephesian Christians?
2. What is the reason for Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3:14–21?
3. What does it mean for Christ to dwell in our hearts through faith?
4. How does Paul suggest through his prayer that we might come to a comprehension of love? What are the key, required elements?
5. What do you think it means to be "filled up to all the fullness of God?" How might we accomplish that?

Endnotes

1. Ben Witherington, III. *The Letters to Philemon, the Colossians, and the Ephesians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Captivity Epistles*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans,

2007), Logos edition, ch. 5, "The Homily Called Ephesians."

2. D. Marion Clark, "The Truth in Love," SermonCentral, 15 Nov 2010, https://www.sermoncentral.com/ser-mons/the-truth-in-love-d-marion-clark-sermon-on-truth-151670?page=1&wc=800.

7

OUR ROLE IN GROWING THE CHURCH

ROBERT YOUNGBLOOD

Focus Passage

Ephesians 4:16

One Main Thing

The body of Christ is designed to grow, and to do so through the efforts of its members.

Introduction

In the late 1800's, Charles Spurgeon, a popular Baptist preacher of the time, speaking in a sermon at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, said to his audience, "Have you no wish for others to be saved? Then you are not saved yourself. Be sure of that." Our first reaction to such a statement is that of course we want others to be saved. We would not wish eternal damnation on anyone. When Jesus compares his kingdom to a mustard seed in Luke

13:19 (NKJV used throughout), He clearly suggests that both are meant to grow when planted and watered. We all seem to understand the idea that the church should be adding to its numbers collectively, as well as within our own congregations. We often show faith and support for our local leadership as they try to grow our numbers. The disconnect comes when we begin to see church growth as a role reserved specifically for those leaders. We wish them luck in saving those souls, and we might even give a little extra when someone we know is working in a mission field. We will learn in this lesson that not only are church leaders told to plant and water, but that all Christians are to use their talents to bring others to Christ. We will take "wishing" for others to be saved to a new level. We will explore the idea that if we have an ability and an opportunity, then we have a responsibility to actively participate in the growth of the Kingdom of God, and we will find some ways we can accept those responsibilities.

Going Deeper

Today, in the United States of America, the number of those professing to be members of the Lord's church hovers around a million people. At our peak, in the early 1970's, we boasted of some 2.5 million Christians. If the body of Christ is designed to grow, and it clearly is not doing so, we need to take a hard look at what is going wrong. Simple math tells us that if every Christian brought one more to Christ each year, all accountable

Americans would be Christians in 7–8 years. What if each of us takes one year and makes sure we bring one person to Christ in 2021? We're not saying that you personally have to conduct every aspect of the process, only that you lead that person through the process. Of course you care about their soul. You know they cannot get to Heaven as they are, and you know how to get them there. Also, you know who you can bring them to that will teach them the simple Gospel, if you are not yet able to teach them yourself (more on that growth later). You can evangelize one person this year, then you both can evangelize someone next year, repeating the process. Year one ends with 2 Christians, year two has 4, then 8, sixteen, and thirty two, sort of like the exponential growth of the mustard seed. The Kingdom grows when you plant and water. God will give the increase (1 Cor 3:6).

We call this command to actively grow the church the Great Commission, but some argue it was only for those Jesus was speaking directly to at the time. Matthew 28:19–20 reads,

> Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age. Amen.

Though many have tried, we cannot simply dismiss this command as one given to early disciples. In fact, there are many passages that help us understand our responsibility to teach others. 1 Peter 3:15, 2 Corinthians

5:20, 2 Timothy 4:5, Mark 16:15, Romans 1:16, and 2 Timothy 2:2 are a few. We are all commanded to make disciples of others; we all have a responsibility towards our fellow man to bring them to Christ.

So now that we have decided to do our part, what exactly can we do? Some say, "I can't teach or preach," or "I don't know enough to conduct a Bible study." No problem. God has that worked out too. While he does want you to grow in knowledge and understanding as we see in Hebrews 5:12–14, 1 Peter 2:2, and 1 Corinthians 3:1–2, he recognizes we can all use different talents to help grow his church (Eph 4:11, 16; Matt 25:15). The church is a body with many working parts, and each of us is designed to function together to grow that body. *Every* part of His body has a role and a purpose. As we individually grow ourselves, adding to our abilities to evangelize, we utilize every talent we have to contribute to the growth of the church.

Application

For the sake of a visual example, let's think of the church as a pyramid. At the top of that pyramid, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ adds to His body those who are saved (Acts 2:47). The layer directly under that, we may find pulpit preaching, devotionals, Bible studies, and other activities designed to challenge potential Christians to make that final step to salvation. The next layer may include those who invite someone to church, post Bible passages on social media, pray for someone, welcome

them as they walk in the door, or introduce them to other members. Another layer may include every small detail of preparing facilities, working the nursery, printing bulletins, or preparing the Lord's supper. There are so many individual tasks that combine to bring one to Christ, so that He can give the increase. Planting and watering encompass the entirety of cultivating and nurturing a plant to its full potential. The point is, there is a place for every Christian in the growth of the church. The question is, what is your place? What talents do you currently have that can contribute to bringing a lost soul to Christ? Are you using every talent you currently have to reach the lost? What is your plan to improve your talent pool so that you can do more to save more?

Finally, it seems appropriate to add one more dimension to our challenge: time. For starters, time itself can be a talent in that we must commit time to the growth of the church. We ought to give at least as much time toward planting and watering as we do any number of our other hobbies. But there is another aspect of time to consider here. According to scripture, man does not know the "day" or "hour" of Christ's return (Matt 24:36), but we do know that when that day comes, our opportunity to plant and water is no longer available. Our time here is limited by the Lord's return, our own death, or the death of the soul we may be trying to reach. If we truly believe our salvation depends on us growing the church, then the time factor makes it that much more urgent that we do all we can starting now to save souls. Are we willing to commit every talent we have, right now, to saving the lost?

Conclusion

The decline in the numbers of Christians over the last forty years is troubling. Even more troubling is that most of us, as Christians, struggle to understand that we are ALL responsible for church growth. We all have a role, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part (Eph 4:16) in growing the body of Christ. Our role extends far beyond the confines of 3 settings a week where we come together to worship. We opened this chapter with the thought that we ourselves cannot be saved if we are not interested in saving others. We have studied a number of scriptures that confirm this idea. And we have offered challenges to ALL Christians to apply these lessons to our own lives. The church is designed to grow. Will you help it to do so?

Discussion Questions

1. What are some talents you currently have that can contribute to someone else obeying the Gospel, and are you using those as often as you can?
2. What talents would you like to develop toward evangelism, and what is your plan for developing those?
3. Consider your various circles of friends (family, school, work, sports, neighbors, church, etc.). Are there people within those groups who are not saved? What will you do to

get them on a path toward salvation? Take time to list the names on a card or in your phone notes. Make a plan for each, and pray for them daily.

4. When the time is right, who can you work with to help you plant and water? Take time to talk with those potential partners and see how you can work together to bring someone to Christ.
5. How much time do you currently spend toward the growth of the church? What are some ways to increase that time?

8

TRANSFORMATION IN CHRIST

JEFFREY BROTHERS

Focus Passage

Ephesians 4:22–24 NIV

One Main Thing

Breakthrough begins in the mind, then leads our being to evolve into God's likeness, and ultimately allows us to find salvation.

Introduction

It is easy when reading passages of scripture like Ephesians 4:17–24, to posture ourselves in a way that refers to the "gentiles" as "them." We must not live like them or think like them. How easy is it to point "them" out? How easy is it to point the finger at someone else's life and say they are wrong, or they are in error? How easy is it to see someone else's folly? Before moving

forward in this lesson, let us be prepared to take a fearless inventory of ourselves. Let us check to see if we are among those who have grown dark in understanding, and let us check for lack of awareness relating to our own possible separation from the life of God.

It is helpful to accept that who we are right now is not the person that God intends for us to remain. God tells us through the apostle Paul that we must put off the old self. We must put off the parts of ourselves that are obviously contrary to the word and will of God. However, we must also learn to identify and cast off the more subtly dangerous parts that cause our hearts to gradually lose sensitivity to the Spirit and mind of God. In Proverbs 23:7, the wisdom of Solomon tells us that as a man thinks in his heart, so is he. Much can be extracted out of this wisdom as it relates to how the heart directly impacts what we do and what we say. The wisdom of Solomon also tells us in Proverbs 4:23 to, above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life. It is in the battle ground of the heart and mind that we find the brilliance of illumination as a guide in a righteous direction, or ignorance and blindness as an anchor keeping us in the abyss of besetting darkness. All we have to do is but choose in each moment understanding that there are implications for each choice.

Going Deeper

John 3:2–8, He (Nicodemus) came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come

from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him." In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." Nicodemus asked, "How can a man be born when he is old?"

Here is a unique contrast of darkness and light. Nicodemus comes to Jesus in a "time of darkness" and encounters the light that Jesus is. Now is a good time to ask the same question that Nicodemus asked Jesus. How can a man be born again? How can a woman be born again? How can I be born again? We can find the answer to this question in God's instruction through Paul, when we are told to be made new in the attitude of our mind in order to attain the new self. If we ever needed a reason to be a better steward over our own mind, we need only to remember that the Messiah Himself said, "... no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." The very foundation of our faith calls for a new self, and that calls for an unwavering focus on the image of God. The highest self to strive for, is the Image of God that we are made in. Paul reminds us that our new selves are created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. This is for us to know that it is possible to become righteous in God's sight, and even now, it is possible to be made holy. This process is the awakening of a greater awareness of God's presence in each moment we encounter, and a continual choosing of God's Spirit in each moment.

Application

Every day is a new day given to us by God and every day is a new opportunity to be better than who we were yesterday. If we set our minds on God's word and on being a better person, and if we hold that in the conscious mind for long enough, we will begin to see how deeply the law of sowing and reaping effects the soul and how practically this plays out in everyday life. If we sow good, we will reap good, and if we sow what is bad, we will reap from a bad harvest. This sowing and reaping is true of transactions that take place within our own self talk, as well as the transactions that occur between individuals. Consider the numerous moments we come to in one day where the battleground of the mind is tested in some struggle of positivity and negativity, right and wrong, good and bad, etc. Whether these encounters are within our own minds, within the bounds of a meaningful relationship, or within the passing by of strangers, we must tend to what takes place in these realms. Not only is it wise to stand at attention in the mirror with a watchful eye, it is also wise for us to stand at the gate of interpersonal exchange and be particular about what may and may not pass through. God has given us the ability to walk in the power of free will. This is the power of choice, to remain the old self or strive for and attain the new self.

Conclusion

Paul says in Romans 12:1, 2

> Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God-this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is-his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Though there is no way to justly deal with everything in Ephesians 4:17–24 in this study, it is worth taking note that our new selves are created to be like God, which has profound implications. Over the course of time, we should get further away from who we used to be. This does not mean living a perfect life, but it does mean living a better life than once lived and constantly being willing to shed the deficits of our current selves. Even if we attained the highest possible version of ourselves in this life on earth, there would still be at least one more change to undergo.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:51, 52,

> Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed- in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

All this to say, let us not get so conditioned and attached to who we are that we are not willing to let the current version of ourselves go. No matter what our past is, no matter what our present is, we can still find a new place and a new way of being on the spectrum of life.

Discussion Questions

1. In what ways are you different than who you used to be?
2. When experiencing frustration, anger, sadness, anxiety, etc., what are some of your current problematic ways of thinking or behaving?
3. When experiencing the previously mentioned negative emotions, what fruits of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control) are lacking in those moments?
4. What can you do to strengthen those areas that are lacking in moments of negative feelings and emotions?
5. What can you do to improve your relationship with God?
6. If you are married, in what ways can you evolve to improve your relationship with your spouse?
7. What can you do to improve your relationship with family and friends?

9

FORGIVENESS

ARVY DUPUY

Focus Passage

Ephesians 4:25–5:2

One Main Thing

Forgiven people forgive.

Introduction

It is called *reality rehabilitation television*, and there are several programs that fall under this category. They are stories of addiction, eating disorders, phobias, plus many others. One of the most popular was *Hoarding: Buried Alive*. Each show looked at two people who were hoarders. The subjects described themselves in other terms: collectors, thrifty, or resourceful. The truth was they had a lot of junk and it was causing problems in their lives. The problem far predates the show.

Homer and Langley were born in the late 1800s to an affluent Manhattan family. The brothers lived in a luxurious three-story mansion at the intersection of 5th Avenue and 128th Street. Both Homer and Langley earned college degrees. Everything seemed fine in the Collyer family. But in 1909 their mother and father divorced. The boys, now men, stayed in the home with their mother. Their mother eventually died, crime in the area began to escalate, and the neighborhood deteriorated. Homer and Langley withdrew, escaping from the world around them. They retreated into their inherited mansion, closed and locked the doors. They were all but unheard of for nearly four decades. Then in 1947 someone reported the smell of a dead body at their address. It took seven policemen to break down the door because the entrance was blocked by a wall of newspapers, folding beds, half of a sewing machine, old chairs, part of a winepress, and other junk. After hours of digging, policemen found the body of Homer, seated on the floor, his long and matted gray hair reaching his shoulders. But where was Langley, his brother? That question triggered one of the strangest searches in Manhattan history. Fifteen days of digging produced 103 tons of junk: gas chandeliers, a sawhorse, the chassis of an old car, a Steinway piano (actually, thirteen pianos in all), a horse's jawbone—you name it, they had it. Google their names and see all the pictures; you will be amazed. It was slow-going because of all the stuff throughout the house. Then finally, on day sixteen, they found one missing brother. He was buried under a pile of his "collection." The things he had held on to had collapsed on

him and killed him. What a way to live! What a way to die!

Digging Deeper

Who wants to live with yesterday's junk? Who wants to hoard the trash of the past? Not me, you say! Well, maybe not in your houses, certainly not! But what about in your hearts? Not stacks of papers and old boxes, but what about hurts, anger, pain? Do you hang on to things that you really need to discard? Are you keeping things in your lives that are causing you problems?

In Ephesians 4 Paul talks to believers about how to live, what to grab on to and what to let go of. Beginning in verse 25 he addresses some of the latter. It is a long list with lots of great insight but one of the hardest things to let go of and the easiest to hold on to is addressed in verse 32: ... *forgive each other....*

Paul wants everyone to understand that the life you are called to live, destined to live, is only possible when you let go. When you stop hoarding hurts, when you forgive others. But this is easier said than done.

People from all ages and all times have struggled with this one. Peter did. In Matthew 18:21, he tries to reduce this complex issue to a manageable number. Peter makes a seemingly generous proposal, but then Jesus brings Peter back to reality by telling a story that reminds everyone the reason Paul wrote what he did in Ephesians 4.

Yes, some would say that this is not literal, Jesus is employing hyperbole. But what if Jesus is referring to the

debt we all owe to God? Another of Paul's letters says that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. There are lots of words for sin, but Paul says to "fall short" is sin. Worry is falling short on faith. Impatience is falling short on kindness. Having a critical spirit falls short on love. The list goes on. With that in mind, ask yourself, "How often have I come up short with God?" If you are honest, you owe a huge debt. Now, how do you plan to pay God for your indiscretions? You can't. It is too much, but God forgives you what you have no hope of dealing with on your own. That is why Paul says believers must forgive. Must, because you have been forgiven. Does Ephesians 4:32 not end with that clarification?

God pardons your innumerable sins, and then so often believers do the unthinkable. They grab on to forgiveness with all they have only to refuse that same gift to others. Instead they become savers, collectors, record keepers.

Application

If your life has been liberated in Christ, your sentence commuted, what next? How will you respond?

It really is very simple: forgiven people forgive. Grace and mercy are a natural outgrowth of receiving grace and mercy. To do otherwise is to resign yourselves to a life full of bad and bitter days.

One of the consistent elements of the show *Hoarding: Buried Alive* is the pain, the lack of joy. Participants lament the wasted years, all they missed out on because of all they refused to let goof.

So you can pile up the hurts, or you can lay them down. Yes the hurt is deep and the pain is real. The offender has already taken so much from you, don't let them take anymore. Refusing to forgive allows them to keep on taking. Yes, what they did to you was wrong. Forgiveness does not mean approval. It is in no way an endorsement of their behavior. You are just entrusting your offender to Him who judges righteously (1 Peter 2:23).

Maybe you have been so angry for so long that it will take time, for most forgiveness does not come overnight. But you can choose to take a step in that direction. Forgive in phases if you must. Start praying for them by name. That's a start. Try—as difficult as it is—to understand their situation, to see what might have been their perspective on the issue.

Learn from Antwone Fisher. He had every excuse not to forgive, to have a heart full of garbage. For the first thirty-three years of his life, he did not know his parents. His father had died before was born, and Antwone was born in a prison where his teenage mother was incarcerated. He grew up, bouncing from place to place, abused, neglected, desperate to find a single member of his family. To escape homelessness he joined the Navy. After eleven years in the Navy he began working in the security industry. He found himself in Cleveland one night in a hotel, and so he picked up the phone book. He began calling people with his last name. Night after night he had no luck: wrong number; number no longer in service; person didn't know anything to help him. Then one night he called the next number and a lady answered

who turned out to be his aunt. He told her what he knew. He described the difficult turns his life had taken and how he longed for a family. The warm voice on the other end of the phone said, "You have a big family." Before long another aunt invited him for a Thanksgiving reunion and a weekend filled with a lifetime of belated love. As his visit was coming to a close, his family finally found his mother's brother. This newfound maternal uncle offered to take Antwone to the apartments where his mother lived. On the drive Antwone rehearsed the questions he had waited thirty years to ask: Why didn't you come for me? Didn't you ever wonder about me? Didn't you miss me at all? But the questions were never uttered. When they arrived the door opened and Antwone walked into a dimly-lit apartment. Adjusting his eyes finally he saw her, a frail woman who looked too old to be his mother. Her hair was uncombed. She wore her faded nightclothes. Antwone's uncle said to her, "This is Antwone Fisher." Antwone's mother made the connection and started to moan, "Oh please ... Oh." She turned her face away in shame and rushed out of the room, crying. From his uncle he learned that his mother's life had not been easy either, mostly from consequences of heroin addictions. But still, she was his mother, and when he realized how painful her years had been, he chose to forgive.

Later in his autobiography he wrote,

> In the place inside me where the hurt of abandonment had been, now only compassion lived. ... What I understood now was that even though my road had

been long and hard, my mother's had been longer and harder. [1]

Conclusion

In the end, you choose what lives inside you. Isn't it time you choose forgiveness? Paul is right, that is the way to live, the only way.

Discussion

1. Why do you think it is so hard to forgive?
2. Who is someone who has hurt you and you have collected that pain or held on to a hurt?
3. What is one thing, even a small step, you can do today to being the journey of forgiveness?

Endnotes

1. Antwone Quenton Fisher, *Finding Fish: A Memoir* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 320.

10

FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT

CLAY MCFERRIN

Focus Passage

Ephesians 5:3–20

One Main Thing

Reject the works of darkness, and pursue the light of God.

Introduction

It has often been pointed out that the Bible is not simply a list of "Do's and Don'ts." It's true—God's message to us is so rich in profound themes that it would be a mistake to treat the Bible as a mere rulebook. Nevertheless, one of the recurring ideas in Scripture is that, since God has "blessed us in Christ" (Eph 1:3 ESV) , "made us alive together with Christ" (Eph 2:5), and allowed us to "be filled with all the fullness of God" (Eph 3:19), it is only

fitting that we "walk in a manner worthy" of our calling (Eph 4:1). In this chapter, we'll see how Paul goes into further detail about how we can leave behind the sinful ways of our past and instead "walk as children of light" (Eph 5:8).

Going Deeper

The New Testament often proclaims the high standards to which God calls His followers. Ephesians 5:3–6 emphasizes the need for faithfulness in our sexuality and speech. Paul's condemnation of sexual impurity here echoes passages such as 1 Corinthians 6:9–10, Galatians 5:19–21, 1 Thessalonians 4:3–5, and especially Colossians 3:5–6. As Paul explains to the church at Corinth, we should use our bodies to glorify God (1 Cor 6:13–20). Similarly, the denunciation of "filthiness," "foolish talk," and "crude joking" is consistent with God's expectation that Christians should be holy in their speech (Jas 3:2–12). And why does our language matter? Because ungodly words indicate an ungodly heart (Matt 15:18–19).

As Paul continues into Ephesians 5:7–14, he picks up one of the most common themes of Scripture—the believer's conversion from darkness to light. When we commit ourselves to a life of obedience to God, He "deliver[s] us from the domain of darkness" (Col 1:13), so that we, too, can "walk in the light, as He is in the light" (1 John 1:7). As Paul exhorts the church at Philippi to dwell on wholesome things (Phil 4:8), we try to ensure that our lives produce "all that is good and right and true" (Eph 5:9). Whereas evildoers crave darkness to hide their

deeds, we have no fear arising from our righteous actions being known by God or others (John 3:18–20). Faithful Christians are not ashamed to have the light of Christ shine on them and make their works visible (Eph 5:13–14). However, our motivation is not self-promotion nor the praise of men, but the glorification of God. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told His disciples, "Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people *in order to be seen* by them" (Matt 6:1, emphasis added), but "let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and *give glory to your Father* who is in heaven" (Matt 5:16, emphasis added). The more we "walk as children of light" (Eph 5:8), the more we will have a positive impact in the world by leading others to see and know God.

Perhaps one of the more difficult phrases in our passage lies in verse 11. What does it mean to "expose" the "unfruitful works of darkness"? If the passage said to expose the *people* doing such things, we would be God's designated investigators and whistleblowers. We might behave like the scribes and Pharisees in John 8:3–5, taking into custody people "caught in the act" of some sin. However, Paul tells the congregation at Corinth that his prohibition on associating with a brother who continues in unrepentant sin does not carry over to people outside the church. "For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside" (1 Cor 5:12–13). Paul's instruction to the Ephesians is consistent with this idea. Notice that, in Ephesians 5:11, what we are exposing are the works themselves. It is not that we are harassing non-

Christians or publicly accusing them of sinful behavior, but that we recognize sin and are willing to declare it to be a violation of God's will. Some discretion is required here; we won't achieve anything by warning an intoxicated man about the dangers of drunkenness. Paul gives us some guidance when he says, "Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person" (Col 4:5–6).

This brings us to our final section, Ephesians 5:15–20, which contains a series of distinct-yet-related admonitions. By using the word "walk" figuratively in verse 15, Paul means we should be careful and thoughtful in our daily lives. In verse 16, notice the same "making the best of the use of the time" phrase used in Colossians 4:5; we have a responsibility to take advantage of our limited opportunities to carry out God's will on this earth. Verse 17 reminds us that "the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction" (Prov 1:7). If we understand the Lord's will, we are one step closer to being wise. Verse 18 contrasts a life of sinful overindulgence with a life of self-control. Pardon the pun, but we might say that we need to be full of the Spirit, not "spirits." Actually, Paul explicitly connects the idea of being filled with the Spirit to our singing—the Holy Spirit dwells in Christians continuously, but perhaps especially as we exhort one another and worship God in song. (By the way, while we should always support biblical patterns of worship, we should also notice that the overall context of Ephesians 5:19 is really not about

corporate or individual worship, and therefore may not be the best "proof text" in relation to any study of God-approved singing.) Finally, verse 20 repeats the exhortation from verse 4 to be thankful. What does it mean to give thanks "always and for everything"? Paul certainly doesn't mean we should be thankful for *literally* everything; for instance, it wouldn't make sense to be thankful for the death of a beloved child, parent, or grandparent. But we can always be thankful for God's love and faithfulness, even (and especially) in circumstances that would seem hopeless to someone without faith. Additionally, we should make a habit of being continually thankful for our many blessings. Hopefully, the more we take time to consider "every good and every perfect gift," all of which come directly or indirectly from God (Jas 1:17), the more thankful we will be.

Application

As free moral agents, we are inherently gifted with the enormous opportunity and responsibility to choose our responses in life. When we are confronted with God's call to renounce and denounce the sinful ways of the world, how will we respond? Will we set aside the immorality, covetousness, and empty words that are so prevalent among those who reject God? Will we dedicate ourselves to living a life of self-denial that pleases Him? Will we allow ourselves to be filled with the Spirit, building up the body of Christ? If we do, we will have not just a meaningful, rewarding life on earth, but also an "inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God" (Eph 5:5).

Conclusion

We each have our own background. Some of us grew up with no connection to God's church, while others have been believers from an early age. Perhaps some were in and out of the church and/or other faith groups over time. But whatever our unique history, every Christian has at least these three things in common:

1. Sometime in the past, we realized we were not in a right relationship with God. "At one time you were darkness" (Eph 5:8).

2. We decided to obey God and receive His forgiveness. "You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor 6:11).

3. We are now committed to serving God. "Now you are light in the Lord" (Eph 5:8).

Each day of our lives, we have a new opportunity to leave our sinful past even further behind as we "press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil 3:14). Let us seek out ways to share the light and love of God with others, especially with those who may be caught up in some of the same unfruitful works of darkness that used to dominate our own lives. Let us always be thankful to God for giving us "every spiritual blessing" (Eph 1:3). Let us make the best use of whatever time is given to us.

Discussion Questions

1. How would you counsel a Christian struggling to overcome sexual immorality or impurity? Covetousness/idolatry? Filthiness, foolish talk, or crude joking? (Eph 5:3–4)
2. Which sins were most prevalent in your life before you became a Christian? Are those still among your strongest temptations today, or have you (at least to some extent) overcome them?
3. What is your favorite thing about walking in the light? (Eph 5:8)
4. What other passages can you find that discuss the will of the Lord? Based on those Scriptures, what *is* the will of the Lord? (Eph 5:17)
5. What is one way you could express more thankfulness in your daily life? (Eph 5:20)

11

SUBMIT YOURSELVES TO ONE ANOTHER

NATHAN GUY

Focus Passage

Ephesians 5:21–32

IN THE BEGINNING, God created the heavens and the earth. He made the skies and the seas, and all that is in them. With his voice he brought forth vegetation, and in his wisdom he made the animal creatures that share life beside us.

And in his love, he made humanity. When it came time to make beings on earth to carry within themselves the image of God, he made humans. The word in Genesis 1:26 is not "man" (as in "male") but "human." "Let us make man," declares the Lord; "and let *them* have dominion" (Gen 1:26 ESV). "So God created man in his own image," the text continues; "he created him; male and female he created them" (Gen 1:27 ESV). It might seem like odd use of the English language to move from

singular to plural; but the translators were seeking to show that when God chose to have his image born on earth, he conferred his image in humanity—"male" and "female." The male and the female both show the likeness of God, in the same, similar, and different ways.

This is why God blesses marriage and sanctifies it. Paul quotes Genesis 2:24 which says a man is to leave his father and mother, be joined to his wife, and the two become one flesh. But he adds that this is a "profound mystery" (Eph 5:32 NIV). "Mystery" in Paul does not mean "strange" or "weird." It refers to a secret previously unrevealed: a great truth, a divine story that is deeper and richer than what you see on the surface. The two are joined and become one flesh. That is true metaphorically: the two become one family, sharing one name, representing one new unit. That is true literally in many cases: when the two, as a result of their union, have a child, they literally infuse their togetherness into one new flesh. It is a beautiful image. If you will allow me to wax poetic, it is as if two halves are brought together so the fullness of God can be seen.

Throughout scripture, we have imagery to suggest that the fullness of God is best seen when we come together in community, producing fruit to the glory of God. Already in Ephesians Paul has prayed that we—"with all the saints"—may come to know the height and depth of God's love that is beyond anyone's capacity to fathom (Eph 3:18–19). It is in the worshipping community, there "with all the saints," that the fulness of God's love is expressed in tangible, fruitful ways. When we worship together, producing the fruit of our lips, our worship

becomes an expression of our hearts, and the light produced shines before others who witness the power of our love, and give glory to God (Matt 5:16).

The mirror of that powerful truth is seen in marriage. Children see the likeness of God in the fullness of their parents, and parents see the fruitful result of the image and likeness of God resulting from the union of "humanity."

If the human is the first biblical portrait of divine likeness on earth, marriage is the first biblical portrait of true community. This is why in God's good world (in Gen 1, his 7-times "good," 3-times "blessed" world), there was only one thing pronounced "not good:" that any one person should be alone (Gen 2:18).

Portraits are never complete, and metaphors always break down. If you are an unmarried man, a single mother, a widowed believer, or a person without living parents, there is good news for you: the fulness of God is within you and among you. The gift of singleness is celebrated in gospel passages, in 1 Corinthians, and in the early church. The willingness to forsake or forego physical families for the kingdom of God is cited as noble by our Lord and Savior (Matt 19:29; Mark 10:29). Let nothing in this lesson deprive you of knowing that the fullness of God is present by His spirit in the heart of everyone in whom He dwells.

But models in society, and in the church, are placed there by God to serve as ever-present reminders of faithful truths. And in the joys and experiences of sacred marriage, the fullness of God is on display. You see, your marriage is a copy or a model of a deeper truth. Nathan

and Katie, joined together, is just a surface image; the real story in that is Christ and the church.

That is Paul's major reason for introducing marriage into Ephesians 5. The book is about God. Just read chapter 1 and you will see the subject line of every major paragraph is "God." As it turns out, that is the subject line of every major paragraph of your life story as well. That is the subject line of the church throughout all ages. The story is always about God.

And so, when it comes to parenting, parenting is a display of the glory of God (Eph 6:1–4). When it comes to working for others, work is a display of the glory of God (Eph 6:5–9). And when it comes to marriage, Paul challenges us to see marriage as a witness to the ongoing relationship between Christ and his people.

By the time you get to the marriage section of Ephesians 5, the language of worship in community is already in full bloom. "Be filled with the spirit," writes Paul, "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" (Eph 5:18b–21 ESV).

Many have pointed out the numerous "one another" passages in the New Testament. Love one another. Serve one another. Encourage one another. And here we already have two of those images: singing and speaking to one another (Eph 5:19) and submitting yourselves to one another out of reverence for Christ (Eph 5:21).

How many problems in our world stem from

changing our language from "we" to "me?" It's the beginning of that warring inclination that pits "me" against "you." But when we live life together—loving together and serving together, side-by-side, while praying with and for one another—we are on the path to healing and joy. My friend and roommate Jeremy Barrier once used a vivid illustration in a sermon he preached when he was just a teenager. Here was his illustration.

Suppose you are on a cruise ship, out at sea in the middle of a tempest storm, and someone falls off the edge. We would plead and beg, throw things in the water and hope for his safe return. But if tragedy should strike, and he be lost at sea, we would mourn of course, but we would return home and life would still go on. But now suppose that each of you on that cruise ship were tied to each other, and one were to fall off the edge. The power of your connection would lead to his life ... or there would be no future for any of us.

"Together." A word needed in our world now more than ever. Together. And the constant, perennial fight to determine the pecking order in society should never be seen in the community of Christ. "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them," said Jesus, "and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave." (Matt 20:24–27 ESV). Do you remember the example, the chief example, that follows that sentence, grounding it? "Even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matt 20:28 ESV).

What is another way to say that? "Submitting to one another, out of reverence for Christ" (Eph 5:22 ESV).

I want you to circle that word "submitting" in verse 21. Because it's not in verse 22.

Oh, I know it is there in your English Bibles. And no, I'm not trying to make a strange claim about Bible translations. It is not a mistake. It's a helpful extension. You see, verse 24 is going to reiterate the basic point that wives should submit to their husbands, but the word doesn't actually appear in the Greek text of verse 22. In verse 21, Paul calls upon all Christians—ALL Christians—to live lives of mutual submission, "submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ."

And to begin with his first illustration, Paul continues in the Greek with this phrase: "Wives, to husbands, as to the Lord."

There is no doubt that Paul wishes for wives to be submissive to their husbands. In fact, he paints with as broad a brush as possible: "Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands" (Eph 5:24). But this flows out of his basic argument in verse 21, that in doing so, she is displaying the reverence for Christ that all Christians are called to show and model.

Paul places a weighty responsibility on husbands when he claims "the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church" (Eph 5:23). I wonder if we husbands are ready for what this means, especially in the light of our call to model Christ in verse 21.

What does a general call to submission look like for

husbands in a marriage context? "Husbands," writes the apostle Paul, "love your wives, as Christ loved the church" (Eph 5:25a). Can we stop right there? Christian love is not rooted in the emotions (although your marriage ought to be full of that too). Christian love is rooted in the will. I once heard Keith Parker tell the story of a kid in his youth group who said "love is a feeling you feel when you feel a feeling you never felt before." Keith replied, "back into an electric fence; you'll feel a feeling you never felt before. But that ain't love!" No. Look for any passage in the New Testament where God's love is displayed, and you'll find a giving, serving action verb to follow. "For God so loved the world, that he gave" (John 3:16). This is why John says, "In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10) The call to "love your wives" is a call to submit your interests to her needs.

"Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church *and gave himself up for her*" (Eph 5:25). One of the two is going to suffer. "Let it be me," said Christ. If one of you is called to lose so the other may gain, "let it be me" says Christ. If sacrifice is called for, "let it be me" says the Christ. We have leadership so backwards. Some people think that leadership is found in taking pride of place and demanding that others go where we point. And if you don't go where I point, you aren't following my lead. In the words of Paul, "that is not the way you learned Christ" (Eph 4:20).

"Wives," says Paul, "submit to your husbands, as to the Lord" (Eph 5:22). If husbands were to die daily for their wives—as Christ died for the church—the circle

would be complete. So husbands, follow Christ in going first. Do the sacrifice. Do the service. Do the honoring and serving and loving. Give yourself *up* for them. Is there a better definition of submission than that? And wives ... follow that lead.

Togetherness. It sounds hard. But it seems easier to do if everyone plays his or her part. It's easy to give in to someone who gives in to you. But this is where leadership that models Christ gets even more profound.

Husbands are called to love their wives, "just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her *to make her holy*" (Eph 5:26 NIV). Did you notice that it doesn't say "because she already was holy?" The command is to sacrifice to bring about the kind of lifestyle response in others that so many of us want to see first, before we do the sacrificing. That's not the model! Christ gave himself up for his bride to make her holy "so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing" (Eph 5:27a ESV). Men, how do you see your wife? Pointing out any imperfections or flaws in your wife is not only beneath your role and calling as a Christian; it is a sign of ignorance: if she has wrinkles, who do you think gave them to her? It would be a painful mental exercise to go through the various ways her calling to love you has not always been an easy task. Wouldn't you agree?

If you read through the section, you will quickly realize that more time is given to the role of husband than is given to the role of wife. But that's fitting, isn't it? The call to love one another, to serve one another, to give to one another is the basic commandment. And just as

Christ did for the church ... husbands: you go first. That is what leadership is all about. And in your marriage, seek to reflect the glory of God; or what is a marriage for?

"'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" (Eph 5:31–33 ESV).

12

MASTERS AND SLAVES

ED GALLAGHER

Focus Passage

Ephesians 6:5–9

One Main Thing

Jesus, who became a slave, calls his followers to serve one another.

Introduction

Harriet Jacobs tells the story about how the slave masters initiated a worship service for slaves. The very first time she attended such a worship service, the sermon's text was Ephesians 6:5.

Of course it was.

After summarizing the homily, Jacobs describes the reaction from her fellow slaves: "We went home, highly amused at brother Pike's gospel teaching, and we deter-

mined to hear him again. I went the next Sabbath evening, and heard pretty much a repetition of the last discourse."[1] I'm confident that no one will be surprised to learn that Ephesians 6:5 was a popular text for sermons directed at slaves in the nineteenth-century southern United States.[2]

The Bible and slavery—this is a difficult discussion, for several reasons. The legacy of American slavery is still so very painful, and the use of the Bible to undergird the institution of slavery is high on the list of embarrassments for Christians (near the Crusades). But it's not like the Bible says nothing useful for opponents of slavery; two centuries ago, Christian Scripture played a crucial role in the abolitionist movement. Lincoln had reason to say that both sides in the American Civil War, North and South, "read the same Bible, and pray to the same God; and each invokes His aid against the other." More than that, both cited the Bible against the other side.[3] A discussion about the Bible and slavery is difficult most of all because the Bible simply does not say what we wish it said about slavery. We wish the Bible said that slavery is wrong, sinful, an affront against God and against human beings made in the image of God. Instead, the Bible says, "Slaves, obey your masters" (Eph 6:5).

There's more in the Bible relevant to this issue than just Ephesians 6. If we're really going to understand what the Bible says about slavery, we've got to put these instructions to slaves and masters into a broader biblical context, and it would be helpful if we knew something about slavery in the ancient world and how ancient people thought about slavery. The whole discussion

continues to be distressingly relevant in the twenty-first century. We've already mentioned the lingering effects of American slavery that was abolished more than a century and a half ago. Though slavery is no longer legal, human trafficking is a present concern, and by some estimates there are more slaves in the world today than there ever have been before.[4]

Going Deeper

The Roman Empire into which Christianity was born constituted one of the major slave societies in the history of the world.[5] Scholars often talk about specifically five major slave societies: ancient Athens, ancient Rome, and —in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—the southern United States, the Caribbean islands, and Brazil. These were societies that did not just have slaves but in which the importance of slavery within the society reached a certain threshold (as defined by modern scholars) so that they can be classified as "slave societies." Usually the criteria for defining a "slave society" include a high percentage of enslaved people (about 20% or more of the population) and slavery's importance to the working of the economy. The Roman Empire, and in particular Italy and especially the city of Rome (where Paul may have been when he wrote Ephesians), qualify as a slave society based on these factors. But though ancient Rome and the southern United States in the nineteenth century were both slave societies, the two societies practiced slavery in different ways, particularly in regard to the relationship between slavery and race: while Amer-

ican slavery came to be associated closely with African descent, Ancient Romans did not derive their slaves from any particular ethnic group or nationality.[6]

Strange to say, there was no abolitionist movement in the ancient world. There were no Frederick Douglasses wandering the Roman Empire preaching about the evils of the institution of slavery and calling for its elimination. Though slavery has existed in many societies on earth throughout history, a movement for the abolition of slavery arose only in relatively modern times (especially in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in the Western world). Unfortunately, when Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire in the fourth century, the slave system continued.[7]

While the Bible does contain commandments regulating (rather than abolishing) slavery (Exod 21:1–6; Lev 25:39–55; Deut 15:12–18), and while American slaveholders did quote the Bible in their favor, the Bible contains enough material that sits uneasily with the practice of slavery that masters were not comfortable allowing their slaves full access to Scripture. The historian Thomas Kidd explains: "White critics had worried that Christianizing African Americans, especially slaves, was dangerous. Doing so might give slaves notions about their rights as Christians and about God's deliverance for those in bondage."[8] They were right to worry. After all, one of the major stories in the Bible—the most important story in the Old Testament—centers on Israelite slaves rebelling from their Egyptian masters. Prominent abolitionists, including some who had themselves been enslaved, took inspiration from Scripture: both Nat Turner and Fred-

erick Douglass were preachers, and Harriet Tubman's nickname was Moses. While the Bible might not straightforwardly say that holding people in slavery is sinful, Paul does condemn "menstealers" (1 Tim 1:10), and there are plenty of commandments about loving neighbors and avoiding anger and treating others better than yourself, which would make the practice of slaveholding fairly obviously inconsistent with Scripture. For these very reasons, an edition of the Bible was produced specifically for slaves, which omitted all the parts that might make the slaves think that God was not necessarily on the side of the master.[9]

In the early days of the USA, southern slaveholders realized (as did northerners and foreigners) that the rhetoric of liberty and equality sat uncomfortably with the flourishing of slavery in the South. In 1788, during the process of the ratification of the US Constitution, Charles Cotesworth Pinckney of South Carolina argued in favor of the proposed Constitution based in part on the fact that it lacked a Bill of Rights (which, of course, came later as the first ten amendments). "Such bills," he asserted, "generally begin with declaring that all men are by nature born free. Now, we should make that declaration with a very bad grace, when a large part of our property consists in men who are actually born slaves."[10] A generation later, another South Carolinian, William Harper, insisted that the Revolutionary generation was actually exaggerating when it declared the equality of all men. "Whatever may have been said in the fervor of their zeal by those who were in pursuit of the greatest practicable liberty, such natural equality and universal freedom

never did and never can exist."[11] To the extent that notions of liberty and equality are seen as connected to the religion of the Bible, to such an extent Christianity is inconsistent with holding slaves.[12]

In the ancient world, not everyone was convinced in the equality of all people.[13] No less an authority than Aristotle argued that some people were born to be slaves. But there were people such as the Stoic philosophers Seneca (*Epistle* 47, first century AD) and Epictetus (*Discourses* 1.13, early second century AD) who argued not only for the humane treatment of slaves but for the basic recognition that slaves and masters were essentially equal in their humanity, that slavery was not a natural condition. Still, Seneca did not argue for, or even contemplate, the abolition of slavery—nor did Epictetus, though he was himself a freed slave.

While slaves appear not infrequently in the New Testament, in the parables of Jesus, for instance, there is not much instruction about how slaves should behave or how masters should treat slaves (the latter, only Eph 6:9; Col 4:1).[14] Paul does not campaign for abolition, but he does tell slaves to obtain their freedom if the opportunity should arise (1 Cor 7:21), and he uses all his moral and apostolic authority to persuade Philemon to manumit Onesimus.[15] But mostly Paul wants slaves to focus on representing Christ in the world and not on obtaining freedom.

> Were you a bondservant when called? Do not be concerned about it. (But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity.) For he who was

> called in the Lord as a bondservant is a freedman of the Lord. Likewise he who was free when called is a bondservant of Christ (1 Cor 7:21–22).

If it be asked whether Paul would have agreed more with Aristotle or with Seneca and Epictetus concerning the basic equality of slaves and masters, there can really be no doubt of the answer, not for the apostle who wrote the following.

> There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:28).

> For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit (1 Cor 12:13).

Maybe the Bible isn't as straightforward and explicit on the issue of slavery as we would like (nor was anyone else until just a few centuries ago), but it was straightforward enough on universal human equality and value to be a dangerous book in the hands of a slave, as the slaveholders of the American South realized all too clearly. And if we view the issue from a wider lens—does the Bible encourage or discourage oppressing others? does the Bible generally side with the oppressor or the oppressed?—the matter becomes even clearer.

Application

But the truth about the Bible on slavery is not that the Bible calls for the elimination of slavery but that the Bible calls on all of us who would be children of God and imitators of Christ to think of ourselves as slaves of God and of one another.

It was our Lord who said:

> Whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all (Mark 10:44).

It was our Lord who, "knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself" (John 13:3–4) to wash the apostles' feet, after which he instructed, "I have set you an example, that you should do as I have done to you" (13:15).

It was our Lord "who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave" (Phil 2:6–7).

In the instructions to slaves and masters in Ephesians 6, Paul charged slaves to obey their masters as if they were obeying Christ, to give service with enthusiasm, because they are "slaves of Christ" (6:5–8). And then Paul turned to the masters and commanded, "masters, do the same to them. Stop threatening them, for you know that both of you have the same Master in heaven, and with him there is no partiality" (6:9). What are the implica-

tions of those six words, "masters, do the same to them"? Immediately after telling slaves to serve their masters as if they were serving Christ, he bids the masters to "do the same" to their slaves. Can he really be telling masters to serve their slaves as if they were serving Christ? Such are the implications of the gospel, because in Christ there is no slave or free—we are all one (Gal 3:28), and we are all slaves. This is the radical, upside down world of Christianity, in which those who mourn are considered fortunate (Matt 5:4) and those who are persecuted should rejoice (5:10–12) and people turn the other cheek (5:39) and love their enemies (5:44) and take up their cross (16:24). In a religion in which the wisdom of God is revealed primarily in "Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles" (1 Cor 1:23), yes, the apostle can tell slaveholders to serve their slaves as if serving Christ. In fact, he can tell us all to "be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Eph 5:21).

Conclusion

The Bible does not say what we wish it said about slavery. What the Bible says is that we are all slaves (Luke 17:10!), that we should serve one another. Idealistic? Perhaps. But Jesus has shown us the way. We can feel satisfied about our own practice of Christianity when we are fully conformed to the image of our Lord who became a slave for us.

Discussion Questions

1. What do you wish the Bible said about slavery?
2. Compare the instructions to slaves in Eph 6:5–8; Col 3:22–25; Titus 2:9–10; 1 Pet 2:18–21. Which instructions do you think would have been most useful for people looking to justify slavery? How would you respond to such use of these texts?
3. What are the implications of passages such as Mark 10:44 and Gal 3:28?
4. What kind of behavior does Paul expect from Christian slaveholders? See Eph 6:9; Col 4:1.
5. From the fact that, as Paul says, Jesus became a slave (Phil 2:7), what implications are there for the Christian life?

Endnotes

1. Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (Boston, 1861); ed. Frances Smith Foster and Richard Yarborough, Norton Critical Edition, 2d ed. (New York: Norton, 2019), 62, in ch. 13, "The Church and Slavery."

2. Thomas S. Kidd, *America's Religious History: Faith, Politics, and the Shaping of a Nation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019), 114.

3. For a tame example, see the collection of friendly letters from Francis Wayland (anti-slavery) and Richard Fuller (pro-slavery), both Baptist ministers, originally written in 1847, and recently re-edited in *Domestic Slavery Considered as a Scriptural Institution*, ed. Nathan A. Finn

and Keith Harper (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2008).

4. Wikipedia, "Slavery."

5. For recent discussion of the concept of a slave society, see Noel Lenski and Catherine M. Cameron, eds., *What Is a Slave Society? The Practice of Slavery in Global Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

6. On Roman slavery, start with Keith Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), who does note (p. 66 n. 10) that some Romans (e.g., Cicero, *On the Consular Provinces* 10; Livy, 35.49.8; 36.17.5) considered certain races (Asiatic Greeks, Syrians, Jews) to be born for slavery.

7. Mary E. Sommar, *The Slaves of the Churches: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

8. Kidd, *America's Religious History*, 111.

9. Wikipedia, "Slave Bible."

10.*The Debates in the Several State Conventions, on the Adoption of the Federal Constitution, as Recommended by the General Convention at Philadelphia in 1787*, ed. Jonathan Elliot, 4 vols. (Washington: Printed for the Editor, 1836–1845), 4.316.

11. William Harper, *Anniversary Oration, in the Representative Hall, Columbia, S.C., Dec. 9, 1835* (Washington: Duff Green, 1836), 9.

12. Slavery was abolished in Massachusetts in the early 1780s when a state court determined, in the Quock Walker case, that the state constitution written by John Adams in 1780, with its statement that "all men are born free and equal," disallowed slavery.

13. Aristotle, *Politics*, book 1. For an examination of ancient thoughts on slavery, see Peter Garnsey, *Ideas of Slavery from Aristotle to Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). On Aristotle, see ch. 8, pp. 107–27. On the influence of Aristotle's idea that some people were born to be ruled, see ch. 3, pp. 35–52.

14. Instructions to slaves appear in Eph 6:5–9; Col 3:22–4:1; Titus 2:9–10; 1 Pet 2:18–21.

15. Or, apparently that is what Paul is driving at; for a nuanced interpretation, see John M. G. Barclay, "Paul, Philemon and the Dilemma of Christian Slave-Ownership," *New Testament Studies* 37 (1991): 161–86.

13

BE STRONG IN THE LORD

JUSTIN GUIN

Focus Passage

Ephesians 6:10–20

One Main Thing

Being suited with God's armor strengthens you to stand against Satan's schemes designed to weaken your faith.

Introduction

A story is told about a boy who had to deal with a bully at school. Each day he encountered the other young man in the hall, and the bully would demand his lunch money. After a few weeks, the boy grew tired of this routine and asked his mother if he could take karate. The young man was involved in many other things, and the mother told him he would have to pay for lessons. He went to the first one, and it cost $5.00 per class. While he enjoyed it, he

did the math and concluded it was much less expensive just to pay the bully, so he gave up karate.

Many people deal with Satan this way. They resolve to equip themselves to defeat him, but growth requires sacrifice and the cost seems too much. It is easier to deal with the consequences of sin than ridding its influence from their lives. You cannot resign yourself to being defeated by Satan. He is a bully who demands everything in your life, and the spiritual price is high (Rom 6:23).

Instead of consigning to defeat, God prepares you to walk by faith and live worthy of the gospel. With God's help, you can stand against the schemes of Satan. In Ephesians 6:10–20, God lists the resources he provides to strengthen you. Being suited with God's armor supports you as you stand against the schemes of Satan designed to weaken your faith.

Digging Deeper

In your study of Ephesians, you have noted the motivation and instruction on how to live for the Lord. First, God's spiritual blessings motivate you to serve him (Eph 1:3). As Paul develops this letter, he enumerates these blessings. The blood of Christ redeems you (Eph 1:7); you received the Holy Spirit as a guarantee for salvation (Eph 1:13–14), and God gives you his grace to save you and prepare you for good works (Eph 2:8–10). If you are discouraged, take time to walk through the first three chapters of Ephesians. It will remind you of the blessings only Christ can provide.

Also, God is clear about what he expects from you. A

Christian must walk in a manner worthy of the gospel (Eph 4:1–2). The "old man" is dead, and you have learned a new way of living (Eph 4:17). This new way of living demands you imitate God's character and expose sin's dark and unfruitful works (Eph 5:8–9). Following these instructions is not an easy task. Jesus himself said it was difficult, and few choose it (Matt 7:13–14). God gives resources that enable you to stand against Satan's methods designed to derail you from this path. When you "put on" the new man (Eph 4:20), you equip yourselves with God's strength and armor. It makes the challenging path much easier to navigate.

The first God-given resource is strength. Ephesians 6:10 says, "Finally, be strong in the Lord and the strength of his might" (ESV). Your struggle is not with an earthly foe. To defeat the adversary, you cannot rely on your inadequate strength. Instead, in your spiritual conflict against Satan's schemes, victory is won through God's mighty power (6:12). The phrase "be strong" occurs thirty-four times in the English Standard Version. Thirty-one of these times, it is about God strengthening his people for faithfulness. God never gives a task without providing the strength to accomplish it.

Consider Joshua's example. He followed the most significant leader in Israel's history, Moses. The preparation for the transition in leadership required Moses to strengthen his understudy. In Deuteronomy, the Lord commanded Moses three times to strengthen Joshua for the task of overtaking the promised land and leading Israel (3:28; 31:7; 31:23). The previous generation failed to enter the Canaanite land because they were afraid of the

opposition's strength. Ten of the spies reported, "We cannot attack these people; they are stronger than we are" (Num 14:31, NIV). In leading the next generation, the Lord knew Joshua would need his mighty power, or they too might fall prey to this temptation. He said to Joshua, "Only be strong and courageous, being very careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you" (Josh 1:7a, ESV). With God's help, Israel settled the Promised Land, and the Israelites served the Lord all the days of Joshua. Note Joshua 24:31, "Israel served the LORD throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and who had experienced everything ***the LORD had done for Israel***" (NIV, emp. added).

The same God who strengthened Joshua and Israel strengthens you. Your task is not overtaking a land with fortified cities and large armies. It is living worthy of the gospel, and doing so requires you to stand against Satan's spiritual forces and deceitful schemes (Eph 4:14). "Scheme" in Ephesians 6:11 is derived from the word *methodia,* which refers to crafty scheming with the intent to deceive.[1] Other versions use "tactics" (HCSB), "strategies" (NLT), or "wiles" (KJV). These translations help you see that Satan has a calculated plan to tempt you with sinful desires. He does this with powerful, wicked, and cunning resources. Of course, he is not all-powerful, and when you rely upon God's mighty power, his efforts are futile.

A second resource God gives you is spiritual armor (Eph 6:11, 13–17). The Ephesian Christians were familiar with the uniform and equipment of a Roman soldier.

Using this metaphor, Paul explains how God strengthens you to obey his word. The purpose is to fortify you to stand against the assaults of Satan. Notice how many times the word "stand" occurs in this text (vv. 11, 13, 14). A Roman soldier never deserted his post, and when their legions did not break rank, they were almost an impenetrable force.[2] There is no armor for the back because you never turn your back on Satan, and the armor is comprehensive, leaving nothing exposed.

The first piece of armor is the "belt of truth." For a Roman soldier, this probably referred to the leather apron that protected the upper legs during a battle and held the weapons needed for warfare. Fastening one's belt signifies the readiness a Christian needs for action.[3] This piece of armor is no leather belt. Instead, it is described as "truth," and truth holds everything together. It is the foundation of faith (Rom 10:17), and when you submit to it your convictions are in agreement with God's revelation.[4] A Christian's life is to be a "pillar and buttress of truth" (1 Tim 3:15).

The second piece of armor is the breastplate of righteousness. The breastplate protected all of the vital organs of a soldier. Pursuing righteousness is having the moral strength to submit to God's standard of living (Rom 6:13). It protects the heart from becoming alloyed with evil influences. Unrighteousness has no place in a Christian's life.

The third piece of armor is the shoes that are ready with the gospel of peace. What does this mean? It could have two possible interpretations. First, it could refer to having a firm footing. Faith in the gospel is the bedrock

on which you stand (Matt 7:24–27). Second, it might relate to the testimony one's life has regarding the gospel (Eph 4:1; Phil 1:27). The gospel prepares you for godly living.

The fourth piece of armor is the shield of faith. The Roman shield was a sizeable oblong-shaped shield that was usually two feet by four feet. It is made of wood or heavy metal and coated with leather. The soldier dipped it in water so it could extinguish flaming arrows.[5] Like a shield, faith protects you as you walk by it (2 Cor 5:7). Satan's deceitful schemes do not toss you to and fro (Eph 4:13–14). You trust steadfastly in the love, grace, and mercy of God. You seek, live, and teach his word (Ezra 7:10).

The fifth piece of armor is the helmet of salvation. In the first century, a helmet was made of animal skin and strengthened with bronze and other metals. It was had a horsehair crest at the top and had a visor to protect the face.[6] Salvation provides hope for the future (1 Thess 5:8). It also provides confidence for today. The Scriptures repeatedly give assurance of forgiveness and victory over sin (Acts 22:16; Col 1:12; 1 John 1:7; Rev 17:14).

The sixth piece of armor is the sword of the Spirit. Paul identifies this as "the word of God." It is the only offensive piece of equipment, and you must learn how to wield it effectively (2 Tim 2:15). How can we go on the offensive with the word of God? Through teaching, as godly living comes from learning and teaching sound doctrine (Eph 4:14; Titus 2:1). During times of temptation, it vital to have a grasp of Scripture. When Jesus encountered temptation, he relied on the word of God to defeat Satan's attempts (Matt 4:1–11). Satan's oldest scheme is to

undermine God's instructions (Gen 3:1). Resolve not to fall for his oldest trick in the book.

Application

What is the point of putting on the whole armor of God? Being suited with God's armor strengthens you to stand against Satan's schemes designed to weaken your faith. As Paul concludes this letter, he focuses on the need to have endurance. Notice Ephesians 6:18, "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." (ESV) These pieces of armor, along with prayer, produce enduring faith. Someone rightly suggested that before your day begins, pray for God to equip you with each piece of armor. These resources enable you to withstand any evil you might encounter. God expects you to do all you can to stand firm. When the flesh weakens you, his grace and strength are sufficient (2 Cor 12:9–10).

Discussion Questions

1. What are some other biblical examples where God gave his people the strength they needed to serve him? (1 Sam 30:6)
2. What does the word "scheme" tell you about Satan's attempts to deceive you? Why isn't armor provided for the back of a Christian?

3. Why does Paul emphasize "standing" in this text?
4. Which piece of armor do most Christians lack? Which armor do most Christians use?
5. What are some ways you can go on the offensive with the sword of the Spirit?

Endnotes

1.Eugene A. Nida, and Johannes P. Louw, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 1:759.

2. Craig Keener, *IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, Olive Tree Bible Software, n.p.

3. Peter T. O'brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 473.

4. Marvin Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1946), 3:408.

5. Keener, *IVP Bible*, n.p.

6. Keener, *IVP Bible*, n.p.

Scripture Index

Old Testament

Genesis

1 75
1:26 73
1:27 73
2:18 75
2:24 74
3:1 100

Exodus

21:1–6 85

Leviticus

25:39–55 85

Numbers

14:31 97

Deuteronomy

3:28 96
15:12–18 85
31:7 96
31:23 96

Joshua

1:7a 97
24:31 97

1 Samuel

30:6 100

Ezra

7:10 99

Psalms

3:48 11
19 20
30:12 8
148:13 2

Proverbs

1:7 69
4:23 54
23:7 54

Isaiah

9:5 32
59:1–3 17

Jeremiah

13:11 7

Ezekiel

37 18

Micah

5:4 32

Habakkuk

3:3 2

New Testament

Matthew

4:1–11 100
5:4 90
5:8 68
5:10–12 90
5:16 68, 75
5:39 90
5:44 90
6:1 68
6:9–10 2
7:13–14 96
7:24–27 99
16:24 90
18:19 67
18:21 61
19:29 75
20:24–27 77
20:28 77
24:36 50
25:15 49
25:20–21 22

25:29 22
28:18 5
28:19–20 48
Mark
9:24 40
10:29 75
10:44 89, 91
15:16 48
Luke
13:19 46
17:10 90
John
3:2–8 54
3:16 79
3:18–20 68
8:3–5 68
8:24 18
13:3–4 89
13:15 89
13:35 16
14:6 18
Acts
2:24 14
2:38–39 6
2:47 49
4:8–12 18
9:1–22 32
19 10
21 28
21–28 26
21:27–35 26
22:16 99
Romans
1:16 48
1:20 20
3:13 18
3:23 17
5:6–8 19
5:20 4
6:6–11 18
6:13 98
6:23 17, 95
10:17 98
12:1–2 56–57
1 Corinthians
1:23 90
3:1–2 49
3:6 48
5:12–13 68
6:9–10 67
6:11 71
6:13–20 67
7:21 87
7:21–22 87–88
12:13 15, 88
15:9–11 32
15:24–26 5
15:51–52 57
2 Corinthians
5:7 99
5:17 21
5:20 48
12:9–10 100
Galatians
1:15–16 32
3:27 2–3
3:28 88, 90–91
5:19–21 67
Ephesians
1 37, 40
1:3–14 1–2, 8
1:3 2, 66, 71, 95

1:4 2
1:4–14 1–2
1:6 2, 4, 7
1:7 4, 95
1:7–14 4
1:9 4
1:9–10 6
1:10 2, 8
1:11 6
1:12 2, 6–7
1:13 6
1:13–14 95
1:14 2, 7
1:15 40
1:15–23 10, 37
1:17–19 11
1:22–23 15
1:23 43
2 37, 39
2:1–4 19
2:1–10 17–22, 25
2:4 27
2:5 66
2:8–10 95
2:9 20
2:10 21
2:11–22 24–25
2:14 27, 32
2:15 27
2:18 27
2:22 27
3 37, 39–40
3:1 38
3:1–13 30–31, 34
3:2 32
3:3–5 32, 35
3:4 5
3:6 5, 32, 35
3:7–8 32
3:10–11 33
3:13 35
3:14 37–38
3:14–15 39
3:14–21 36–37, 44
3:16–17 40
3:18 40, 42
3:18–19 74
3:19 41, 66
3:20–21 43
4 61
4–6 37
4:1 67, 99
4:1–2 96
4:4 19
4:5 19
4:7 19
4:10 20
4:11 49
4:13 43
4:13–14 99
4:14 97, 99
4:15 21
4:16 46, 49, 51
4:17 96
4:17–24 53, 57
4:17–5:21 21
4:20 79, 96
4:22–24 53
4:25 61
4:25–5:2 59
4:32 61–62
5 76

5:3–4 72
5:3–6 67
5:3–20 66
5:4 70
5:5 70
5:7–14 67
5:8 67, 71–72
5:8–9 96
5:9 67
5:11 68
5:13–14 68
5:15 69
5:15–20 69
5:16 69
5:17 69, 72
5:18 69
5:18b–21 76
5:19 69, 76
5:20 70, 72
5:21 76, 78, 90
5:21–32 73
5:22 78–79
5:23 78
5:24 78
5:25 79
5:25a 79
5:26 80
5:27a 80
5:31–33 81
5:32 74
6 83, 89
6:1–4 76
6:5 82–83
6:5–8 89, 91
6:5–9 76, 82, 93
6:9 87, 89, 91
6:10 96
6:10–20 94–95
6:11 97–98
6:12 96
6:13 98
6:13–17 98
6:14 98
6:18 100
Philippians
1:27 99
2:6–7 89
2:7 91
3:14 71
4:8 67
Colossians
1:12 99
1:13 67
3:5–6 67
3:22–25 91
3:22–4:1 93
3:23–24 22
4:1 87, 91
4:5 69
4:5–6 69
1 Thessalonians
4:3–5 67
5:8 99
1 Timothy
1:10 86
3:15 98
2 Timothy
2:2 48
2:15 99
4:5 48
Titus
2:1 99

2:9–10 91, 93
2:13–14 21
Hebrews
4:16 27
5:12–14 49
9:22 4
11:1 20
13:15–16 21
James
1:17 70
2:17 22
3:2–12 67
1 Peter
2:2 49
2:18–21 91, 93
2:23 63
3:15 48
5:3 6
1 John
1:7 67, 99
1:10 18
4:8 43
4:10 79
5:1–3 20
Revelation
2:10 3, 7
17:14 99

CREDITS

Select Scripture quotations are taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE®, copyright© 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

Select Scripture quotations are taken from the NEW KING JAMES VERSION®. Copyright© 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Select Scripture quotations are taken from the NEW REVISED STANDARD VERSION BIBLE, copyright © 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Select Scriptures quotations are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zon-

dervan.com The “NIV” and “New International Version” are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.®

Scripture quotations marked HCSB are been taken from the Holman Christian Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1999, 2000, 2002, 2003 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission. Holman Christian Standard Bible®, Holman CSB®, and HCSB® are federally registered trademarks of Holman Bible Publishers.

Scripture quotations from The Authorized (King James) Version. Rights in the Authorized Version in the United Kingdom are vested in the Crown. Reproduced by permission of the Crown’s patentee, Cambridge University Press.

Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved

CONTRIBUTORS

Bill Bagents (DMin Amridge University) is Professor of Ministry, Counseling and Biblical Studies at Heritage Christian University.

Jeremy Barrier (PhD Brite Divinity School, Texas Christian University) is Associate Professor of Biblical Literature at HCU.

Jeffrey Brothers (MA University of North Alabama) is Instructor of Counseling at HCU.

Kirk Brothers (PhD Southern Baptist Theological Seminary) is President of HCU.

Arvy Dupuy (MA Amridge University) is Adjunct Instructor at HCU.

Ed Gallagher (PhD Hebrew Union College) is Associate Professor of Christian Scripture at HCU.

Justin Guin (MMin Freed-Hardeman University) is Adjunct Instructor at HCU.

Nathan Guy (PhD Oxford University) is President of Mars Hill Bible School and adjunct professor at HCU.

Travis Harmon (MMin Heritage Christian University) is Vice President of Student Services and Instructor of Ministry at HCU.

Michael Jackson (EdD Union University) is Vice President of Academic Affairs and Associate Professor of Education and New Testament at HCU.

C. Wayne Kilpatrick (MAR Harding School of Theology) is Professor of Church History at HCU.

Clay McFarren (MBA Tennessee Technological University) is Admission Counselor at HCU.

Robert Youngblood (MA University of Alabama at Birmingham) is Vice President of Advancement at HCU.

BEREAN STUDY SERIES TITLES

The Ekklesia of Christ (2015)

What Real Christianity Looks Like (2016)

Clothed in Christ (2017)

Instructions of Living (2018)

Visions of Grace (2019)

Cloud of Witnesses (2020)