

The
NEW TESTAMENT

Translation and Commentary

by
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The Book of
Ephesians

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Preface

The purpose of this project is to provide the Lord's people with a thorough, easy-to-read interpretation of the Bible verse-by-verse. With this commentary there will be a translation from the original text, which will preserve simple dignity and yet eliminate the colloquial and antiquated expressions. There will also be an effort to avoid translations that make arbitrary decisions about certain texts which might be taken in several ways. For example, in the descriptions of Heaven, in Revelation 21:16, it says, "*The city lies foursquare.*" Now the Greek word translated, "foursquare," *tetragonos*, can mean "cube" or "four-cornered." If the city is a pyramid, which is quite possible, then "four-cornered" is a good translation. But if we use the word, "cube," then we shut out the possibility of the pyramid, an arbitrary decision which we are not capable of making at this time. Accordingly, we will attempt to stay as close to the literal text as possible, without paraphrases that may take too much liberty.

Foreword

It is our intention with this chapter-by-chapter study, to show as accurately as possible what the Bible teaches. We are not trying to present a reasonable philosophy of life with a reference to the Scripture as a source, but rather, we are attempting to show, as faithfully as possible, what the Bible teaches about life. We are not here defending the Bible, but only interpreting it. The Holy Spirit, Himself, must defend the Bible because, after all, it is His Word.

In order to interpret the Bible accurately, the following things are essential: 1) The presence and power of the Holy Spirit; 2) A thorough knowledge of the Hebrew and Greek languages in which the Bible was written; 3) A knowledge of the history and culture of the periods in which the Bible was written; 4) A personal situation which is free enough to make it unnecessary to defend any particular theological position; and 5) Enough personal experience with Christ and with the Bible to provide the high degree of sensitivity that is essential to bring out the best possible meaning among several choices.

The presentation of the truth of God as revealed in the Scripture, must be simple enough to be available to all who seek it, and yet profound enough and accurate enough to be assured that we are conveying the message as God intended it to be given. We must come to the Bible not as a textbook to be analyzed, but rather, as a revelation from God of the meaning of life especially as it relates to the human spirit and its identity with God. Essentially, the Bible reveals to us the nature of God, the nature of man, and the nature of man's relationship to God. As a revelation of the nature of God, the Bible becomes a source of nourishment to the spirit, which finds its source in the bread of life,—Jesus Christ. As a revelation of the nature of man and his relationship to God, the Bible provides guidelines for living.

In this study of the Bible we are going to provide a translation from the original text (Greek in the New Testament and Hebrew in the Old Testament) and with it, comments that will clarify the meaning of the text, providing both the spiritual nourishment and the practical guidelines that were intended from the beginning, in the revelation that God has given us.

An introduction to the study of the book of Ephesians

Ephesus was a jewel in the Roman province of Asia. In Paul's day, Asia comprised the western section of the peninsula of what later became known as Asia Minor. "Asia," in the days of the Roman Empire, was not the expansive continent that it is today. It is essential to understand this point in order to bring into perspective the statement by Paul "*that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks*" (Acts 19:10). Asia was only one of seven provinces in that region that were under the dominion of Rome. And this, of course, was the reference point in the Book of Revelation when John referred to the "seven churches of Asia." At the present time Asia Minor is occupied by Turkey.

In Paul's day, Ephesus was a beautiful and prosperous port city on the Aegean Sea. A magnificent street, paved in marble, ran from the harbor up to the center of the city. Lining the street were marble columns holding great torches that lighted the way. On either side were arcades, whose facades were lined with mosaic tiles. At the top of the street one turned left to the Great Arena, which had been the site of the uproar led by the silversmiths (Acts 19). The acoustics of the arena are such that one can whisper at the podium and be heard throughout the arena. If one continues north a few miles, one comes to the Grand Temple of Artemas (Diana), who was the goddess of Ephesus as well as of Asia. To the right of the street were the public buildings, including a grand library. All of this has been revealed through recent excavations.

Ephesus was also a great center of commerce with easy access to the Inland Empire as well as to the ports of the world via the Aegean Sea. One of the major drawing points of the city was the Great Temple of Diana. Great wealth was brought to the temple as a place of safe keeping and Ephesus became something of a world bank.

In later centuries, Ephesus lost both its wealth and its goddess, and its splendor. The rivers that converged on the harbor brought continuous deposits of silt, which soon rendered the port completely inoperable. The ruins of Ephesus now sit about three miles from the coast. Furthermore, subsequent to Paul's ministry and perhaps as a contributing cause, the goddess Diana came into neglect and was no longer a drawing card to the wealth of the region. Recent excavations have uncovered the magnificence of its former glory.

The place of Ephesus in the expansion of Christianity was in a large measure due to the conquest of Alexander the Great, in the 4th Century B.C.. Alexander was the heir to the throne of Philip of Macedonia. After his father's death, Alexander began a massive campaign of conquest throughout the Greek peninsula and the Near East. Decimated by the war with Sparta (the Peloponnesian War), Athens was an easy mark for Alexander. He became fascinated with the Greek culture and determined to spread it throughout that part of the world. This was a period known as the Era of Hellenization, which was taken from the original name for Greece—Hellas. The Hellenic culture included the Greek language, which became the major basis of communication throughout the Mediterranean basin, including Egypt, where Alexander established the city that bears his name. In fact, Greek-style city states had been established throughout the Near East. This Hellenization

was an important factor in the early spread of Christianity. And, of course, Koine (common) Greek was the language of the New Testament, as it was also the language of commerce throughout a good part of the known world, at that time. It can well be said that the empires of Rome and of Alexander the Great were, to a large extent, the vehicles through which God spread the Gospel far and wide.

The city of Ephesus was an important part of this process. Here Paul ministered for three years and the message was spread throughout all of Asia. To such a city and such people, Paul wrote from Rome. It must be remembered that the names on these letters of Paul's are not merely book titles, but letters to real people in real places, with real needs. In many respects, Ephesians is a great literary work, as we would expect of something inspired by the Holy Spirit however, it is not to be seen as a philosophical or literary masterpiece, but rather as a vital message with vital instructions to the people of God. It is not an ethereal guide through never-never land. It is not religious jargon from the ivory tower, known only by a select few who can ferret out arcane symbolisms. It is a pragmatic guide to all who care to follow Christ.

These words were written by Paul after some thirty years of revelations and rigorous experiences in living and fighting side by side with the risen Christ. The knowledge is there; the experience is there; the language is there; and Christ takes it and uses it to communicate to His people the eternal truths that will bring them through to glory.

It is well to remember also, that the words of Paul were not intended to establish an order of religious perfectionism. They were intended to produce a people of God filled with His Spirit and living life day by day in the energy of that Spirit. Many books on the so-called "Christian walk" are really manuals for the producing of fleshly piety and religious fervor. Paul's letters are not such manuals of Christian perfection—they are guides for living life on the earth, at peace with God and man, and understanding the meaning of our relationship to Christ. All motivations to service and the caring consciousness of living with Christ are from the Holy Spirit within. Efforts on the part of Christian leaders to motivate believers, are likely to produce an artificial religious piety, and/or unnecessary guilt upon any failure.

Paul's first contact with Ephesus came on his second missionary journey. At that time he stopped briefly, but went on in order not to miss the feast of Pentecost at Jerusalem. However, on his third missionary journey, he stayed in Ephesus for three years. There were at Ephesus, two disciples—Aquila and Priscilla—whom Paul had met in Corinth and had worked with in his trade of tent making. Later, they had gone with Paul to Ephesus and stayed there, while he went on to Jerusalem. Under Paul's ministry at Corinth, they had become well-informed and had obviously begun a work among the people of Ephesus along with a Jew from Alexandria named Apollos. He was learned and eloquent, but knew only the baptism of John. Aquila and Priscilla then took him aside and showed him the true meaning of Christ.

When Paul came to Ephesus he found a small group of disciples (about twelve), whom he gathered together to determine whether or not they had understood the coming and meaning of the Holy Spirit. They responded that they had not even so much as heard whether there be a Holy Spirit, but had been baptized with the baptism of John. Paul then

explained to them about Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit. And when he had laid hands on them, they received the Holy Spirit, and spoke in tongues and prophesied. It is very important to understand that the Holy Spirit, as given at Pentecost, was ministered to the various sectors of the country through the twelve Apostles. The reason it had to come through the Apostles was to prevent separate groups of people from rising up and claiming some special dispensation of the Holy Spirit, exclusive of the rest of the body. They had to be united, and the uniting had to come through the Apostles. The assumption that the Holy Spirit would always have to be administered through Apostles in the future, however, is not sustained in the rest of the New Testament.

This coming of the Holy Spirit at Ephesus was in keeping with Jesus' statement to His disciples as He was leaving them to ascend to glory. He said, "*Ye shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and in Samaria and unto the uttermost parts of the earth*" (Acts 1:8). The phrase—"*uttermost parts of the earth*"—should be translated "the extremities of the land." This is in keeping with the usage of that phrase by Jesus, when He said that the Queen of Sheba "*had come from the uttermost parts of the earth...*" Actually, she came from the region of the Arabian Peninsula, which was at the extremity of the land. The use of the word "earth," both in Hebrew and Greek, is properly translated by "land." As such, it usually refers to the Mediterranean area including the boundaries of Asia Minor. Jesus' words to the disciples, in Acts 1:8, were not so much a command as they were a statement of fact. Jerusalem and Judea were indeed immediately enlightened through the Apostles. Samaria came next, through the ministry of Philip, and now the extremities of the land would be carried out by Paul, whose ministry included all of Asia Minor. Ephesus was the ideal place to launch this ministry, since, as we have seen, its accessibility to the sea and the inland provinces had made it a great trade center, and thus, a natural vehicle for the spread of the Gospel.

It is of singular importance, to note that this original group in Ephesus that had received the initial coming of the Spirit, was only twelve in number. It is reminiscent of the fact that Jesus left the entire building of His Church to His twelve disciples initially. As Jonathan, the close friend of David, had observed a thousand years earlier (in a battle context), "*it is nothing with the Lord to save by many or by few*" (I Samuel 14:6). One of the cardinal principles of Scripture, as summarized by Paul to the Corinthians, is that the Lord has always used the weak to confound the mighty (I Corinthians 1:27).

Paul remained in Ephesus for three years, teaching in the school of Tyrannus and in the homes of the disciples. And thus, Ephesus became the foundation of a great ministry among the Gentiles of Asia. The narrative of Paul's work in Asia may be found in Acts 18-20. It is with this in mind, that we now turn to the text itself and seek, as nearly as possible, to understand the true intent of Paul, in the words that he uses.

Ephesians 1:1-2

TRANSLATION

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God to the saints who are in Ephesus and to the “faith ones” in Christ Jesus, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

COMMENTARY

Opening Remarks

The single most significant thing about Paul’s ministry was that he was undeniably sent from God. The word “apostle,” bandied about rather carelessly, has been applied so broadly as to have lost much of its true meaning. As a more precise designation, it referred to the twelve Apostles of Christ, *with* Paul included. In the broader sense as used in Scripture, it is someone designated in a special way, possibly as an emissary to new regions. The word is from the Greek verb—*αποστελον* (*apostello*)—which means “to send forth.” So the Apostle had a very special commission. Paul could lay claim to both categories, since he was given the designation of Apostle in the same sense that the original twelve were.

Paul further emphasizes his special commission by stressing the point that it was through “the will of God.” There are many efforts on the part of the Church to motivate people to go out to the work. Such motivations are likely to be of the flesh, rather than of the Spirit. While motivations of the flesh are replete with causes and “because,” the motivation of the Spirit is a compelling, from within, that may be completely void of human

rationale, as such. Human motivations involve rewards, and penalties, and needs, and numbers. The motivation of the Spirit may have none of these, and may be on the one hand, beyond human reason. There is an inner compelling to respond to the touch of the Spirit.

It is more likely to be of the Spirit if it does not follow the path of human reason. Paul was very explicit about this in his words to the Corinthians—“*The love of Christ constrains [compels] me...*” (II Corinthians 5:14). The Greek construction here indicates, that Paul is not talking about love *for* Christ, but the love *of* Christ within him—a love that is the fruit of the Spirit. When the Holy Spirit comes to us at salvation, there is a fruit of the Spirit that attends His coming. Galatians 5:22 spells out the various facets of that fruit-love, joy, peace, etcetera. These are not gifts that we have to seek, they come to us with the Spirit. But some may say, “I don’t have the love I would like to have.” Such a statement usually implies a seeking of a human kind of love, which is of the emotions. The *agape* love of Christ goes beyond emotions, and comes from the

Spirit within that reaches out beyond human emotion to care about others. In this sense, one may love one's enemy, even though one doesn't feel any emotional attachment. Human affection is not necessarily a part of this kind of love.

So Paul's apostleship was based on a compelling love of Christ within his spirit, that reached out beyond his human emotion to care about the Gentiles to whom God had sent him. Hence, Paul's apostleship was by the will of God and not based upon human motivations. A good example of this principle is found in his visit to Athens. Even though Athens was the cultural center of the Western World at that time, and even though it was very populous, and even though Paul was well-equipped to handle the Sophists and the Stoics, Paul gave only one message and moved on. There is no indication that he established any kind of work or church in that city. By the same token, the Spirit did not permit him to go to the Roman province of Bithynia, even though that would have served to round out his ministry in Asia Minor. It is of crucial importance to understand that Paul's apostleship was a true commission "by the will of God." It is all right to consult with others about one's calling, but it ought not to be motivated by others. If the Holy Spirit Himself does not give one the compelling and the capacity, it is likely to be in the flesh. Callings that are based on guilt or obligation are based on human rationale.

To the saints... The Greek word is *αγιοι* (*hagioi*), which means "separated" or "set apart." It is the New Testament counterpart to the Old Testament Hebrew word *qadash*, which was used, for example, for the temple vessels which were "set apart" for God. The word has been grossly misused in the Church. In

fact, we have been robbed of the proper use of it in application to all of the believers everywhere. It has nothing to do with special degrees of piety or service, as a large segment of the Church has used it. It is lamentable that they have managed to deprive us of that marvelous word; and so the word "sanctify," which has also been grossly misused in application to a special brand of piety or dedication. Everywhere in the Bible, the word means simply to set something apart or for God's use. Everyone who comes to Christ is so "set apart" for Christ, and is delivered from any claim by Satan. The roots of the word in Hebrew go clear back to the earliest Semitic languages in the form of the word *qad*, which meant simply "to cut." In salvation we are completely cut off from the claim of Satan and delivered unto God; to be His possession forever. It is true, of course, that Satan can buffet us, and plague us, and tempt us, but he can never possess us when we have been set apart by Christ. Remember, you are a saint not because you are pious, but because you belong to Christ.

To the "faith ones"... Not "faithful," but "full of faith." The word and its derivatives are used everywhere for faith and believing. The idea of "loyalty" or "trustworthiness" is certainly a possible usage, especially in the Greek classics where faith as we know it was not so common, if known at all among the early Greeks. What militates against it in the New Testament, especially in such passages as this, is the problem of assuming that any human being is really trustworthy in the ultimate sense of that term, and certainly not universal among the believers. And it is most unlikely that Paul would address only a highly select group of very, very special believers. Actually, the best translation would be "to the faith ones" or believers, without

regard to the ultimate degree of that faith. Like electricity, faith is an energy process from God which one either has or does not have.

In Christ Jesus... As is abundantly clear throughout the New Testament, our faith stands only in Christ. Anything that is a matter of human feelings of trust or confidence is of the mind and therefore, of course, of the flesh. The concern about human feelings has often caused believers to be discouraged, and robbed them of their peace. The faith that is in Christ Jesus is from God; and is not dependent on human feelings, positive or negative. Thus, God may be functioning within one in His own way, even while one is full of doubts and fears. The doubts and fears are the emotions of the flesh and have nothing to do with the spirit, wherein dwells the faith of Christ.

Grace to you and peace... Again, we are dealing with two words that have been greatly abused in the teachings of the Church. Grace has usually been treated in a rather “sterile” way as “unmerited favor.” The adjective—unmerited—is not an intrinsic part of the word “grace.” It is, in fact, something of a redundancy because obviously God’s favor is unmerited. In a way it, is like giving someone a gift, and as you hand them the gift, you say to them, “You know you really don’t deserve this, but I’m giving it to you anyway.” A gift is a gift, and in the nature of the case is not based upon the merit of the individual. It is an obvious point, but certainly unfashionable to remind the recipient of it. The Greek word *χαρις* (*charis*) is, in its very essence, a word of giving. There are many derivatives of the word, all of which ultimately have to do with giving. Some of these words are *charisma*—gift; *eucharisteo*—giving thanks; *charidzomai*—forgiving. Based on a

thorough study of the word, we conclude that a better translation of *charis* would be “a flow of Divine benevolence.” Such a flow is not merited, but that is intrinsic to the word and does not need to be emphasized.

Peace has also been much misunderstood. The Greek word *eirene* means serenity and harmony. It does not necessarily involve cessation from hostilities. One can be at peace in the midst of hostility, where the Spirit is involved. In Galatians 5:22, peace is a fruit of the Spirit. As such, it comes with the coming of the Holy Spirit, and is not something that has to be strived for. What is essential to understand is that peace in the spirit and peace in the flesh are two different things. One can be at peace with Christ in the spirit and be going through great conflicts in the flesh. To the oft repeated question “Where is the peace?” The answer is that it is in the spirit. If we don’t understand that, we may assume that Christ has really not had much success in bringing peace. When He offered peace to His disciples, He said, “*Peace I give unto you; My peace I leave with you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid*” (John 14:27). The peace that we have in Christ as a gift of His Holy Spirit, supersedes all earthly conflicts and gives us peace in our spirits in spite of all. Such peace is not attainable by fleshly efforts. It is a gift of God, and as such, is not affected by any human factor. One must never judge one’s peace with Christ by feelings of peace or turmoil in the human emotions.

From God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the guarantee of the grace and the peace. It is not merely a casual salutation by Paul. It is a very serious offer from God, who is the Originator of the universe and all its

inhabitants, communicated through the Holy Spirit, and validated by the

“Captain of our salvation.”

Ephesians 1:3-6

TRANSLATION

Blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the “supra-heavenlies” in Christ, even as He has chosen us out in Him before the foundation of the world that we should be set apart and blameless before Him in love, having established us beforehand unto a sonship through Jesus Christ unto Himself, according to the good purpose of His will, unto the praise of the glory of His grace, with which He has surrounded us with grace in the Beloved One.

COMMENTARY

Our Spiritual Heritage

What do we mean by spiritual? It is one of the most crucial words in the entire Bible, and yet, it has been bandied about with such carelessness as to have little real significance. It has been used to identify songs and seances and super-Christians. The result is that there is a good deal of confusion and misunderstanding and misapplication of its meaning. But what, then, can we know for sure about its meaning? The Greek word for spirit is πνευμα (*pneuma*). This word denotes both the human spirit and the Spirit of God. It also denotes the realm in which God functions—the realm of the Spirit, known also as the Spiritual Kingdom. The adjectival form is πνευματικε (*pneumatike*). This word, then, has nothing to do with a special kind of piety, or holiness, or dedication. It strictly refers to the realm of the spirit versus the realm of the flesh. It is essential to know this in order to

understand the meaning of this first section of Ephesians 1.

Blessed is God... Again, we are confronted with a word that has lost all of its significance. Its use is rampant in the secular world, often for trivia; and in the religious realm in an equally trivial sense. It tends to roll off the tongue with vacuous ease and habit, with the same impact as “have a nice day.”

But what does it really mean? In fact, how is it that we mortals can presume to “bless God?” We must, again, scrutinize carefully the Greek word so translated. The word is ευλογεω (*eulogeo*), and is made up of the word *logos* and a prefix—*eu*. *Logos* was used by John to indicate Christ as the revelation of God. It meant word as an idea, or medium of communication. But in a special sense, it also meant different kinds of things. Basically referring to words about things,

it later came to mean things in themselves. To the word *logos* was attached a prefix—*eu*—which meant “well” or “good,” or “harmonious.” Thus, we bless God in terms of offering to Him words that are filled with appreciation and good will. On the other hand, God offers to us benefits both of a spiritual as well as material nature. In this passage in Ephesians, the benefits that are in focus are the matters of the spirit. As a matter of fact, the many things that people often identify as blessings from God are sometimes questionable. When people use the expression—“God has blessed us”—they usually refer to material things. The fundamental question is, is God still blessing people when they don’t have material things? It is not to be ungrateful for what God gives us, but it is to suggest that, for the most part, the focus of people is on the benefits of the flesh, rather than benefits of the spirit. God’s focus would primarily be on the benefits which He brings us in the spirit, which are our spiritual heritage.

The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ... The title—God—addresses Him as the Godhead—the Tripartite Being who is the Source of all existence—the universe with all of its material elements, as well as the realm of the spirit. The full designation—Lord Jesus Christ encompasses all that Christ is as a part of the Godhead; all that He was in His incarnate sojourn on the earth; and all that He is as the Lord God Omnipotent, reigning.

Blessings of the Spirit... Now we come to the essence of the passage. What are these blessings? What is the substance of our spiritual heritage?

In the “supra-heavenlies”...The word “heavenly” is not adequate. The word for “heaven” is οὐρανοῦς (*ouranous*). To this

word there has been added a prepositional prefix—*epi*. *Epi* has many facets to its meaning, but fundamentally, it carries the idea of on or above or beyond. Here the intent is almost certainly “beyond.” But what can be beyond the heavens? Apparently it is referring to a spirit dimension, rather than a material one. In Ephesians 6, the same word is used in connection with forces of evil that occupy the *epouranios*. Here it is translated in the King James text as “heavenly places.” Obviously, Satan does not occupy Heaven as such, since he was cast out. Nor is it reasonable to assume that this means “the Church”—hardly a “heavenly” place.

The idea of a “spirit realm” beyond the heavenlies is quite in keeping with the facts. Satan and his demonic forces do have access to the realm of spirits, from which he functions as a *prince [ruler] of the power of the air* (Ephesians 2:1-2). It is vital to remember that just because something is of a spirit nature, does not mean that it is from God. The “anti-Christ,” or false Messiah, will perform many miracles in the end times. This is, of course, the realm to which the spiritists appeal in their experience of the occult. In the majority of cases, there is certainly a good deal of charlatanry, but there is also a strong element of demonic power at work. It is well to stay clear of all manifestations of power that are not Christ-oriented. The Bible itself warns against seeking out the counsel of astrologers, stargazers, wizards, necromancers (speaking with the dead) (Deuteronomy 18:10-12; Isaiah 47:13). So the Bible recognizes a realm of the supernatural that is not of God, and warns against it.

So the word we are dealing with here, belongs to the spirit realm. That spirit realm is apparently occupied both by the

forces of God and the forces of Satan. That is where the great battle is raged; and it is a battle that is beyond the power of human beings. It is, therefore, essential that we let God deal with it, and not try to fight Satan ourselves rather than, as the Bible suggests, simply to stand fast. It is also important to understand that whatever force Satan has in the spirit realm, it is temporary and will ultimately be totally vanquished. On the other hand, God does exercise His power with His saints, and has provided us with an eternal heritage in that spirit realm.

Chosen out in Him before the foundation of the world... In the realm of the blessings of the spirit, the first one Paul identifies is our election. It is essential to understand that this is a corporate election—that is the choosing out of the Body of Christ or the Church. It does not have to do with individuals, any more than the election of Israel had to do with individuals. God did not elect beforehand, certain ones to be included in the family of Israel and certain ones that were not to be included. The Church is the present replacement for Israel, and partakes of the same kind of election. This election took place before the foundation of the world. That is, God chose to bring into being a special body of people who would belong to Him as Israel belonged to Him.

That we should be set apart and blameless before Him in love... Collectively, the Church would be a special family set apart for Him, as the vessels of the temple were set apart for worship. Again, we are not dealing here with piety or religious fervor, but with a setting apart or sanctifying, as the vessels of the temple were set apart for the service of God. Similarly, the word “blameless” refers not to flawlessness, but

faultlessness. We are all *faultless* before God through the righteousness of Christ. His capacity to present us “*faultless before God*” is the Divine answer to the tragedy of Eden. Jude 24 confirms this truth.

His election and preserving of His people is in the context of love. As we are faultless before Him (Jude 24), so we are before Him in love. The love that is spoken of here, is the *agape* love of the Spirit of God. It is one of the fruits of the spirit to all who believe. As such, it is a gift of the spirit and not something to strive for. To speak in terms of cultivating more love is to speak in terms of a fleshly exercise. Paul’s discussion in I Corinthians 13, is not between believers with less love and believers with more love, it is between believers who have the Spirit of Christ in them, and unbelievers who may exercise a certain kind of human concern, but are not possessed with the love of Christ. As one cannot be saved apart from the Spirit of Christ, so one cannot have the Spirit of Christ without having His love. Where people are confused is in the difference between the human love of *phile*, which has to do strictly with human emotions, and the *agape* love of the Spirit, which is *beyond* human emotions. It is quite possible to love one in the *agape* sense—even one’s enemies—without feeling emotional attraction to them. One does not always like the people one cares for. God’s caring for the world eventuated in its salvation. It would, on the other hand, be unsound to test God’s love in the human sense by the things that He does for us or does not do for us, in the flesh.

Having established us beforehand unto a sonship... The Greek word προορισας (*proorisas*) simply means to decree or establish beforehand. Our word predestination has acquired, through the

years, a number of complex ideas, which have gotten us into a good deal of trouble. Our theological vocabulary often does that for us. We establish something of a “straw man,” in our usage of words and then deal with that straw man. The whole debate over whether or not individuals are destined to be saved or destined to be lost, is something of that straw man. What Paul is declaring here is that, as God had established or decreed the family of Israel, so He has decreed, now, the family of the Church. It has nothing to do with individuals but with a collective election. The major difference in these two elections is that God has sent His Holy Spirit to dwell within the individuals and to give them the capacity, or power, to be His own sons or children; in essence, more than just in title. The word *υιοθεσιαν* (*huiiothesian*) is improperly translated by “adoption,” since it really is not the same as our legal process. In many respects, the introducing of a legal factor here, is as unfortunate as would be the introducing of a legal factor in a natural child. If a child is born into a family, it is hardly impressive to say that the child has also legal rights in the family. We belong to the family of Christ by virtue of a spiritual birth, and not by virtue of a legal decree. The spiritual birth carries with it the legal privileges of sonship (the Greek word includes both male and female). Thus, the translation “place as a child” is more significant than the translation “adoption,” which is a binding legal term, but rather sterile in its concept. The idea of the natural child is equally binding, but a much richer kind of relationship. So God determined before the world began, to establish a family on the earth that would, by reason of the Holy Spirit, become His natural children and natural heirs. It was this that was predetermined, and not individual members of that family.

According to the good purpose of His will... The Greek word *ευδοκα* (*eudokia*) is better translated by “purpose,” then by “pleasure.” It was not merely something that pleased Him, but rather, something that was intrinsic to the creation of the universe. To say that He could have created the universe without the inhabitants, begs the question. A universe without its living beings, especially human, would not serve in any way to reflect His glory. There is a sense, of course, in which nature does declare the glory of God (Psalm 19:1), but the glorifying of him through His creation, especially with the voluntary offering of worship and praise, completes the ultimate meaning of His own being. In the nature of the case, God cannot exist without expressing Himself in creation, and that creation must also express itself in glorifying Him.

Unto the praise of the glory of His grace... This phrase confirms what we have said before. There is no higher glory than the glory of God. To complete His being, He must create that which returns to Him the praise of His glory. And that glory is ultimately expressed in the extending of grace to His creatures. As we have seen, that grace is a river of Divine benevolence flowing out of His very Being, which is by nature, the very essence of love—“God is love.”

With which He surrounded us with grace in the Beloved One. We are literally “immersed in grace.” The expression “accepted” as in the King James version is not adequate to the full meaning of the word, which is the verb form of the word “grace.” There is, as is often the case, no adequate English translation, but perhaps the closest is to indicate that we are literally immersed in His grace in the Beloved One. God, who

is the very essence of love, projected Himself to His creatures in One who is Himself the ultimate expression of love

and who, through His Holy Spirit, shed that love upon us and in fact, literally imbued us with it.

Ephesians 1:7-14

TRANSLATION

In whom we have redemption through His blood—the forgiveness of trespasses according to the riches of His grace, with which He abounded unto us in all wisdom and understanding, having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His [God's] good purpose which He set forth in Him [Christ] unto a dispensation of the fullness of times, to head up all things in Christ, of things pertaining to heaven and things pertaining to earth, in Him in whom also we have received a share, having been preestablished according to the purpose of the One who energizes all things according to the counsel of His will, that we should be unto the praise of His glory who had our expectations beforehand in Christ. In which also you, having heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, in whom also having believed you were sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the pledge of our inheritance, unto the redemption of His secured possession, unto the praise of His glory.

COMMENTARY

Our Heritage Further Explored

We are dealing with our heritage; or privileges; or benevolences from God. In a real sense, they are more than gifts, as they are sometimes called, because they belong to our rights as children of God. These rights are not those merely of adoption, but the rights of birth—a spiritual birth. Access to the kingdom of God, and to our position with Him, is only possible through spiritual rebirth. Whereas much has been made of our rights and privileges in the material sense, these are really quite paltry in comparison with our spiritual heritage. In fact, large numbers of the Lord's children have had very little in the way of earthly benefits. The inequities in this

area are as widespread as they are difficult to explain. In the New Testament, where the spiritual heritage is brought to the full, it is obvious that there is no connection between the temporal benefits of the Lord's people and the spiritual realities. Paul, of course, is a primary example.

We continue now, the exploring of our limitless benefits in the kingdom of the Spirit, where our rights and privileges are undisputed.

In whom we have redemption... Redemption is the central issue of the Bible. Without it, there would be no Bible

and no need for God to communicate with his creatures. In fact, without the preestablished potential of redemption, there would not likely have been a creation at all, since God would have been guilty of evolving a monster which He could not, or would not, contain.

Moreover, this is one of the few words which has a commonality of meaning in all languages. “To redeem” simply means to buy back or to recover. There are many ideas as to how this process was effected or what its total implications are, but ultimately, it means one thing—God has provided for the recovery of all who wish to be recovered. Of itself, the Greek word *απολυτρωσις* (*apolutrosis*) does not suggest the means by which the redemption takes place, but it does suggest the completeness of the transaction. There is no greater fact in all of life than the fact that God, the Author of the universe—for all of the mystery surrounding the creation and the subsequent fall—has made it possible for His creatures to recover the necessary capacity to be integrally one with Him throughout eternity. We humans speculate as to how and why God made the universe, as well as the ultimate meaning and purpose of a creation outside of Himself; but the fact remains that all who wish to be, may be one with Him forever—partakers of His very nature, and heirs of all that He possesses.

Through His blood... One of the reasons that the meaning of redemption is so clear, is that Israel had been given a great host of symbols and types that gave, in precise definition, just what redemption was all about. There, we learn that sin had brought about an alienation between God and man; that death was the inevitable consequence of that separation; that restoration was possible with God, but only in the

continual recognition of that death in the offering of a symbolic death—a blood sacrifice. And thus, since the recognition of this death was a continual necessity, there was the need of a continual sacrificial process. But there was still a certain barrier. An animal sacrifice was only a symbolic substitute and could not, of itself, take away sin (Hebrews 10:11). Further, such sacrifices could not bring to fulfillment God’s ultimate intention for His creation (Hebrews 10:1). It was therefore necessary that God should bring to the world His ultimate sacrifice—Jesus Christ. The Epistle to the Hebrews is the classic statement of the Old Testament sacrifice and its New Testament fulfillment (chapters 8-10). Here, it is plainly stated that whereas the sacrifices of the Old Testament were adequate as substitutes, the only *true* sacrifice was Christ, whose blood could, indeed, purge from sin (Hebrews 9:13, 14). So the meaning of redemption was thoroughly given in the Old Testament sacrifices, but only fulfilled in the sacrifice of Christ. What we learn in the Old Testament sacrifices, is that there is a place of reconciliation to God. What we have in the sacrifice of Christ, was an eternal reconciliation through the “once for all” death of His Son. Through the sacrifice of Christ, sin would never again be an insurmountable barrier between God and man.

But why the shedding of blood? Could there not have been a more humane way to give up one’s life?

The ultimate answer to that remains with God, but suffice it to say, that the lessons of thousands of years of human history have shown that sin has produced a brutish society; and must be answered, in kind, by a brutish death.

But why blood? Is there some special power in blood?

The Bible says that the life of the flesh is in the blood (Leviticus 17:13, 14). Our modern technology gives us ever more convincing proof of this. In fact, the health of the entire body is discerned through blood tests. But aside from that, it must be realized that it was the blood of Christ—the very human expression of God—that is before us. Obviously, there was something special about it. Of course, it was the sinlessness of Christ that made Him an acceptable sacrifice for the sins of the world. Any other human could only die for his own sins.

But the subject of the implications of the blood is a highly complex one and not necessary to go into at this time. Suffice it to say that God did shed His own blood through His Son, and it was an adequate sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. *“Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world”* (John 1:29). Millions of volumes have been written on the theological implications of redemption. Often they only add to the confusion—much of it is speculation. But what we humans need to know is that there is a place of reconciliation with God; it was accomplished through the sacrifice of Christ; it was a once for all thing that requires no new sacrifice, but merely an acceptance of the one made by Christ; it provided for us a permanent and eternal recovery to the ultimate position that God had originally intended for His creation. There are, obviously, a great many mysteries surrounding the implications of Christ—mysteries which the human mind cannot understand—but God has revealed them to our spirits through His Holy Spirit, so that we possess within our spirits a knowledge that cannot be expressed with our human capacities (I Corinthians 2:9-16). Perhaps a rough

analogy would be in the many, almost incomprehensible, technologies that we use every day with complete effectiveness; and yet, which very few of us really understand. As Paul wrote to the Ephesians, the words were given and received through the power of the Holy Spirit; and therefore, needed not the intricate explanations which often accompany today’s theological discussions. And it should be sufficient for us today. We are redeemed by the blood of Christ, and we *do* have an eternal place with Him.

The forgiveness of trespasses... Here again, the word for forgiveness—*ἀφιεν* (*aphiemi*)—would have been understood by the Ephesians very clearly and very thoroughly, as simply to take away or remove. There is no question here of degree or of emotional interaction—only removal. And once again, the symbolism of the Old Testament sacrificial system is most enlightening. On the day of atonement two goats were prepared—one for the sacrifice and one for a special designation of “scapegoat.” The priest laid his hands on the head of the scapegoat and symbolically transferred the sins of the people to it. Then the scapegoat was sent off into the wilderness to symbolize the fact that the sins were completely removed. David picks up this beautiful concept in Psalm 103:12—*“As far as the east is from the west so far has He removed our transgressions from us.”*

The word for trespasses—*παραπτωμα* (*paraptoma*)—is from the word *pipto*, which means “to fall.” There are a great many terminologies used in the issue of sin and failure. All of them have to do, in one way or another, with falling short of God’s ultimate intention for His creation. Jude speaks of the one, *“who is able to keep you from falling.”* And David says, *“The steps of a good man are ordered by*

the Lord: and He delighteth in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the Lord upholdeth him with His hand" (Psalm 37:23, 24). There is a considerable debate over what is sin and what is merely a misstep. And therefore, what needs to be forgiven and what does not. The truth of the matter is, that sin as a basis of separation from God, has been covered in the atonement of Christ. On the other hand, anything that offends the Lord ought to be forgiven in the same sense that we forgive those who offend us; or we ask for forgiveness if we have offended someone. If we are conscious of having offended Christ, we should ask His forgiveness. We can leave it to Him to determine what the label ought to be. The fundamental point is that the Bible, everywhere, promises forgiveness for asking. To ask Christ for forgiveness is really possible only through the Holy Spirit. Therefore, to seek forgiveness is to find it. A clear teaching of this passage then, is that the issue of sin has been dealt with in all of its aspects, and forgiveness guaranteed through Christ.

According to the riches of His grace...

Since the riches of Christ are unfathomable, so the extent of His grace. Let us plunge into the river of the flow of God's benevolence toward us and let us carry it through to glory.

In all wisdom and understanding...

The Greek word translated "wisdom" is σοφία (*sophia*). It is a common part of many English words and is quite frequently used in the New Testament. It is important to understand, however, that the word does not convey the same idea as our English word, which usually refers to something akin to sound judgment. The Greek word, on the other hand, refers to the meaning of life and the universe. When Jesus said that the Greeks "seek after wisdom," He meant that they were

always exploring the mysteries of life and the universe. This was the pursuit of the so-called "Sophists." According to Jesus, the Jews were seeking some kind of miraculous sign from God, and the Greeks on the other hand were pursuing the knowledge of the universe apart from God. Both of them were ignoring the fundamental revelation of Jesus Christ. For the believers, all that the Jews and Greeks were seeking was fulfilled in Christ. He was the ultimate revelation of God to both Jew and Gentile. All of the ages of the efforts of the Greeks to find the mysteries of the universe, had brought them to naught. It is much like modern science today. The effort to discover the ultimate origin of the universe has led ultimately to gaseous matter. The latest discoveries have shown that gaseous matter to have been in existence for billions of years. But what produced the gaseous matter? And how could such gaseous matter ultimately produce the refinements of civilization as they are today? Even the scientists who pursue the subject, owe their mental capacities to devise the technology by which they do their work, to an intelligent Creator and not to the chance accumulation of ions. For the believer, the coming of salvation brings with it the revelation of Christ; and hence, a grasp of the origin and meaning of the universe that is not accessible to those who do not have the Spirit of Christ within. Even though our knowledge in the flesh is quite minimal, the revelation which we possess within our spirits, is adequate to identify us with the realities of the universe as God created it.

The word for "understanding" is quite different. *Phronesis* (φρονησις) has to do with a thought process which is based upon the function of the brain in producing patterns, ideas or tendencies. The coming of the Holy Spirit gives us the

capacity to view life in a sound manner. That is, we see God as the Creator and ourselves as His special creation. While there are still vast mysteries to be revealed when we are glorified, every believer has a basic view of life and the universe that provides a foundation for a sense of what life is all about and where we are headed.

Having made known to us the mystery of His will... The word *μυστηριον* (*musterion*) denotes not something that cannot be known or is improbable of being known, but something that is known by the initiated. Perhaps it is akin to the bylaws of an exclusive club, which are not known by anyone outside the group. In this case, of course, God has revealed these mysteries to His people. Paul tells the Corinthians, “*Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, the things that God hath prepared for them that love Him*” (I Corinthians 2:9). This text is often quoted as an indicator of the glories of Heaven, whose magnificence is beyond the human understanding; however, the next verse changes that meaning because it says, “*But God hath revealed them to us through His Spirit*” (I Corinthians 2:10). So, as the rest of the passage indicates, we are dealing here with the great mysteries of the Spirit, which have been revealed to our spirits and, as indicated before, may be known at the spirit level, but not at the mental level. The Spirit within us knows things by the presence of Christ within, that the brain doesn’t always pick up. So we are privy to many of the mysteries of God, especially as having to do with our salvation and our relationship to God.

According to His [God’s] good purpose which He established beforehand in Him [Christ]... *ευδοκια* (*eudokia*) has often been translated by

“good pleasure”—a misleading concept in terms of modern day English usage, which gives it a lighter touch. It is more accurate to translate it by “what He deems or thinks best.” It does not always please God to do things that are, nevertheless, important for His people.

What God deemed best for His people, He established “before the world began.” The way things have turned out in the world is no surprise to God. He provided the ultimate test for those whom He could number with His eternal family. If He provided a test, He also provided the means to pass the test. A great many, in the Old Testament period, failed the test of faithfulness to God, but they did not have the inner resources of the New Testament believer.

But then, as Paul asks, how can He find fault? Did they not do the best that they could?

Ultimately, Paul’s response must be our response—who can really judge God’s actions? On the other hand, it must be said that the attributes of God, as set forth in all of the Bible, include limitless grace and mercy. So we must ask with Abraham—“*Shall not the judge of all earth do right?*” (Genesis 18:25). We must conclude that, somehow, God will bring everything to a conclusion in keeping with His own standards of justice and mercy. If there are those who are not responsible for their situation (as, for example, the great host of those who are, in one way or another, unable to make a sound decision) you can be sure that God will make provision for them. And so also, if there are those who have not had a chance (God knows) then He will make provision for them. Such thinking may seem like an easy way out, and yet, how can we humans ever really fathom God’s motives, or purposes, or methods? I

would rather err on the side of giving God the benefit of the doubt, than on the side of falsely judging Him. Speculation about what God is going to do or not going to do, should never be the basis of rejecting Him.

Unto a dispensation of the fullness of times... The word “dispensation” is a very familiar one in theological dialogue. Generally speaking, it is understood to mean specific time periods which conform to God’s clock for the earth. Actually, the word so translated has a much deeper meaning. It is the word from which we get our word economy—οικονομία (*oikonomia*). Literally, it means “the law of the household.” And that has a much broader meaning than our modern day “household.” At the time of the writing of this Epistle, households could be quite extensive, including not only familial matters, but family estates and holdings, and commercial activity. Thus, included in a household would be something like a shipping business, for example. One who was a steward over a household could be in charge of a great many things, including the managing of the entire estate. Thus, in the famous parable: the master who went away into “a far country” had left a great deal of responsibility to his trusted steward.

Derived from this broader meaning is our own word “economy,” which has to do with the means of production and wealth of a given country. In its simplest form, it refers to how a given group—tribe, country, political unit—provided for its people. In that respect, societies were identified, for example, as hunting and food gathering; or agrarian; or industrial. In its more complex form, economics involves an intricate system of the extraction and manufacturing of raw materials; distribution of goods; monetary

systems; and international trade relationships.

This most simplistic statement relative to economics serves merely to indicate that God’s purposes for the earth, as indicated by what might be called a “time schedule,” is far more complex than that; and involves His intentions for the people of earth as well as the universe. He is not going simply “according to a schedule,” but according to an intricate process of the evolving of an eternal family. Included in this, of course, is a time schedule that brings in each phase of the system, in the appropriate space mode. It would not be necessary to understand all of the things that we have spoken of in order to be a full participant in God’s purposes. It would be appropriate, however, to let our minds break free of the petty mold in which we normally confine God and His universe.

To head up all things in Christ... If God is the Eternal Source of all creation and the Spirit Force that energizes the universe, Christ is the Executor; executing God’s purposes. In Colossians, Paul tells us that Christ is the One in whom “*dwells all the fullness of the Godhead in bodily form*” (Colossians 2:9). That is to say, that although the Godhead *per se* is the Spiritual Force that sustains and energizes the universe, the fullness of that Godhead finds expression for space/time creatures, in the bodily form of the glorified Christ. When Jesus rose from the dead, He broke the shackles of an earthbound existence and became the very personification of the Godhead. When we come to our final dwelling place with Christ, we will relate to Him as a person, who will be the expression of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In a sense, Christ is “God’s window on the world.” We will not see three God’s on three thrones, nor will we have to deal with an

invisible spiritual force. We will experience Christ in all the relationships that we have been involved with Him in, on the earth—Father, Brother, Friend, Shepherd, and much more. But in our own glorified state, we will be able to experience the fullness of Christ without the limits which on the earth allowed us only to see “through the mirror darkly.” *“But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now we know in part, then shall we know as we are known”* (I Corinthians 13:10-12). We are now children in our understanding, but we will come to maturity when we are glorified with Christ.

Of things pertaining to heaven and things pertaining to earth... Presently, the forces of good seem overwhelmed by the forces of evil; however, Satan’s apparent victories are shallow and short-lived and pertain only to the material world. God ever controls the spirit realm, and gives to Satan only as much liberty as fits the Divine purpose. In a certain sense, He is saying to Satan, “The material world is only an empty shell—welcome to it.” And if Satan seems to have some power in our lives, as with Job, remember that it all fits the Divine purpose for us, and He will not let Satan go beyond His own ultimate purposes for us. Meanwhile, though circumstances may be quite negative, the spirit remains secure in Christ. And that of course is the great prize. God will give Satan the treasure chest; He wants the jewels.

The inclusion of heaven and earth apparently suggests the supremacy of the reign of Christ. Paul tells the

Corinthians *“He [God] has subjected all things under His feet”* (I Corinthians 15:27). And John tells us in Revelation—*“The Lord God Omnipotent [all powerful] reigneth”* (Revelation 19:6).

In whom also we have received a share... Paul tells the Romans we are *“joint heirs with Christ”* (Romans 8:17). We share the universe with the “God of the universe.” Moreover, we share in the Spirit of the One who energizes the universe. The meager and often disheartening circumstances of this life on the earth will very quickly be over, and then our spirits will roam free to join with God throughout eternity.

The One who energizes all things... Our sharing in the universe with God is according to preestablished purpose of the One who is the Source of all the energies of the universe. He is also the Source of our own energy. We were created originally to be vessels of the Spirit of God, but we lost that in the fall. The coming of Christ, now makes possible the renewal of that inner Spirit.

Relative to the expanse of the universe, we are but ionized particles—and yet, particles possessed by the energy of God and, therefore, capable of interacting with Him. The coming of Christ to the earth as Jesus, gives us the ultimate statement of the potential of the Spirit of God dwelling within a human and making that human capable of interacting with Him. Were it not for the example of Jesus, it would be absurd that we could be on speaking terms with God; and even more absurd to think that we could actually be partakers of His nature. The common translation of ενεργεω (*energeo*)—“to work within”—obscures this marvelous truth. Our word “energy” comes directly from this Greek word.

To the end that we should be unto the praise of His glory... Since God is the source and sustenance and end of all creation, there can be no greater purpose than to reflect His glory. Paul tells the Philippians, “*We are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit and make our boast in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh*” (Philippians 3:3). The expression, commonly translated—“make our boast in”—is the Greek word *καυχασθαι* (*kauchaomai*), which is the Cretan form of *χαλκος* (*chalkos*), which meant “copper” or any shining surface. The idea of “boasting” in the Lord does not make good sense, but to find the glory of Christ reflected by us is a great concept. For God to create humans on earth who are made in His image, and who ultimately, when they have come to full purpose, reflect His glory is the highest possible purpose, since in Him is the meaning of the universe. The image of God in us, tarnished by the fall, shines brightly again in the coming of Christ. Again, we quote those marvelous words to the Corinthians—“*For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the presence of Jesus Christ*” (II Corinthians 4:6).

Who had our expectations... We who will ultimately fulfill this glorious purpose, are those who have had our “expectations” beforehand, in Christ. Paul tells the Colossians that God had made known to them the mysteries of His glory, “*...which is Christ in you, the hope [expectation] of glory*” (Colossians 1:27).

You were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise... The Holy Spirit has set His seal on us. Like the seal of the king, it marks us as His possession. The children of Israel were God’s possession, in a certain sense, but they did not have the mark of the Holy Spirit on them. Further, the seal of the Holy Spirit is the pledge that Christ will fulfill all of His purpose in us. The Greek word—*ἀρραβων* (*arrabon*)—often translated by “earnest,” is directly from the Hebrew word which meant “a pledge.” It would be like our own word “guarantee.” So the presence of the Holy Spirit *in* us is God’s guarantee to us that He is going to fulfill His purpose. It is therefore absurd to think that the Holy Spirit comes and goes in terms of our own human performance.

A secured possession... This word has the force of something that is very special. The Greek word—*περιποιησις* (*peripoiesis*)—means “to put something around,” so as to preserve it. As Paul said earlier in the chapter, we are *surrounded by His grace*. Paul assures the Philippians of this preservation—“*Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ*” (Philippians 1:6).

The universe is God’s; the world is God’s; we are God’s; and the energy is God’s to dwell within us, and sustain us with Him forever.

LESSON FOUR

Ephesians 1:15-23

TRANSLATION

For this reason I also, having heard of your own particular faith in the Lord Jesus and your love which is to all the saints, do not cease giving thanks on behalf of you, making mention in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may grant to you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of Him, the eyes of your hearts being enlightened to the end that you may know what is the hope [expectation] of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance among the saints, and what is the surpassing majesty of His power in us who believe, according to the energy of the might of His strength; with which He energized Christ when He raised Him from the dead and made Him sit at His right hand in the “supra-heavens,” far above every rulership and authority and power and lordship and every name that is named not only in this age but also in the coming one; and has subjected all things under His feet and given Him as a Head over all things to the Church, which is His body, the fullness of the One who fulfills all things in all.

COMMENTARY

Paul’s prayer for enlightenment

One of the great facets of our spiritual heritage is enlightenment—the capacity to see things as they are. Throughout the history of civilization many have sought enlightenment and many have claimed it. In fact, ages of history have been named after it. But the only absolute enlightenment comes from God, who created the universe—who gave us eyes to see and ears to hear and a brain to perceive. In the Fall, of course, that perception was diminished and great darkness settled over the people. The race became blind—blinded by disobedience, and fascinated with earthly

evils and the works of darkness. Nonbelievers go to great lengths to prove that they are wise and caring; however, their perception of things often turns into folly. For example, it is certainly humane to be kind to animals, but this can be carried to such an extreme as to be a hindrance to human progress. Some segments of population would have been totally opposed to the sacrificial system of the Old Testament. Non-believers often have a distorted view of life. This is especially true of humanism, where an overexalted view of human capacity often obscures the reality of the evils to which

they are vulnerable. Hence, Paul prays for special enlightenment for the children of God that they may see the world through the eyes of Christ.

The Father of glory... In his prayer, Paul addresses the One who is the Source of all the universe, and therefore, of the ineffable glory that is its very essence. Humans cannot imagine the ultimate implications of the term. It is a word that defies human analysis and must therefore, be left to the Spirit of God to reveal.

The Spirit of wisdom and revelation... Remember that *sophia* refers to the mysteries of the universe and can only be revealed to us through the Holy Spirit; and by the same token, can only come to our spirits through revelation. The nature of the universe is fundamentally a matter of science; the mysteries of the universe are known only by revelation. And that revelation is only perceived by our inner spirits, where Christ dwells. The spirit often knows what the mind cannot. But that knowledge within our spirits, while not often perceived by the brain, forms the basis of our identity with Christ. The tragedies and inequities of the world would overwhelm us and militate against rational belief in God, were it not for the reservoir of truth within the spirit that bids us “stay the course.”

The eyes of your heart being enlightened... The Greek word here—*καρδια* (*kardia*)—was regarded as the entire inner being—perhaps the essence of the person. It is quite properly seen as “understanding.” It would be used for the seat of the spirit, rather than in our modern usage which is more often an emotional factor.

That you may know what is the expectation of His calling... The word for expectation—*ελπις* (*elpis*)—carries with it far more certainty than our English word “hope” would suggest. For the most part, “hope” as an English word conveys a good deal of uncertainty. For example, to the question, “Will this turn out all right?” The response is often, “I hope so.” In fact, there is only one basic usage of the word that conveys any kind of certainty. If, for example, one is stranded on a desert isle for days and then suddenly a ship looms on the horizon, there is hope. Or if the Indians have surrounded the little wagon train, and suddenly in the distance is heard the bugle of the army, there is hope. But that is the only usage that really conveys any certainty. The far better translation is “expectation.” *Elpis* is altogether a word of certainty rather than uncertainty. For example, Titus speaks of the “*hope of eternal life*” (Titus 3:7). The English word “hope” might convey the feeling that there is some uncertainty about it; however, if we translate *elpis* properly, the text would read “in expectation of eternal life.” If you will check the various texts in the New Testament where the word “hope” is used, and insert the word “expectation,” you will find that these texts give a much more positive note.

The word for calling—*καλεω* (*kaleo*)—is the basis of the word “church,” which is *εκκλησια* (*ekklesia*). It means, literally, “the called out ones.” Jesus said to His disciples, “*You have not chosen me but I have chosen you*” (John 15:16). One of the most basic principles of Scripture is that God has reached out to us. It is He who elected to redeem us, and it is He who elected to establish a familial relationship with us. It is He who made us partakers of His nature, and it is He who has elected to share His Spirit with us for eternity. Paul is praying here, that the

believers may have a sense of the expectation of their calling—a certainty of the fact that God has chosen to redeem us. But that is not a rational concept to the human mind. What could the God of glory ever want with wretched humans like ourselves? The very fact that we accept this is evidence that the Holy Spirit has revealed it to us. Paul tells the Corinthians that, *“The natural mind does not receive the things of the Spirit, neither can he know them because they are spiritually discerned [by the spirit]”* (I Corinthians 2:14). The greatest evidence that you belong to Christ is that you *want* to belong to Christ, and you accept the fact that you can.

The riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints... The riches of the glory of God are little comprehensible to the human mind. What we are talking about here is the glory of His inheritance in the saints. What does that mean? The entire process of the creation of humans in His image and the glory that is thus reflected back to Him, gives some clue as to what kind of inheritance He might have in the saints who are His family. Of course, we have already understood that “saint” really means, not some highly pious person but anyone who has been separated from Satan and evil and brought into the family of God. The word inheritance—*κληρονομία (kleronomia)*—means a portion or share that is lawfully decreed or based upon a certain right. God’s right to us is the right of creation—He made us. Our right to a share with God is the right of birth. We mutually share in the glory of God. Glory that is not shared is less glorious.

The surpassing majesty of His power in us... To extol the surpassing majesty of God is reasonable; to grasp the wonder of that power in us is only possible through

the Holy Spirit that is within us. The effort of humans, apart from the Holy Spirit, to reach out to some undifferentiated force or power is paltry and absurd. To attempt to capture the Deity in the human mind, unaided by the revelation of Scripture, is like “a dead heat on a merry-go-round”—going in circles. One of the guarantees to those who have been touched by the Spirit of God is that one has broken free of this mental merry-go-round. The data of the Deity is not self-generated but input from God Himself. The guarantee of this is that it does go quite beyond our own capacity of imagination. The human mind is capable of imagining wondrous things, but never things that are outside the data experience of the mind.

According to the energy of the might of His strength... We meet again, the word “energy.” The Greek word—*ἐνεργεω (energeo)*—is directly brought over into English in our word “energy.” It is often or usually translated by the phrase “work in,” which obscures the real force of the word. Relative to the vastness of the universe, we humans are but ionized particles. However, given the limitless energy of God, His power in us gives us the energy needed to be partakers of His nature, and to be one with Him for eternity.

With which He energized Christ when He raised Him from the dead... So the limitless energy of God—which sent Christ to earth in the first place; empowered Him to fulfill His purpose; and finally, raised Him from the dead—is the very energy with which the believer is empowered to partake of the Divine nature and to live with Him for eternity. This is the reason that we “particles” in the universe can identify ourselves with God and feel capable of praying to Him, considering that He does dwell within us

in the presence of His Spirit. Apart from God's extension of Himself to us, there would be as little possibility of our relating to Him as an ant relating to a human. If you could imagine an ant climbing up on the nose and communicating with us, you could imagine that a human particle might communicate with God. This has to be an evidence of His existence and of His power within us. In fact, it is the most certain evidence of our salvation. If the Spirit of God were not in us, we would not feel open to communicate with Him. The fact that we *want* Christ in us is the best evidence that He *is* in us. To judge our salvation on the basis of our performance would keep us on a continual roller coaster. And, of course, ultimately we will be with Him in personal Presence, and we will be able to accommodate the universe around us which He has made.

Seated at His right hand... Does this mean that there will be two Gods on two thrones—or even three? Does each member of the Godhead have a physical presence? Paul gives us the answer in Colossians 2:9—“*In Him [Christ] dwells all the fullness of the Godhead in bodily form.*” In other words, Christ is the embodiment of the entire Godhead, consisting of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In the Person of Jesus, Christ took on a bodily presence; and, after the resurrection, did not lose the body but, rather, took on a glorified one. In fact, according to the Scripture, “*We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is*” (I John 3:2). And Paul tells the Corinthians that Christ is the “*firstfruits of them that have slept*” (I Corinthians 15:20). That means that he is something of a sample of what is to come. The first plucking of the grain is the indicator of what the rest of the crop will be.

So what does the phrase—“at His right hand”—really mean?

It is an old Hebrew expression that means the one who is the administrator or executor of the wishes of the monarch. In this case, the monarch is the Godhead in Spirit form and Christ is the One who carries out the actual plans. In reality, Christ is the “King of Kings and Lord of Lords.” God is a Spirit; and, without the mediatorship of Christ, would not be in relationship to the people of earth. At the same time, Christ is something of a window on the world to the Godhead, which is basically Spirit.

Furthermore, the authority of Christ extends to everything in heaven and earth, including all the forces and powers that exist both in the earthly realm and in the spirit realm. The listing of the powers that be, in Ephesians 6, include those of the spirit realm. That would, of course, involve Satan and his demons. At the present time, Christ seems to let these various authorities and powers have their day—but someday they will be as His footstool. These forces seem to have things under their control at the present time, but they are, as compared to eternity, on a “short leash.” Whatever any of these forces do on the earth could be, from time to time, hurtful to our flesh but never to our spirits. Figuratively speaking, God lets them have the cosmic sandbox while He preserves the universal abode.

And He has given Him as a Head over all things to the Church. The English word “church” is rather misleading and confusing. It is difficult to get by the practical usages of the word and see the larger picture. The Greek word is *ἐκκλησία* (*ekklesia*) and means “the called out ones.” The Spanish word *iglesia* comes closer to the real meaning. The

word “church” comes from the Germanic *kirche*, which in turn comes, not from *ekklesia* but, rather, from *κυριακος* (*kuriakos*), which occurs only twice in the New Testament and refers to “things pertaining to the Lord.” It has nothing to do with the people. It is a most unfortunate confusion, because the essence of the *ekklesia* is the body of believers, and refers to people not things. Long after the *κυριακοι* (*kuriakoi*) have disappeared, the *ekklesia* will still remain. The *ekklesia* is likened to something living—the body. The figure is used everywhere in the New Testament. One of its most pertinent uses is in connection with the “gifts.” Christ has set each one in the body “as it has pleased Him.” Unfortunately, we tend to think of the body merely in terms of limbs and the five senses. Actually, there are a great many million parts to the body if we regard all of the functions within and without. It is unfortunate, because all of the focus tends to be on the more obvious outward functions. One is an arm, or a leg, or a mouth. If we consider all of the neural functions, we are actually dealing with trillions. One’s “gift” may be completely obscure from the rest of the body (and perhaps even from oneself), but it is nonetheless vital to God. What we do in the “body” is strictly a “gift.” It is not for us to say what our gifts should be.

But what about the verse that says “covet the best gifts?”

Actually the word translated “covet”—*ζηλόω* (*zeloo*)—means rather, “to be devoted to” or “to appreciate deeply.” The idea of seeking after, or coveting, something that is a gift is like “begging” for a gift. In discussing the matter of gifts with the Romans, Paul said that one ought not to be over impressed with oneself but to think modestly, “*as God has measured out to each one the measure of faith*” (Romans 12:3). Remember that the compelling and the capacity is a gift and not something to be sought after or developed by human motivation. As the Head of the body, Christ is the ultimate Dispenser of the gifts and the Director of their use.

The fullness of the One who fulfills all things in all.. Once the process of redemption was begun the only way that it could have been fulfilled, was by the sending of Christ to the earth to be the Captain of salvation, and the bringing together of the body of those who desired to be united to God. Without the body of believers, the process would have been irrelevant. So we have the Godhead with a creation that went astray; we have the extending of Himself to the earth in the form of Christ; we have a sacrifice to satisfy the requirements of redemption; we have a resurrection to guarantee eternal life; and we have the body of believers who complete the redemptive process and share eternity with God, as He had originally intended. Without the body of believers, the cycle would have been incomplete.

LESSON FIVE

Ephesians 2:1-10

TRANSLATION

And you being dead in your trespasses and your sins, in which then you walked according to the course of this world, according to the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit who now energizes the children of unbelief; in which we all had our way of life then in the desires of our flesh, doing the will of the flesh and of human thought, and we were by nature children of wrath, even as also the rest; but God being rich in mercy and on account of His great love with which He loved us, and we being dead in our trespasses, He has made us alive together with Christ—by grace you are saved—and has raised us together and seated us together in the “supra-heavenlies” in Christ Jesus, in order that He may show in the ages which are coming, the surpassing riches of His graciousness, in His grace upon us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you are saved through faith; and this not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, lest one should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus on the basis of good works which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

COMMENTARY

The Spirit Of Death And The Spirit Of Life—Between The Power Of Light And The Power Of Darkness

We are born into the world with human spirits, but these spirits are devoid of the Spirit of God. It is therefore necessary for us to be “born again,” in the Spirit. It is not a complex process—it is merely recognizing the need of having Christ in our spirits. Until we are old enough to understand this we are, apparently, covered by the grace of Christ, who said, “Permit the little children to come unto Me and do not forbid them for of such is the Kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 19:14). The grace of God is far more inclusive than exclusive, although many who wish to be “special,” like to limit His grace to

an elite few. However that may be, the clear teaching of Jesus and the Epistles is that, until Christ comes into our spirits, we have only natural, mortal life. When Christ does come in, we pass from mortal life to eternal life, and also become partakers of His Divine nature which enables us to function in the realm of the Spirit, which is the Kingdom of God.

According to Ephesians 2, Satan also occupies a spirit realm, but it is the realm of darkness. It is therefore, crucial to understand that not everything that is of “spirit” nature is of God. Satan has hosts

of demons that are called “evil spirits.” So Satan also has power beyond the human capacity. According to Ephesians 2, those who are unbelievers are energized by the spirit of Satan, as believers are energized by the Spirit of God. That does not mean that unbelievers are necessarily “demon possessed,” which is a special category of those who have been thoroughly taken over by Satan. It is also crucial to understand that we have no power over Satan except by the Spirit of Christ. No amount of human piety or perseverance or religious exercise can avail against the evil one. Only Christ can prevail on the basis of His own strength and not ours. In the New Testament episodes, Satan was vanquished not by extensive human efforts, but by a word. Only Christ has that power and that word. Our part is merely to engage Him. We engage Him by asking and not by begging. We engage Him by request and not by rhetoric or ritual. All of this is crucial to the understanding of Ephesians 2.

And you being dead in your trespasses and your sins... Dead is dead. Even those who are “clinically dead” have no power, whatsoever, to restore themselves to full life. While we are dead, in the spiritual sense, we cannot lift one finger to bring ourselves to life. We can only say “help!” We have no strength to make promises or commitments as a precondition. It is senseless even to say “If you will save me—I will. . .” It is Christ who makes us alive, and Christ who strengthens us to function in the Kingdom of God.

The words “trespasses” and “sins” sometimes seen as synonyms are both used in this passage in a definitive way. They are not redundant. As we pointed out in the last chapter, *παραπτώμα* (*paraptoma*) means “stumbling and falling.” *ἁμαρτία* (*hamartia*) is a far more

general term, including the entire process of sin as originating in the Garden of Eden. *Paraptoma* has more to do with episodes of sin, whereas *hamartia* has to do with the general principle of sin. In either case, we are dealing with the human failure to satisfy God and the consequent death of the human spirit. Both words are used in connection with believers and cannot be that precisely distinguished. In either case, God has dealt with the process of sin and sins, and stands ready to forgive the failures of the believers. John uses the word *hamartia* in his first epistle—“*My little children, these things I write to you that you sin not, and [but] if anyone sin, we have an advocate [defender] with the Father—Jesus Christ the just One*” (I John 2:1).

According to the course of this world... The Greek word *αἰών* (*aion*)—from which we get our word eon or aeon—has to do with the ages. But the ages, in turn, have to do with the process of human existence on the earth. An age really refers to the process of human civilization during a given period of time. Thus, in the ancient world we had the “stone age,” and in modern times we have the “atomic age” and the “space age.” The phrase “end of the age,” used in connection with the final stages of human history prior to God’s ultimate fulfillment, uses age in an all-inclusive way to refer to human civilization from its beginning to the final curtain. Prior to salvation, one’s whole life is given to the natural process of life in this world. Such a life inevitably has self-fulfillment and self-interest,—to say nothing of self-gratification,—as its essential meaning. Apart from Christ, even humanitarian efforts, since they cannot be motivated by the Holy Spirit (who is absent), has some basic self-orientation, even in the phenomenon of co-dependency, which is a form of

insecurity. Much charity is done to bolster ones feelings of self worth.

According to the ruler of the power of the air... The word *αρχων* (*archon*) refers to a ruler and not “prince,” as in the English sense which refers to merely “an heir apparent.” The ancient Greek city-states were ruled over by archons. The word for power here is *εξουσια* (*exousia*), which means “power” in the sense of authority. In John 1:12, it says, “*To as many as received Him, He gave them power [authority] to become children of God...*” Satan has been given authority, by God, to exercise a certain amount of control over the world. Apparently, it includes the atmosphere (though possibly not outer space). However, there are many examples in Scripture that indicate that God keeps a certain control over the extent of that authority. Job is a good case in point where God allowed Satan to go only to certain limits in afflicting Job. He, apparently, does let Satan have some power over our physical world and our physical persons, but never our spirits when they are possessed by Christ. The listing of various adversaries, in Ephesians 6:12, seems to be focused on Satan and his host of agents who are, in fact, based in the spirit realm. We will deal with this at length when we come to that chapter, but this does not refer in any way to evil practices in the religious community. He is not talking here about “wolves among the sheep.” A similar listing of powers is given in Colossians 1, as created by Christ, and probably does not have anything to do with the establishing of particular earthly governments. It may refer, however, to the general establishment of civil authority, *per se*.

The spirit who now energizes the children of unbelief... Again, the word *energeo* is used to refer to the process of

energy. The phrase “to work in” is not inaccurate, but simply lacks the force. The word is now used to refer to the work of Satan in the unbelievers. It is a similar motivating process to that which the Spirit of Christ does with the believers. The believers are constantly motivated by the Spirit in ways that are beyond their human capacities. By the same token, Satan often motivates the unbeliever in ways and actions that are not understood by the human mental process. The evidence is the constant phrase—“I don’t know why I did it” or “I seemed to be out of control.” The parody of that is the common phrase—“The devil made me do it.” To live in the world without the presence of the Holy Spirit within is a very risky thing, irrespective of the issue of mortality. Satan himself may have greater control over a human’s life than one may realize. The standard concern of independence, or not wanting God’s control, is certainly a failure to understand that if one does not have God’s control, one would have the control of Satan. So humans on the earth are never really free. Even to be bound by the cultural modes of society may be more of an influence by Satan than one would realize.

In which we all also had our way of life... Paul includes himself in this statement as having been one who was under the control of Satan’s world. The word *αναστρεφω* (*anastrepho*) was translated in the King James version by the word “conversation.” The word is an archaic English word and should be replaced by “way of life.”

In the desires of our flesh... The translation—“lust”—is too strong. The Greek word, which simply means “desire,” was even used by Jesus when He said to His disciples, “*With great desire, I have desired to eat this Passover with you*”

(Luke 22:15). The word “lust” focuses on a particular phase of evil and obscures the intent of the passage which is to indicate that all activities of earth which are engaged in by those not having the Spirit of Christ are governed by fleshly self-orientation, and therefore vain and futile, as the book of Ecclesiastes emphasizes—“Vanity, vanity, all is vanity” (Ecclesiastes 1:2).

We were by nature children of wrath... This does not imply that God’s wrath is poured out on all earthly activity. It only means that if we are not part of God’s Kingdom, we are *de facto* part of Satan’s kingdom which is one day going to feel the vehemence of the wrath of God, which is poured out not upon particular evils, but upon the whole diabolical course of Satan’s empire. Those who do not come into the Kingdom of God are inexorable victims along with Satan and his demonic forces.

But God, who is rich in mercy... Who can really calculate or fathom the mercy of God? David says that, “*The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting*” (Psalm 103:17). It is infinite—it does not really calculate within the time/space continuum. But what is mercy? What is the difference between mercy and grace? These are not synonyms—they are different words, both in the Hebrew and in the Greek. The word that David uses here is *chased*. The word for grace is *chanan*. *Chanan* has to do with God’s general attribute or characteristic of grace or graciousness. *Chesed* is the fruit of that grace in terms of His favor to His people. The Greek word used in this passage is of the same nature as *chased*, which David uses in Psalm 103. In other words, it is not only God’s attribute of grace that is eternal, but also His extension of that grace to His

people, in His kindness and favor toward them.

On account of His great love... How do we fathom the love of God? What is it really like? Can it be equated with human love? We must refer, again, to the Greek word *agape*. We discussed it earlier, but we must refresh ourselves for a moment, to remember that it is a love of caring, consideration, and respect. While it may involve the emotions, feelings are not basic to the meaning of the word. The love of God goes quite beyond feelings—and that is a good thing. The reason it is a good thing is that human emotions are so vacillating. It is not only our love for God that would be vacillating, but our perception of His love for us. In Christian circles there is the constant wail—“God couldn’t possibly love me because look what He has done.” And of course all of life as trying to live up to the expectations of God, or what we perceive to be the expectations of God. Usually these expectations center around the emotions—“How much do I love Him?” When the emphasis is on human emotions our whole relationship to God is hostage to the stability of our mental attitudes. The Greek word for emotional love is *phile*. That is the affection that we have for family and friends, and even lovers. It is certainly obvious to everyone that relationships which involve human affections are often troublesome. We go through vacillating emotional experiences continuously, and our perception of the attitude or feelings of others, for us, are also constantly in question. The reason of course is that human love is based upon performance. And that is the unfortunate problem with applying human love to God. Our expectations of performance from Him and what we perceive to be His expectations of performance from us will also keep our relationship to Him mired

down in the quagmire of human capacities.

The love of God for us is His gift to us, and is not based upon our own performance. Jesus told us to love even our enemies. If that is true, certainly God's love for us, His children, extends to our periods of weakness and lack of performance. His caring for us is as constant, or more constant, than the caring of parents for their children; who, even though they fail in different ways, are never really out of our caring consciousness. On the other hand, God's gift to us in the coming of the Holy Spirit is part of that love which He imparts to us. "*The fruit of the Spirit is love...*" (Galatians 5:22). That does not mean that if we have the Spirit, we must cultivate love—it means that if we have the Spirit, we *have* that love. But it is important to understand that it is a love of the Spirit and not of the flesh. It is *agape* love and not *phile*; and therefore, not subject to the human emotions. Like faith, the love that is the fruit of the Spirit is as steadfast as God. We become partakers of His nature and with it, of His love. Many people question their love because they see it as an emotional thing that is dependent upon how they feel. The test of that love is that we care about God. That does not mean that we always feel good about God, but that we are always concerned to relate to Him and to have Him with us. The test of our salvation is that we want to be saved—we want to have God in our lives; we want to have His Spirit in our spirits. This is a big hurdle to get over for many people. Recognizing that the love of Christ for us and our love for Him is not dependent at all on human emotions, is not easy to grasp. According to Romans 11:29, "*The gifts and calling of God are without repentance.*" That is, God is not fickle or vacillating. He gives us the gift of love

and the gift of faith, and He does not take them back. Perhaps the bottom line here, is that the very fact that we are concerned about the love of God—either His love for us or our love for Him—is, itself, the evidence that His Spirit is with us. Otherwise we wouldn't care.

By grace you are saved... Now Paul picks up his original statement, 'While we were dead in our sins, Christ made us alive.' To emphasize the point, Paul reminds us that we are saved by grace. The Greek text expressly states that we are saved while we are dead. A dead person can do nothing to raise himself from the dead. We have no possibility of salvation apart from the grace by which He touches us and lifts us from the dead. And Paul says that the very energy that raised Christ from the dead is the guarantee to us that He has the energy to raise us from the dead. Again the word "trespasses" is used, which refers to the episodes of human failure that are the result of original sin. The reason that this is important is that unbelievers are not usually conscious of the principle of original sin. They are, however, aware that they are not always doing the right thing. The common phrase—"you must be living right"—is, in a negative way, an indication of this inner sense of human failure. In fact, unbelievers feel more comfortable with "sinners" because they know their own weaknesses. So there is a universal sense of imperfection in humans, but apart from the touch of the Spirit, there is no sense that one can be forgiven these things and become a member of the Body of Christ.

But then, no one can really come to Christ unless the Spirit touches him. So, if the Spirit does not touch him, how can he expect to come to salvation?

But, we do not know that the Spirit does not touch everyone. How do we know what goes on in the mind of people who are trying to make it in the world, and often confronting human weakness? John speaks of, *“The true Light which lights every man, while He is coming into the world.”* (the word “man” in Greek is generic and refers both to men and women). Who knows what moments in any given life might bring some sense of need which would cause that person to look for help? We must leave the process to God. He has it perfectly worked out. All we need to know is that, according to the Scripture, we cannot come to God apart from the work of the Spirit nor can we acquire salvation simply by doing good deeds, however well-intentioned, as Paul immediately reminds us.

And He has raised us together and seated us together in the “supra-heavenlies” in Christ Jesus... Apart from salvation we are dead, and need to be raised from the dead together with all of the family of God. Further, when we are raised from the dead (in the spiritual sense), we are immediately given a position with Christ in the spirit realm. We do not have to wait for that until physical death or the coming of Christ. Our spirits are already seated with Christ in the spirit realm. We are part of God’s Kingdom and cannot, as far as our spirits are concerned, be touched by Satan. We are the “untouchables.” To have us “see-sawing” back and forth between the realm of Satan and the realm of God is absurd, and totally unworthy of the power of God.

In order that we may show in the coming ages... Part of our reflecting of the glory of Christ is that, contrary to the Edenic tragedy, we are preserved by the Spirit of Christ through all of the earthly chaos and personal turmoil. God’s family, saved by His grace and preserved by His

Spirit, is a constant witness to Satan of the power of God and the triumph of His redemption. In a certain sense (though somewhat crass), God has the limitless “capital” to make good His promises. Part of that “capital” is in the form of His grace, which flows down to us in *χρηστοτης (chrestotes)*—graciousness or kindness. *“But after that the kindness [chrestotes] and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared; not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that being justified by His grace we should be made heirs according to the hope [expectation] of eternal life”* (Titus 3:4-7).

By grace you are saved through faith... It is essential here, to examine again the word “faith.” A significant clue to its meaning is found in Hebrews 11:1—*“Faith is the substance of things expected...”*. The word “substance”—*υποστασις (hupostasis)* means “that which stands under” or “that which is the real essence of something.” Our word “substance” comes from the Latin, which means the same thing. An excellent analogy here, is the structure of a building, which is often steel and concrete; whereas, the facade of glass or marble for example, is merely cosmetic. On the other hand, when we see the facade, we automatically assume that the real substance of the building is behind it. Another analogy, (possibly better) is the copper wire through which flows the energy of electricity. The real substance of the wire is the electricity flowing through it, and when we see the wiring, we assume that it is only the vehicle through which the energy flows. Faith is an energy force from God. All of our mental processes, including faith or trust,

are a flow of energy. When we exercise our minds, the same kind of energy flows through the billions of neurons as we have flowing through electric wiring. The neurons carry these energy impulses in a process of alternating current from one neuron to the next. Usually the source of this energy is from waves of energy reflected off of the objects that we are involved with, or energies generated within the mind which have to do with imageless thought. Assuming faith to be a gift of God, we can also assume that it is a flow of Divine energy through our spirits and affecting our thought processes. Thus, faith actually stands independently of any human emotion of something we call “trust.” And this is where the human mind gets into confusion. It is an unfortunate use of terms. The faith of God is the very foundation of our relationship to Him, or the “receiving apparatus” of our connection with Him. Trust is a human emotion which is generated in the brain, and is dependent on a myriad of human factors or data. This process of human emotion is subject to the sense experience as well as the data of knowledge that each brain possesses individually. Thus, for example, people who have been abused, as far as trust is concerned, will have a difficult time with generating feelings of trust, even concerning their relationship to God. People who have been disappointed in human relationships, for example, may have difficulty, emotionally, in receiving or experiencing the love of God. Such a person will also have great difficulty trusting other humans. But this has nothing to do with the foundation of faith in the Spirit. The love of Christ can interact in the spirit of an individual, even though the emotion of love may be difficult in the human mind. People may have great difficulty trusting in God to perform certain functions for them and

may vacillate in this continually, but that is only an expression of the fleshly mind and does not reflect the true faith which is in the spirit.

Hebrews 11 gives us very strong clues in this matter, because the ascribing of faith to many of the characters is contrary to their human expressions of trust. For example, when the angel told Sarah that she would have a child, Sarah laughed (and even had to name her son “laughter”), but the author describes her as having conceived a child by faith. What that says is that the faith that was operating in fulfilling God’s purpose through Sarah, was not necessarily in keeping with her mental or fleshly attitudes. Not only our salvation but everything we do that is related to Christ, is based upon this inner Spirit of faith in spite of the vacillating attitudes of our mind. When we are going through affliction, for example, we can ask God to do with us what He will in the matter and believe that He has everything in hand, even though our own trust or confidence may vacillate day by day, in the emotional reactions of our minds. It is very important to understand that illness, especially, hormonal imbalances as a result of the illness may have a considerable effect on our emotions. So, how we feel will merely be an expression of the mind or flesh and have no bearing on the energy of faith *within* our spirits, which is a gift of God. It is only through that foundation of faith that we have our connection with God, in the first place.

So salvation is a gift of God—based not upon human weakness and inadequacy, or human efforts to acquire it, but upon the energy which comes from God as a gift. Thus, in Galatians 5:22, we are told specifically that faith is a fruit of the Spirit. That does not mean that if we possess the Spirit, we ought to strive to

have more faith, but rather, that the faith is already there. What most people are thinking about in the human efforts to develop “faith,” is really the emotion of “trust.” They think that if they do not feel “victorious” in their affliction, they are not exhibiting faith. The reality of the matter is, that what they are not exhibiting is the human *feeling* of trust, but if they did not have faith they would not even be concerned about the feelings of it. Apart from the Holy Spirit, no one would ever care about faith in God.

It is a gift of God, not of works... We often think of the word “works” as denoting charities of some kind or good deeds. The Greek word *εργο* (*ergo*) has to do with inner activity, not necessarily of outward services. For example, Jesus said, “*This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him who sent Me*” (John 6:29). So belief is, itself, something of the nature of a work. What Paul is referring to here, is humanly generated activity, even in terms of our beliefs. We are not saved by coming to rational beliefs about God. Many people believe in a Deity or in a religious principle, but have not been given the energy of faith, that saves them. Humanly generated beliefs can neither save us nor hold us steadfast in our faith. They are always vulnerable to changing circumstances. In fact believing in God as a mental exercise is totally irrational, in view of the absurdities of this world. How can we humans integrate the inequities and tragedies of this life. The faith that God gives us as His Divine energy, is not affected by the apparent irrationalities of the world scene. So even the efforts to come to a belief in God by human reason is totally inadequate. There is a discipline of philosophy called “Theism.” Its main objective is to come to rational belief in God. Its greatest failure is that, no matter how rational one’s thoughts and words are, there is no way to bridge

the gap between supposition and reality. It is no more possible to have a true faith in God apart, from His energy, than it is to rationalize that the wiring system of the house is going to produce electricity, apart from a connection with the main transformer.

Lest anyone should boast... It is inevitable to human nature that if one had anything to do with the generating of one’s own faith or salvation, one would be inclined to say to God, at the final judgment seat—“But at least you’ll have to admit that I was a good person”; or “that I sought you diligently”; or “that I was sincere.” Paul didn’t even try that one. He could have said, “At least I was doing my best to serve God, even if I was misguided.” He, rather, admitted to being nothing but “the chief of sinners.” It is the tendency to human pride that accounts for the attitude of many Christians towards sinners, and which makes them aloof. Jesus spent a good deal of time with sinners, to the disgust of the Pharisees.

For we are His workmanship... The Greek word for “workmanship” is *ποιημα* (*poiema*), from which we get our word “poem.” We are God’s “work of art.” As members of His family, we are not only created by Him but fitted harmoniously into His Body, so that we become a work of rhythm and harmony. That is one reason why we have difficulty identifying precisely just how we fit into the whole. There are refinements and nuances of our relationships which are known only to God. We do not even know, ourselves, just how and when we are being used by God in a given service. But, altogether, the expression of the body of Christ “works together for good,” and can be identified as His “works.” This expression—created unto good works—does not mean that we have been “saved

to serve;” or brought into the family of God merely to engage in charities and good deeds of various kinds. Paul expresses it succinctly in Romans 8:28—*“We know that to those who love God, He works all things together unto good, to those who are the called ones according to His purpose.”* All believers, as touched by His Spirit, belong in the category of those who “love God,” inasmuch as they care

about Him enough to be concerned that they belong in this category. Also, as Ephesians 1 has suggested, we who are part of His family are also the ones who are separated unto Him and are the “called ones.” Hence, we are “walking in good works” when we are members of His body; and, therefore, functioning in harmony with His purpose.

Ephesians 2:11-22

TRANSLATION

For this reason remember that when you were the Gentiles in the flesh who, are called the “Uncircumcision” by the ones who are called the “Circumcision” (made by hand, in the flesh); that you were at time without Christ, alienated from the citizenship of Israel and strangers of the covenant of promise, not having expectation and Godless in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who were then afar off have become near in the blood of Christ.

For He Himself is our peace, who has made both [Jew and Gentile] one and who has broken down, in His flesh, the dividing barrier—the enmity; having rendered inoperative the Law of Commandments in dogmas, in order that He may create the two in Himself as one new Man—making peace. Furthermore, He reconciled both in one body to God, through the cross, having slain the enmity by it. And having come, He proclaimed peace to you who are afar and to you who are near; because through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. You are therefore then no longer strangers and foreigners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the Chief Cornerstone, in whom all the building fitted together in compact joints grows unto a Holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also having been built together are one dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

COMMENTARY

Members of the Household of God—Both Jew and Gentile

There is one word in the Bible that summarizes its entire thrust—Immanuel. It was the name declared by the angel, to be given to Jesus. It is a Hebrew word—**אִמְנוּאֵל** (*Im-anu-el*)—which means “with us is God.” Although God had created man in His own image, the humans which He created, fell from their position with Him through disobedience. Created in His own

image, the humans were given a free will, like Himself. And therein was the problem. Having a free will, they were able to choose—to obey or to disobey. They chose the latter, (which was their right) and therefore, lost the place which they had with God as well as their eternal existence. Instead, they were put out of the garden and exchanged their

immortality for mortality, and were slated for death. God did not abandon them, but interacted with them on a “caretaker” basis. They had no oneness with Him, but He provided a way for their reconciliation.

And that, of course, is where Jesus came in. A projection of the Godhead, born of the Spirit, He took on human form and became the ultimate sacrifice, giving up His own life as an atonement for sin, and through His resurrection, imparting to all who would receive it the eternal life which they lost in “the Fall.” Thus, the coming of Jesus brought about the restoration of God’s creatures to their place with Him. The impact of Jesus was the effecting of the mutual abode—God dwelling in us and we dwelling in Him (John 14).

Gentiles in the flesh ... Circumcision in the flesh... Now we come to a major division in humanity. In order to bring into human perspective the incomprehensible implications and applications of God’s redemptive process, He selected a family of people, known by the name of their progenitor—Israel (formerly Jacob). What is today a nation, as well as an ethnic group throughout the world, actually started with one father—Jacob, who, in time, had his name changed to Israel (prince with God). To this group of people—singled out from the rest of the population of earth—God gave the revelation of redemption in symbolism and type, in such a way that even the simplest could appropriate it and apply it.

But, in the nature of the case, that made a very strong division between the Israelites and the rest of the population, which were called “Gentiles.” The Jews assumed then, that they were very special and, generally speaking, that the Gentiles could never be saved. Even after the coming of Christ, there were large numbers of Jewish Christians who still held to the conviction that the Gentiles were forever excluded

from God’s family. Paul and Peter were pioneers under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, in dispelling this notion. Peter had to elicit from the leaders in Jerusalem the declaration that, “God has granted salvation to the Gentiles, also.” Paul’s major task was to assure the Gentiles that they too were included. And that of course is the major message of the passage we are looking at.

Circumcision was the major symbol of the division. Circumcision was a practice, ordained of God, that involved the removal of the foreskin of all male babies. Whereas the practice is widely done today as a health measure, it was not common in those days, and was, in fact treated with disrespect by the Gentile population. Paul makes a very strong point of the fact that such a practice was a physical one only “in the flesh” and had, under the New Covenant, no spiritual significance. One could be circumcised “in the flesh” and still be out of touch with God, as the Pharisees had proven. That was what Paul referred to as the “circumcision made with hands.” On the other hand, as Paul points out to the Romans and the Galatians and the Colossians, circumcision with the coming of Christ was a matter of the Spirit and not the flesh. So the “uncircumcised” Gentiles were just as much a part of the family of God in salvation, as the “circumcised” Jews.

Alienated from the citizenship of Israel... In presenting the Gospel to the Gentiles, Paul must first make it clear that they were not originally included in God’s redemptive process. They were not part of God’s fancily; they were not citizens of the nation of Israel; and they were without hope in their state of Godlessness. It was only the grace of God which included them. In a way, they had not earned their birthright. On the other hand in God’s view, no one had earned it—it was an act of pure grace. Through

Christ, the Gentiles were now free to belong to His family. It was theirs for the asking.

For He Himself is our peace... The original message of the angels, on the holy night of Jesus' birth, was a message of peace—*Peace on earth, good will to men*. Satan has continually sought to belie that message by throwing the world into wars and conflicts and confusion. Unfortunately, many Christians are caught up in this tragic chaos. Satan tries to rob them of their peace. And, unfortunately, many religious groups are agent in this process since they put upon believers conditions of humanistic endeavor that keep the believers constantly in unrest, as they strive to live up to man-made requirements and standards. The process of perfection enjoined upon them puts them forever on a treadmill. The role of Christ in bringing about peace is replaced by the effort of humans to fashion their own kind of perfection and their own kind of peace. Who does not live in the continual struggle of striving and failing and guilt?

A most important antidote to this problem is the verse that we are now looking at—*Christ is Himself our peace*. But what does that mean? It means that when we take Christ into our spirits, He comes with His attribute of peace.

So why then, do Christians constantly struggle to find peace ?

The answer lies in the difference between the flesh and the spirit. It is quite possible and often probable that, whereas we have peace in our spirits, there is difficulty in the flesh. Our place with Christ is secure; our relationship to Him is secure; but our daily struggle in the flesh can leave us with feelings of unrest. Peace with God is the most important thing we have. And it is our gift with the coming of Christ. But

whether or not we have peace in the flesh depends very much on how we are living our lives in the flesh. If, for example, one has a problem with overspending and managing one's finances, one may be, rightfully, troubled about one's bills. But this is a matter of the flesh. One may have peace with God in terms of one's spirit, but struggle with earthly practices that are unsound. This is an area where we need to grow and mature, but we have the privilege of doing so while still being a member of the family of God. And this is true of many other earthly activities.

On the other hand, one may be striving to accomplish a degree of perfection in the flesh, and assume that one cannot really have peace with God until one has succeeded. An example of this problem is the attempt to develop "faith" as it is called. Unfortunately, what many call "faith" is really the emotion of trust. As we have pointed out, faith is that foundation laid by God, which is the basis of our salvation and the basis of His relationship to us. Faith is thus, a fruit of the Spirit, as is peace. On the other hand, feelings of trust by which many test their "faith," are subject to the emotional vacillations of the flesh. Actually, how they feel about a given situation has little to do with God's purposes in that situation. As we pointed out with the characters in Hebrews 11, even though they are credited with faith their human attitudes do not always reflect such faith. God is working out His plan in spite of them.

So faith then, is something that is given us in the coming of Christ, and is the foundation of our interaction with Him, but does not always comport with the fleshly attitudes and feelings of our minds. It is the human emotion of trust that often gets people into trouble, and robs them of their peace.

There was no question in Jesus' mind about the validity of the peace which He offered to the disciples (John 14). It was guaranteed on the basis of the absolute control which God exercised over His own Kingdom. His offer did not include any guarantees, whatsoever, of peace in the fleshly realm, where Satan is continuously at work. And it is in the realm of the Kingdom of God that peace and unity and harmony was guaranteed between Jew and Gentile. In the fleshly sense, there does not seem to be much peace, not only between Jew and Gentile, but between one faction of the Church and another. So how real is this peace that Paul speaks of? It is as real as Christ. But we must remember that the conflict is in the realm of the human mind, which of itself is always subject to conflict. So many factors enter into our attempt to come to truth in the mind—ignorance, prejudice, bias, to say nothing of mental ineptitude. It is almost impossible for humans to function harmoniously in the flesh, in spite of the fact that they possess Christ in their spirits.

Who has made both one, and destroyed the dividing barrier... The wall that separated and distinguished the Jewish people from the rest of the world, was also a barrier that excluded it from the special rituals and sacrifices that God had given to His people. That is not to say, of course, that God had excluded all Gentiles from ultimate redemption. There were indications that God had shown favor to certain Gentiles. A good example would be Abimelech—King of Gerar—who was about to defile the marriage of Abraham by taking Sarah for a wife. Abraham had let it be known that Sarah was his sister, lest he would be killed for the sake of taking Sarah. God communicated with Abimelech and warned him about the situation. Obviously, there was some interaction between God and Abimelech, in spite of the fact that he was a Gentile.

There were numerous other examples in the Old Testament, that would indicate that, while God had excluded the Gentiles from the Jewish covenant, He had not excluded them from ultimate redemption. Interestingly enough, David, in Psalm 68, prophesying about the ultimate recovery of Israel, does include a very strong statement about the Gentiles coming from North Africa to worship at Jerusalem.

Nevertheless, there was a great wall between the Jews and the Gentiles, to the extent that even many Jews who had become Christians in the new era, did not believe that salvation was for the Gentiles. It took a special revelation from God, both to Peter and to Paul, to reverse this idea. It was only through the sacrifice of Christ that this barrier was broken down.

On the other hand, it is important to note that Paul considers that the Gentiles could be part of the family of Israel, rather than vice versa (Romans 11). Jesus Himself said that there was to be "*one fold and one Shepherd*" (John 10). The name "Israel" means "prince with God." All of the Church—including Jew and Gentile—was to become a family of kings and priests (Revelation 5:10). So then, in a certain sense we are all one family and all kings and priests—and all called "the Israel of God."

By His flesh... It was essential that God should interact with the people of earth through a projected reality of His person, both spiritually in Christ, and physically in Jesus. "*Christ, the Logos, became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory*" (John 1:14). Redemption could not have been accomplished apart from a physical appearance. The fall resulted in physical death—it took a physical death on the part of Jesus to accomplish redemption. However, in order for redemption to be complete, it took also a physical life in the flesh on the earth, to

identify with humanity and to become a viable substitute. The death on the cross, as heinous as it was, was not the whole of the sacrifice. His life on earth as a wretched human, suffering the outrages of humanity, was an equally devastating experience. We can take a reasonable analogy from the realm of the canine. Let us suppose, allegorically, that a human wanted to lift the species of canine to a human level (some might want to do that); and let us suppose that the only way to do this would be for a human to become a dog, temporarily; and let us suppose that one retained the full consciousness of one's humanity, but would be confined to barking and wagging the tail and sleeping in the doghouse (to say nothing of suffering at the hands of "dog-dislikers"). That might give us some idea as to what it meant for Christ to become a man, and to experience such wretched confinement. The Scripture is very explicit about the reality of Jesus' experiences in the flesh, "...who was tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). And in Hebrews 2:1—"For in that He Himself suffered being tempted, He is able also to help those who are tempted."

There is yet another vital aspect to the manifestation of Christ, in the flesh. In comparison to the universe, we humans are but a tiny, ionized particle in the vastness of space. It is, admittedly, a great absurdity to assume that it was any more rational for us to think of communicating with God, than for an ant to communicate with a human. What gives it an absolute viability is the fact that Jesus became a human, and was Himself possessed with the Spirit of God and in constant communication with Him. In Paul's letter to the Philippians, he makes this clear—"Let this mind [mindset] be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God thought it not a thing to be grasped to be equal with God, but emptied Himself, taking upon Him the

form of a servant, becoming in the likeness of man; and being found in form as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:5-8).

Having nullified the Law of commandments in statutes... The Law of God, which was given to Israel in statutes or ordinances, was replaced by the Law written on the hearts through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. This was, of course, the message of the prophets. "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh [as opposed to stone]. And I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My Statutes, and you shall keep My judgments and do them" (Ezekiel 36:26, 27). This prophecy was also picked up by Joel and became the basis of Peter's sermon at Pentecost. "And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh..." (Joel 2:28). It was not that God would do away with His moral precepts, but rather, that they would be written on the heart, instead of on tables of stone.

In the Christian era—after the coming of the Holy Spirit—the "Law of love" became the basis of conduct. Jesus summarized it—"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind: This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the prophets" (Matthew 22:37-40). In saying this, Jesus was not assuming that any human being could actually fulfill such perfect love; rather, He was showing the Pharisees that their meager attempt at keeping the Law was totally inadequate, as far as God's ultimate intentions for His people. On the other hand, the coming of the Holy Spirit

to dwell within believers would provide an inner sense of right and wrong, based on the gift of love, even though no human would be able to absolutely fulfill that love in fleshly practice. The Law of Moses would be superfluous since the Law of love would go deeper, and would dictate how one ought to treat both God and one's neighbor. The lawyer who had asked the original question about what was the greatest commandment, also wanted to know, "*and who is my neighbor?*" (Luke 10:29). Jesus answered with the familiar parable of the "the good Samaritan," which indicated that all human beings were his neighbors. The Pharisees would like to have excluded the Gentile world, but in choosing the Gentile Samaritan as an example, Jesus put that thought to rest.

The Law of Commandments and statutes and ordinances was the Mosaic Law. It would fill volumes with its original statutes and its expanded ordinances. In one stroke, Jesus dismissed that cumbersome code and replaced it with the Law of love. The Law of love would only be functional with the coming of the Holy Spirit to dwell in the human spirits, with the consequent gift of love. That gift of love would only be conveyed in the reborn spirit of the human heart. Let it be remembered, however, that the love of Christ in our spirits is not always reflected in our flesh. We do not always express that love, even though we know that we ought to.

In order that the two may be created in Him unto one new man—making peace... In the breaking down of the barriers between Jew and Gentile and establishing a new unity in Christ, we are dealing, not with a new alignment, but a new creation. In Christ, the old distinction has been eliminated. Paul makes this clear in his letter to the Galatians. "*For as many of you as were baptized into Christ, have put on Christ. There is not any few or*

Greek; there is not any slave or free, there is not any male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:27-29). Thus, the peace did not come through compromise or ideological harmony, but through a new creation. Apparently, the new creation was both individual and collective. At the collective level, God had developed a nation; a people; a family. They too, had been called out from the expanding population of earth to be His own special oracles on the earth, charged with the revelation of God to man. They were, in that sense a body—a special possession of God. After the coming of Christ, this new body was brought into being—the *ekklesia*, ("called out ones")—uniting both Jew and Gentile in one body. It was a new creation, energized by the Holy Spirit.

On an individual basis we are all new creatures in Christ. Thus, Paul addresses the Corinthians—"if anyone be in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things have passed away, behold they have become new" (II Corinthians 5:17). It is misleading to assume that "all things become new." The text does not say that. It simply says that the old things have become new. Paul has said that he does not see things from the same perspective—even Christ. The Old Testament order of things has passed away and the new has come in. It does not mean that one's personality will change automatically; or one's conduct, necessarily; or one's attitudes. It simply says that one has become part of a whole new process of redemption, in which the Holy Spirit comes to dwell within and becomes the essence of one's salvation in place of the Law. As a result of the coming of the Holy Spirit, Paul sees Christ in a different light. "*If also we had known Christ according to the flesh, but now we know Him no longer [after the flesh]*" (II Corinthians 5:16). The presence of the Holy Spirit within our spirits brings us into an entirely new

realm—the Kingdom of God. It is a kingdom of the Spirit, and functions beyond the realm of the flesh. The Old Testament era was one of the flesh, in which the actions of the flesh were the crucial issue. In the New Testament, the actions of the flesh are certainly important, but are not the basis of our salvation. In the Old Testament, worship was in the flesh, through sacrifices and rituals and feasts. In the New Testament, worship is in the spirit, and is a process that goes on continually between our spirits and the Spirit of God.

And having reconciled both in one body to God, through the cross... So the two have become one body, through the cross. An energy has been applied to mankind by it that has forever eliminated the enmity that existed between them.

And having come, He proclaimed peace... The word “preach” (as in many translations) is not adequate. It is the Greek word *εὐαγγελίζω* (*euangelidzo*), which is usually translated “to preach the Gospel,” or “evangelize,” or “preach good tidings.” The noun form, *euangelion*, was used for a special proclamation. Our word “gospel” has had such a wide and careless usage that it means almost nothing. It is used for everything from slangy verifications to types of music. The alternate translation—“good news” is equally inadequate for the same reason. But the real meaning of the Greek word is very strong indeed. The Greek usage may be illustrated by a narrative in the Greek Classics (*Aeschylus*). When the Greeks went to war with the Trojans, they stationed a watchman on the palace roof at Argos to wait for a signal from the Greeks at Troy proclaiming their victory. The method by which they would do so, was to light fires on the mountaintops that stretched across from Asia Minor to the Peloponnesus, where the palace was located. It would be ten years before such

a proclamation could be given, but eventually it came. The word used for this victory proclamation was the Greek word *εὐαγγέλιον* (*euangelion*). Thus, the word must be translated in English, accordingly, and “proclamation” is probably the best.

The enmity that had existed for over a thousand years between the Jews and the Gentiles was suddenly eradicated by the crucifixion; and peace proclaimed both to the Jews, “who were near” and the Gentiles, “who were afar.”

We both have access by one Spirit...

The key word is “access.” It is one of those pivotal words upon which rests the entire message of the Bible. The original pair were cut off in the Garden of Eden as a result of disobedience. The entire message of the Bible is the process of redemption and reconciliation, whereby God, once again, has granted access to His creatures. That these tiny particles in the universe should be energized by God, is awesome. That these energized particles should also be given the capacity to interact with God, is beyond awesome to an inexpressible glory. The evidence that this is true, is the very fact of our entering into it. Apart from the Holy Spirit, who could imagine such a thing?

You are no longer strangers and foreigners...

In the mind of Israel, all Gentiles were strangers and foreigners. They had no right to their blessings, or to their God who gave them. They were the *Goyim*, who were outcasts from God. On the other hand, the Jews were, for other reasons, despised by the Gentiles. The history of the persecution of Israel by the Gentiles is tragic indeed—often written in bloodshed and atrocities. But one day, after the last chapter of human history has been written by God Himself, the Jews and the Gentiles will be one people, as far as the Church is concerned, and living in harmony, as far as the earth is concerned.

This is indeed the handiwork of God, perhaps more glorious than the creation itself.

Having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets... The Church—the *ekklesia*—is, at once, both a body and a building. Both analogies are instructive and give a clear picture of the position of the Church. The Scripture is filled with types and symbols and figures of speech, so that there need be no confusion about God’s intentions for His people. Confusion comes when we try to reduce the relationships that exist between ourselves and God, to propositions and hypotheses and abstractions. It is all right to ponder these things and make an effort to classify them in the mind, but it is totally unrealistic to assume that we can make absolute statements. If we would all understand the limitations of the mind, we could come to a place of harmony in the realization of our inadequacy. We are actually one in the Spirit, but were never presumed to be one in our mental perceptions. The phrase—“*be of the same mind*”—which occurs in several places, does not have reference to the brain, as such, but to the intentions and tendencies of thought.

Thus, the multitudes of illustrations and examples do give us a basis for understanding our relationship to Christ. The building here discussed in Ephesians, begins with the Apostles and Prophets, as far as the basis of the revelation is concerned. It was the Prophets and the Apostles through whom God revealed the meaning and purpose that He had in mind, in the process of the reconciliation of His people.

Jesus Christ Himself being the Chief Cornerstone... In modern usage, a cornerstone is merely a commemorative plaque placed on the building after its completion. The cornerstone that Paul

speaks of is a fundamental part of the building—a “keystone”—that holds up the building. In modern days such a keystone construction can be seen in the Supreme Court Building in Washington D.C. There is a circular marble staircase that has a landing which supports the staircase. There was no mortar used in the construction. The “keystone” landing was the only support. The state of Pennsylvania, presuming itself to be a vital link between North and South, calls itself the “Keystone State.” Christ was the Cornerstone or “Keystone” that supported the entire structure of the Church. That is a true “keystone.”

In whom all the building fitted together by compact joints... If Christ is the Cornerstone, the Holy Spirit is the Energizing Force that binds the Church together. The expression here—*συναρμολογέω* (*sunarmologeō*)—is akin to the process in which the pyramids were erected in Egypt, as well as many structures in other parts of the world. The giant stones were fitted together by friction. That is, the joints were ground by moving the stones back and forth until the fit was so perfect that a knife blade could not be inserted between them. In many ways the believers are put through such a grinding process, interacting with one another and working together with one another in a process that the Holy Spirit governs, beyond the capacity and understanding of the individual believers. In Ephesians 4 (which we will deal with later, at some length) Paul describes this process of believers working together, according to the gifts which God had given them—“*Toward the restoring of the saints unto a work of service, unto an edifying of the body of Christ, until we all meet together in the unity of faith and the full knowledge of God, unto a consummated man unto a measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ...*” (11-13). It is the Holy Spirit who brings about this

consummation of the body and the building—the church of Christ on earth. The word translated “perfect” in some translations, is—τέλειω (*teleo*), and does not mean perfect in the sense of flawlessness, but fulfillment.

Grows unto a sanctified temple in the Lord... On the one hand, we are dealing with the analogy of a building, and yet, on the other hand, it is a living entity which has the capacity of growth. Atoms are the building blocks of the universe. They are the essence of all things—planets and stars; rocks and mountains; oceans and trees; animals and humans. The constantly changing shapes and forms and functions of everything in the universe is accomplished through the ceaseless motion of atoms. In this respect there is vitality in the inorganic matter. The Psalmist picked this up in his personification of the forces of heaven and earth, in Psalm 19. Jesus alluded to it in Matthew 22, when He excoriated the Pharisees for their berating of the participation of the children in worship. In effect, Jesus said, “Since you won’t worship properly, the children must do it; if the children didn’t do it, the stones would cry out” (Matthew 21; Luke 19). So the Church, likened to a building in some respects, yet partakes of the vital living properties of God’s creation. Many believers wonder why God doesn’t bring an end to this wretched world and get on with the eternal life that we are to share with Him. The purposes of God are very complex. He has many

things to do in developing His family, which are beyond our own understanding. He has His time clock. It worked as far as Israel was concerned, and as far as the coming of Christ was concerned and it will work now in God’s dealings with His people. The fitting together must be perfect. Humans plan and program and manipulate in an effort to bring about the growth of the Church, but in the final analysis, it is God who is the Master Builder, and who must fit each piece into the body as it pleases Him. Our task is to wait on Him to fulfill His purpose in each of us, and fit us into the body properly.

A dwelling place of God in the Spirit... The great eternal moment toward which the whole of God’s purposes and planning is directed, is the preparing of an everlasting dwelling place for His people, and a process of reconciliation whereby they will be fit for His holy habitation. The word “holy,” of course, means “set apart” or “separated.” (We will not spend eternity engaging in religious rituals). We have already been set apart by the Spirit of Christ in our sojourn on the earth. It now remains for us to enter into His everlasting abode. It will not be some “glitzy” mansion, but a dwelling place in the Spirit—a realm that totally beggars whatever human structures one might imagine.

Revelation 21 brings the whole process of redemption to a glorious climax, in the dwelling of God with His people.

Ephesians 3:1-7

TRANSLATION

For this cause I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you the Gentiles—if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of the grace of God which has been given to me for your sakes; in that the mystery was made known to me by revelation (even as I have written beforehand briefly, with which you were able in reading it to grasp my understanding in the mystery of Christ), which was not made known in other generations to the children of men as now it has been revealed to His holy [separated] apostles and prophets, by the Spirit; that the Gentiles would be heirs together, and a body together, and fellow sharers together of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel of which I have become a minister, according to the free gift of the grace of God which was given to me according to the energy of His power.

COMMENTARY

Paul's Assignment—To Proclaim Redemption to the Gentiles

Because God had broken down the barrier between Jew and Gentile, Paul was assigned the task of declaring the glad tidings to the Gentiles. For this he was thrown into prison. To the Jews, he was a traitor and a blasphemer, and deserved to die; as had, in their minds, the Messiah whom he had proclaimed. His fellow countrymen had been in relentless pursuit of him for years. He was now writing from prison. The intense hatred of the Jews was matched only by the intense determination on the part of Paul, to complete the assignment that had been given him by Jesus Christ, the Messiah whom they hated. And thus, he found himself a prisoner for the sake of the Gentiles.

The stewardship of the grace of God... Once again, we confront the untranslatable οἰκονομία (*oikonomia*).

Literally, it means “the regulation of the household.” But it is so much more. It is more than “dispensation;” it is more than “stewardship.” It has to do with the way one is fitted into the functioning of the entire household, which in those days might include vast holdings or business activities. Such a position must be given by the lord of the household. It could not be something one would volunteer to do.

The mystery was made known to me by revelation... Numberless claims to revelation have been made throughout the millennia of human history. In fact, by the very nature of the case; any religion which would claim some supernatural origin, would have to also allege to have come by means of some revelation. So then how, do we know that Paul's claims are any more valid than anyone else's—Mohammed's, for

example, or a host of modern prophets? Actually, there is only one true test—the witness of the Holy Spirit.

But isn't that begging the question? Isn't that what all revelationists claim?

That is certainly true. But there are several very important differences. For one thing, there is the problem of validation. Anyone can make a claim to revelation. Most of such writings are by one person with some limited testimonials. In the case of the Bible, you have some forty authors, writing over a period of fifteen hundred years, who bring essentially the same message. Another factor in validation is the witness of history. Most religious writings are vague enough that there is no way to tell whether they are false or true—"We are the special chosen ones," for example; or "If you live a good life, you will have eternal bliss." The Bible, on the other hand, is rooted in history and makes definite claims about the origin of life and the universe; about the source of evil; about redemption; about the future of the people of God; about Christ as the Son of God. But the final judgment about the matter must be in the witness of the Spirit to the individual. Thus, if God is responsible for this book, then He is also responsible to see to it that we humans are convinced by it. And the only way one can be convinced by it, is to read it. Paul tells the Romans *"Faith comes by hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ"* (Romans 10:17). If God does not have the power to convince us of His word, then we have no reason to believe it. So Paul makes a claim to revelation from God. If that is true, then it should be convincing to us as we read his letters.

You are able in reading it, to grasp

my understanding in the mystery of Christ... In a way, Paul is saying the same thing. Read it and you will understand. The word which we have translated "grasp" is from νοέω (*noeo*), which basically refers to the mind, as the effective instrument of communication. Paul's word—"understanding"—is οὐνεσιν (*sunestin*). It means, literally, to "put things together." We have a common idiom—"get it together." That is very much what is meant here. With the revelation of God, Paul has been able to put together the concepts that make up God's will for mankind; and, by the witness of the Holy Spirit, we are able to grasp it.

Which was not made known in other generations... God's purposes for the Gentiles were not at all understood in the earlier history of His people, Israel. The Gentiles were summarily dismissed as not having any place at all in God's redemptive purpose. Now the time has come for God to reveal His purposes for the Gentiles—to bring them into the fold and establish one family of Jew and Gentile. And Paul has the great privilege of declaring the details of God's purpose for the Gentiles—a purpose which Peter had introduced; and had opened up the eyes of the leadership of Israel to this truth.

That the Gentiles should be heirs together and a body together and sharers together of the promise in Christ Jesus... The original people of God were the Israelites. To them were the promises made, and the prophecies. Theirs was the responsibility, of declaring to the world the truth of God. And theirs was the failure, which prefigured the failure of all mankind and the need of a Redeemer. The Old

Testament records the turbulent odyssey of Israel, which ended in the tragic captivity of Babylon. In its erratic and vacillating efforts to keep the Law of Moses, Israel demonstrated over a period of fifteen hundred years, the inability of human nature, bereft of the Spirit of God, ever to be righteous. This, of course, was the compelling reason for Christ to offer Himself as the ultimate sacrifice. The sacrificial system of the Old Testament was a temporary bridge over the quagmire of evil that threatened to swallow up the entire human race. But even so, as the Epistle to the Hebrews points out, these sacrifices could not purge the consciences of the offerers (Hebrews 9:13, 14). Unfortunately even up to the coming of the Messiah, the religious leaders of Israel were stubbornly persisting in the idea that they could, by their own righteousness, keep the Law of God.

The sacrifice of His own Son—Jesus Christ—was God’s final stroke in the recovery of His people. The message of Jesus in the Gospels was the ultimate judgment of God that humans could not keep His Law. The Sermon on the Mount, far from being the standard of perfection which God expected His people to follow, was the deathknell to their own self-righteous assumption that they were capable of doing it. Again and again, Jesus had to remind them that the rigid adherence to the Law in external behavior, by no means cured the evil intent of the heart (“*You have heard that it has been said,*” or “*But I say unto you...*”). “*You are like sepulchers, white on the outside and full of dead bones on the inside*” (Matthew 23:27).

With the coming of Pentecost came the revelation of the new relationship—the

very Spirit of Christ would dwell within, and the Law would be written on the hearts and not just on tables of stone. And whereas the Pharisees stubbornly resisted this revelation, not wishing to give up the hold which they had over the people in the leverage of the Law, large numbers of Jews received the word through the apostles, and were delivered from the Law into the “glorious liberty of Christ.”

At this point, came the grand proclamation to the Gentiles—they too are now included. The history of redemption was written in the history of Israel. Through the writers and the prophets, God proclaimed His future purpose for Israel and for all of mankind. To Israel, was the privilege of being in the vanguard of God’s purposes. But now, through Peter, initially, and then expanded by revelation through the apostle Paul, the Gentiles are brought into the fold. In that respect the Gentiles became part of Israel, rather than vice versa. So now, the Gentiles will share with Israel the inheritance which was originally theirs, and the body, and the promises. So they will now be “*heirs together, and a body together, and fellow sharers together of the promise in Christ Jesus.*”

According to the free gift of the grace of God... δωρεά. (*dorea*) is a form of *doran* (gift), which adds to it the idea of something given without cause.

But isn’t that the nature of a gift?

Not always. Many gifts have an occasion—birthday, anniversary, celebration, etc. A gift is all the more meaningful when it is given freely, without an occasion. That is the sense of this word. There is sometimes the

assumption that when one is saved, God must now give a gift. Many feel that one must ask Him for a gift. That would be as tasteless as asking one for a birthday gift. God does not owe us anything. He gives gifts to us “freely,” out of His love and magnanimous purposes for His people; and so God’s gift to Paul—an expression of the benevolent flow of His grace.

The word minister—διάκονος (*diakonos*)—is not to be at all confused with the modern day usage of the term. In today’s usage, the word conjures up an official position in the church, with designated activities ranging from pastoral duties to the activities of the various divisions and departments of the institution. Our word “deacon” comes directly from this word, but has little connection with the original gift, as Paul defines it to Timothy (I Timothy 3:8-13). Paul’s “ministry” was a stewardship and an assignment given by God and not simply chosen as a profession.

According to the energy of His power... We are tiny “mites” on the

earth—like computer chips. We are totally useless apart from the energy of the Holy Spirit within us. Jesus said, “*Without Me you can do nothing*” (John 15:5). All efforts in the service of Christ which are motivated by human factors (challenges, promises of reward, pressures of guilt, etc.) are likely to be of the flesh, in which one strives to do a “job” in one’s own strength. When the gift comes from Christ and not from humans, it does not need a cause. There is simply the compelling to do it, as in the case of Paul—“*The love of Christ constrains [compels] us...*” (II Corinthians 5:14). It was the love of Christ and not love *for* Christ. Love for Christ is merely the response of gratitude—“After all He’s done for me “The love of Christ is the very energy of Christ’s love within, reaching out to those that are without, apart from any human feelings of affection or gratitude. It is only the energy of the power of God working through us, that can give us the assignment that God has for us and can effectively accomplish the assignment. Who really knows how to save the world?

Ephesians 3:8-13

TRANSLATION

To me, who am the least of all the saints [separated ones], was given this grace, to proclaim for the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to enlighten all as to what is the stewardship [economy] of the mystery, which was hidden from the ages in God, who created all things; in order that now may be made known to the rulers and authorities in the “supra-heavenlies” through the church the multifaceted wisdom of God, according to the purpose of the ages which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness [freedom] and access in confidence through the faith of Him. Wherefore I ask you not to become fainthearted at my afflictions on your behalf, which is your glory.

COMMENTARY

The Mystery of the Ages Revealed—The Unsearchable Riches of Christ

Paul makes it quite clear here, that he is not merely declaring another religious theory or system, but is God’s appointed oracle for the revealing of the inscrutable majesty and magnitude of Jesus Christ. The glory of God had been a prevailing theme throughout the Old Testament, especially in the Psalms and Prophets. Nor were their concepts confined to finite deities of heaven and earth, whose imagined province was to give or withhold goods and grain. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the prophets of the true God were able to reach out and grasp a universal Deity, who “called the stars by their names.” The problem for them arose in the appearance of Jesus, whom they must identify as the Messiah, and ascribe to Him the attributes which, in their minds, belonged to God alone. After all,

their timeless watchword had been “The Lord our God is One.”

Paul’s pedigree was incontrovertibly Jewish—Pharisee of the Pharisees; of the tribe of Benjamin; impeccably upholding the Law. On the other hand, he was a Roman citizen, and as such, incontrovertibly a Gentile. It was his unenviable assignment in the economy of God, to prove to his fellow Jews that the maverick young teacher from Capernaum (the center of much of His ministry) was indeed the Messiah; that, as the Messiah, He possessed also the attributes of God; and that God had granted to the Gentiles an equal place with the Jews in the redemptive process of God. On the other hand, He had to prove to the Gentiles that the Jewish Deity—*Yahweh*—was more than a provincial counterpart to the

gods of the Pantheon. Furthermore, it was his province to line up the Gentiles with the Jews and establish their equality. Who, but the Spirit of God, could accomplish such a formidable task? This Paul understood thoroughly, to the point of regarding himself only as a vessel—unworthy and totally incapable of declaring the glory of God.

The least of all the saints... Was Paul not saintly? Has he not come down through the ages as “Saint Paul?” Judging by his own evaluation of himself, as well as of the believers in general; I think he would be most unhappy with that designation. In the first place, of course, his use of the word translated “saint,” in keeping with the Greek word—*ἅγιος* (*hagios*)—had nothing to do with our concept of “saintly” in the English language. As we have explained before at length, to the Greeks the word meant simply “separated.” That, Paul would have accepted, because he was, in fact, separated unto God, as indeed are all believers. In the second place, he was very conscious of his weakness in the flesh—*“In me, that is in my flesh, dwells no good thing.”*

Moreover, Paul regarded himself as the least of the “saints” because he persecuted the believers—in fact, had been responsible for the death of many. He did not even regard himself worthy to be called an apostle—*“Because I persecuted the church of God; by the grace of God, I am what I am...”* It is obvious, however, that Paul was convinced that he was forgiven, and went on to serve the Lord as a “specially chosen vessel.” It is remarkable, in view of the circumstances, that he should himself assume that he had been “separated from his mother’s womb.” Having been forgiven by God the intervening years of his denial of Jesus as the Messiah, and his consequent heinous

behavior, did not disqualify him from the performance of a most noble mission; nor did it prevent him from assuming that the Holy Spirit was ready to dwell within him and to energize him for that service. So his insistence that he was the “least of all the saints,” was not in any sense of the word, merely a religious pose. It is popular today to put on a self-effacing cloak of humility but humility is not something one can “put on.” In the first place, humility is a virtue only to those who have reason to be proud. In the second place, the moment one attempts to be humble the phony facade goes tip. Genuine humility only comes in the recognition of one’s complete inadequacy in the flesh and the total reliance on the Holy Spirit to fulfill His purpose within.

To proclaim the unsearchable riches of Christ... The word—*εὐαγγελίζω* (*euangelidzo*)—appears again. It is not adequate to say that Paul was merely “preaching” the unsearchable riches of Christ. He was proclaiming (as in “victory proclamation”) a divine revelation relative to the glory of the Son of God, which was incapable of being communicated through human capacities.

The word—*ἀνεξιχνίαζω* (*anexichniadzo*)—refers to something that cannot even be explored. Prior to the sixties, all physics (including one’s own college text) could not explore the atom because we did not have the equipment, as yet, to do so. The atom was split in 1960 by the cyclotron. Prior to that, physics was all based on the Newtonian Laws of Motion. In today’s world, it would be like trying to get to the moon in an ox cart. And so, the riches of Christ could only be revealed and comprehended by the direct action of the Holy Spirit. It had to be a direct message from God. Did Paul actually have this direct revelation? Let the text speak for itself. If God is in it, it will affect one’s

spirit. In a certain sense the glory of Christ can only be absorbed by the spirit. The mind does not have the capacity to appropriate it. But that is why there is the necessity of a communion between God and the Spirit of God, within us. So Jesus tells the woman of Samaria—“*They that worship the Father must worship Him in spirit and in truth*” (John 4:23, 24).

And to enlighten all as to the stewardship [economy] of the mystery... As in English, words have many different applications. The word—*οικονομία (oikonomia)*—on the one hand, refers to the assignment one has within the household; on the other hand, it may be used to refer to the entire domestic and commercial enterprise of the household. Our word “economy” may refer to an entire system by which a nation supplies the needs of its people, or it may refer to a method of frugality in the first usage of the word in this passage, Paul refers to his own assignment, or stewardship. In the second usage of the word, he is referring to the entire process of redemption with which God recovered His people. This process was a mystery, which was not understood in previous ages because God had not chosen to reveal it at that time. But now according to Paul, it pleased God to disclose His universal purposes, not only to those of the earth but to those who occupied the spirit realm of the supra-heavenlies.

In his first Epistle to the Corinthians, Paul declared that the whole meaning of the crucifixion of Christ was hidden from Satan’s emissaries because, had they known what was going to be the ultimate effect of it, “*they would not have crucified the Lord of glory*” (I Corinthians 2:8). So, apparently, Satan and his ambassadors of ill will did not know what was going to take place in the coming of Jesus to the

earth. Herod, one of these agents, sought to kill the child Jesus. Other attempts were made on the life of Jesus during His sojourn on the earth (Capernaum, e.g.). So, when Satan had Jesus on the cross through his Jewish and Roman agents, he thought he had finally destroyed Him. Little did he realize that he had begun the process of his own destruction.

Let those who deal in extrasensory perception (ESP) and the occult take note that Satan did not, in fact, know the future events having to do with Jesus. Nor does he know the future events having to do with this world. Astrologers and fortune tellers and those who deal in ESP, are able by clever carnival illusions, to persuade the gullible that they are actually telling the future. By the use of vagaries and self-fulfilling prophecies, they entrap those who desperately want to know the future and will grasp at any straw. The future belongs to God and not Satan. The brain cannot dispense what it does not receive. Intuition may give a person certain special sensitivities based upon genetics, but deals in potentialities and not actualities. The compilation of existing data which, taken together, may or may not be clues to one’s personality, including one’s fears and aspirations, has only a chance involvement with the future. If God decides to reveal the future to someone, it is for an important reason and not for placating the curious. The psychological method of dream therapy may have some validity in terms of personality, but must be handled with great care. The important thing to understand is that the spirit realm belongs to God and not to Satan. Satan and his emissaries occupy a spirit realm (“supra-heavenlies”), but do not control it. God is the only source of legitimate revelation. Whatever experiences one may advance in support of extrasensory perceptions, they must come within the

framework of God's revelations and not of Satan's. If it is not of God, forget it. If it is presumed to be from God, one must be very careful lest one be deceived by Satan, as were the false prophets of old. If one declares a revelation to be from God, it had better be right. The penalty for being a false prophet in the Old Testament was death. Today, the penalty is much more severe—it is the deceiving of God's people.

To the rulers and to the authorities in the “supra-heavenlies”... We are obviously not dealing here, with earthly rulers. These are apparently agents of Satan who occupy a certain level of the spirit realm.

Through the church—[the body of believers on earth are the witnesses to redemption and to the grace of God, which sustains His people in the midst of Satan's evil world]. In the Garden of Eden, the sly” serpent” deceived Eve into disobedience, and perpetrated the separation from God. In the New Testament era, the presence of the Spirit of Christ within, guarantees that this will not happen again. The Spirit of Christ, within one will sustain one through all the machinations of the enemy. The believer may be battered and bruised in the fleshly “cocoon,” but the spirit, which is the fortress of faith, remains intact. This is the great witness to Satan of God's ultimate power to sustain His people and overthrow the enemy. Whatever troubles one may have in the flesh—whatever weaknesses; whatever failures—the spirit is guarded by the power of God against the penetration of the enemy (I Peter 1:3-9).

Job is a great example of this principle (though not possessing, within him, the Holy Spirit). All of the sufferings that he went through were for the purpose of

proving to Satan that God had the power to keep him, and to ensure that he would not abandon his faith, no matter what Satan did to him. And whereas that might not seem an enviable assignment, it was nevertheless to the glory of God, which is part of our ultimate purpose on the earth. Paul tells the Ephesians that God had established beforehand, the purpose of the body of believers—“*That we should be to the praise of His glory*” (1:12). What more noble purpose could there possibly be? If Olympic contestants, for example, can make endless sacrifices for the glory of man, cannot believers make sacrifices for the glory of God?

The multifaceted wisdom of God... The word “wisdom” is—σοφία (*sophia*). It has nothing to do with the petty processes of the earthly odyssey, but with the meaning of God and the universe. Who are we? Where do we come from? What is life? What is its end? And this indeed is the kind of wisdom that God gives to His people. The very presence of His Holy Spirit in our spirits makes us aware of the ultimate implications of the universe that He made. This was the kind of wisdom the Greeks sought when they came to Jesus and were rebuffed—because they were not seeking redemption but knowledge; as the Jews were not seeking salvation but signs. The wisdom that God was revealing, both to the world at large as well as to the whole realm of the spirit—could only be described as “multifaceted.” The grand sweep of all that God designed for the universe—both in the material realm and the realm of the spirit, could only be revealed by Him. Peter makes an astounding observation prophetically, in his second epistle, where he says that, “*The heavens will pass away with great noise*” (3:10). In Revelation, John says that the heavens will be “*rolled up as a scroll*” (6:14). The implication of these

thoughts is that, while we are accustomed to thinking of the heavens as endless space, there is a sense in which they represent something of a veil that obscures the true realities of God. There are things about God that the human mind cannot possibly fathom, and there comes a point at which the human perception of outer space actually veils the realities of God. One day the veil will be removed and then, *“Every eye shall see Him”* (Revelation 1:7). To Paul had been assigned the gargantuan task of declaring the riches of Christ which, on the other hand, cannot be explored by the human mind. In a sense, the articulation of this glory could only be appropriated by the readers, through the same Spirit that revealed the truth to Paul in the first place. And thus, the translation of *euangelidzo* must be far stronger than the simple expression “good news,” or even “gospel.”

According to the purpose of the ages... God is Spirit. The essence of His eternal existence is limitless energy and timelessness. Into such an infinite realm, He evolved a “moment” of space and time. This moment has been identified in Scripture as “the ages.” The earth is part of this process. In this “moment” of time, God fulfilled a segment of His eternal purposes. Whether we are talking about thousands of years of human existence, or possibly billions of years of geological time, it is still “but an instant” in the perspective of eternity. But in this segment of time, God accomplished a particular purpose. This purpose was now being revealed through the church, as a wondrous project of God—to bring into being a host of creatures who would be very like Himself and reflect His glory throughout eternity. To be like Himself, they must have free will, but at the same time, a risk was involved. Aware of the risk, God provided a process by which

free-will creatures would be able to voluntarily identify with Him, and join Him for eternity. This process was called—“redemption.” The entire process, from the beginning of the space-time era, was accomplished through Jesus Christ.

In whom we have boldness and access with confidence... The word for “boldness”—παρρησιαν (*parresian*)—is derived from two words which mean “freedom of speech” or “expression.” The Greeks prided themselves on their liberty to explore the realm of ideas freely. The idea of “boldness” has to do, not with rightful demands, but rather, with the liberty to come openly before God. It goes hand in hand with access. The common translation—boldness—is often interpreted as meaning that we are in a position to “boldly” make demands of God—“You said.” This is not the flavor of the word at all. It means that there is a steady flow between ourselves and God which gives us an immediate access, and does not depend on human religious exercise. Through the Holy Spirit in our spirits, there is a constant communion between ourselves and Christ, in spite of our own human weaknesses (Romans 8:26). The word “access” is another one of those pivotal words in the Bible on which rests the entire case of God’s relationship to humans. Through Christ the chasm of human sin has been bridged, providing an abundance of grace for our interaction with Him. And this is with confidence—a word which has to do with persuasion or conviction. We have in our spirits, the inexplicable conviction that God has opened His door to us.

Through the faith of Him... It is common among humans—in spite of numerous texts to the contrary—to think of faith as something that they must exercise as part of the conditions of having their prayers answered. Thus, if

one does not receive the help one needs, it is assumed that it is because of a lack of faith (among other things). The vital question is—Where does faith come from? Is it something we bring forth out of a human reservoir of determination? Can we ever simply exercise a certain amount of mental control and will, to have more faith? The truth of the matter is that faith is a gift of God, and cannot be developed through religious exercise. The faith we have is actually the faith of Christ, which has been ministered to us through the Holy Spirit. It has nothing to do with religious exercise, *per se*.

What people often call “faith” is really the human emotion of trust, which may or may not accompany faith. The whole gamut of human emotion is so much based on the “grid” patterns of the brain, that its function varies radically from one person to the next. It is much easier for some to exercise the emotion of trust than for others. It even varies within each one. So human trust, as a process of the emotions, is totally unreliable. Unfortunately, we do not know with absolute certainty, what God is going to do in a given situation. How often we have heard the expression—“I just know God is going to heal me.” The problem is that we set ourselves up for great disappointment and disillusionment. No matter how much one may believe that one has received a revelation from God in the matter, it is at best “iffy,” and at worst, damaging to faith if it doesn’t take place. It is especially tragic when one misleads someone else in the matter.

Christ resides in our spirits and with Him, is His own faith. “*The fruit of the Spirit is... faith*” (Galatians 5:22). When we have Christ, we have His faith. Paul states that he “*lives by the faith of the Son of God*” (Galatians 2:20). He did not say faith *in* the Son of God, but the faith *of* the Son of God. (The Greek text uses the genitive case here, which is normally used as the case of possession.) It is far better to rely on the faith of Christ, than to rely on the human feelings of trust. In that way, we avoid putting God to the test (which the Israelites were warned about), or putting ourselves to the test, which is rather absurd. So faith is the gift of God to our spirits, providing a foundation for our interaction with God. That faith is constant and operative, whatever the condition of our own human inadequacy. Hebrews tells us that, “*without faith it is impossible to please God*” (11:6). Thus, the very concern about one’s faith is the evidence that one has it. If one has Christ within, one has His faith. If one did not have Christ within, one would not be concerned about one’s faith.

Not to become fainthearted at my afflictions... The multitude of Paul’s afflictions might cause some to lose spirit, and wonder why God treated His servant so. Paul encourages them to realize that his very afflictions were part of the price he paid, in his constant war with the enemy on their behalf. As surely as he brought to them the message of redemption, which would yield their glorification. Satan would press the battle against him to prevent that message from being delivered.

Ephesians 3:14-21

TRANSITION

For this cause I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom every family [race] in heaven and upon earth is named, that He would grant to you according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with [in the grip of His] power through His Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell [settle down] in your hearts through faith, you being rooted in love and founded upon it; that you may be utterly able to apprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth; to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

To the One who has the power to do exceedingly abundantly above all which we ask or think, according to the power which energizes us; to Him is the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all generations forever. Amen.

COMMENTARY

The Impact of the Energy of God Working Within Us

Compared to the rest of the universe we humans are only an ionized particle in the vastness of space. We have said that before, but it bears often repeating. We are not admitted to the fraternity of believers, as to a club, on the basis of our capacity to fulfill the obligations of membership. Rather, we are imbued with the Spirit and energy of God, in which process we become “*partakers of His divine nature*” (II Peter 1:4). Only thus, can we particles achieve the capacity to identify with God. Outside of this process, we could no more interact with the God of the universe than could an ant interact with a human—in fact, far less. To speak of humans coming to believe by way of

human rationale and regulation is totally absurd. So, now we come to the substance and realities of our relationship to Christ, as revealed by Paul in Ephesians 3.

For this cause... For what cause? For the cause of God’s energizing process in the building of the Body of Christ, which unites Jew and Gentile, and grows into a “Holy Temple” and a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. As is typical of Paul, there is a considerable parenthesis between the first expression of cause and its repetition.

I bow my knees... An act both of humility and worship. There was none

more humble than Paul. In numbers of references to his own inadequacy, he was quite certain that his own human capacities had little to do with the energy and revelation of God, through His Spirit. He was certainly not putting on a pose when he regarded himself as the “*least of the apostles*,” to say nothing of his assumption that he was the “*chief of sinners*.” As one who had led Christians to their executions, he was probably not unjustified in his assumption. He was most emphatic in his conviction that he could have “*no confidence in the flesh*.”

From whom every family [race]...is named... The word—πατριὰ (*patria*)—is very broad and not too precise. It can refer to race or tribe or family. What Paul means here is not altogether clear, but certainly alludes to the fact that all human life, of whatever anthropological or sociological origin, is ultimately from Him.

That He may grant to you, according to the riches of His glory... Whatever follows now, in respect to God’s interaction with humans, is based upon His limitless glory and fullness. The word “riches,” obviously does not have to do with material substance, *per se*. His is a fullness that goes quite beyond all finite corporeality and, of course, there is a limitless reservoir of power, out of which God interacts with His people.

To be in the grip of His power... There are different words for “strength” and “power.” It is quite important that we distinguish between them. They are not used simply as synonyms. The first word—κραταίω (*krataio*)—has to do with the grip of power. It is the basis of such words as “democracy”—“power to the people” and “aristocracy”—“power to the few,” etc. These words all have to do with being in the “grip” of or under the power

of. When we possess Christ in our spirits, we are in His “grip.” That is a very comforting thought, given the vastness of the universe and the frailty of our flesh. If you want to be in His power, you are. If you did not have His Spirit in you, you would not want to be.

Dunamis (δυναμις)—is the power by which God prevails in the affairs of earth. Whereas the word—ἐνεργέω (*energeo*)—has to do with intrinsic power—“energizing.” *Dunamis* has to do with extrinsic power. It is the power by which God created and sustains the universe. The point is made in the Psalms (147:3-5) that He who had the power to create the universe and name the stars, has also the sensitivity to deal with human hearts. “*He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds. He telleth the number of the stars, He calleth them all by their names. Great is our Lord, and of great power, His understanding is infinite.*”

In the inner man... The flesh is totally unreliable. Paul believed it to be so and expresses that, in no uncertain terms. The human person is capable of great heights—in a sense, very like God. By the same token, it is capable of great depths. History is strewn with the wreckage of those who have achieved great things in their lifetime and have ultimately been shipwrecked on the treacherous shoals of some area of human weakness. The phrase—“power corrupts”—is all too familiar in our society. That is not to denigrate the achievement or to berate the fallen; it is merely an observation about the unreliability of the human nature. But, of course, the flesh is after all, but a cocoon—transient and temporary. The true strength is in the inner man—the spirit—which, possessed by Christ, will prevail despite the weakness of the flesh. This is God’s

promise to us—“*Unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy*” (Jude 24).

That Christ may settle down in your hearts... The Greek word—κατοικέω (*katoikeo*)—means more than simply “to dwell.” It has a note of permanence and intimacy. In a figure of speech, He is not an “absentee landlord.” Nor does He come and go like a “finicky visitor.” (This is not an uncommon thought among those who think that Christ visits only as long as He is treated right.)

Through faith ... His own faith opens the door and sustains the relationship.

Rooted in love and founded [in love]... The permanence of His relationship to us is established through a root system in one figure, and a foundation, in another. The root system is already there, in infinite depth. When we are grafted, as the branches to the vine, we become part of that root system. Moreover, the building, in another figure, is already established with Christ as the “Keystone,” and we are merely fitted into it in the place that He has assigned to us. His love, as His faith, is part of the flow of divine energy that establishes the connection.

That you may be utterly able to [apprehend]... ἰσχυνῶ (*ischuno*)—means “to be able,” or “to have the strength to.” The addition of a preposition—ἐκ (*ek*) (or in this case “ex”) enhances the verb and makes it much stronger. In Greek, we call it the “perfectivizing” use of the preposition—a very common device. Here, it means that one is not only able, but utterly able. In a similar sense, the word for “comprehend”—καταλαμβάνω (*katalambano*)—is made up from the word λαμβάνω (*lambano*), which means

“to receive” and κατὰ (*kata*), which is more than receiving—“comprehending” or “apprehending,” which means “to appropriate.” The Spirit of God within us gives us the capacity to take in the meaning of God’s love and make it a part of us.

Breadth and length and height and depth... We are dealing here with dimensions beyond the human capacity. We talk about the “fourth dimension” and consider it mathematically, but it is still beyond the experience and the perception of three-dimensional creatures. If we were two-dimensional creatures, we would not be able to perceive depth. Apparently, the fourth-dimensional factor expressed in this text, is the ability to conceive of the heights which would bring us into touch with God. This can only be perceived with the touch of the Holy Spirit in our spirits.

To know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge... How can we know something that is beyond knowing? We experience it and apprehend it through the presence of Christ within our spirits. We cannot “learn to love others.” We cannot make it a religious exercise. We cannot develop it in sociological efforts to relate to others. It can only truly be expressed by the Spirit of Christ, reaching out beyond our fleshly sense of love, and touching others at a deeper level. Paul said, “*The love of Christ constrains [compels] us*” (II Corinthians 5:14). The love of Christ loves others through us. We cannot learn to love as Christ loved. His love reaches out in spite of our inadequate capacity for true love. Of course, this is the love of caring—really much deeper than the love of affection. We do not always like the people we care about, with the caring love of Christ.

Filled with all the fullness of God... How can we human “mites” possess the fullness of God? Only by the energizing power of the Holy Spirit, who lifts us from the realm of the finite to the realm of the infinite. It is like the computer chip—a mere bit of silicone but touched with energy, becomes a vital part of the computer program. Possessing Christ within us, we are *de facto* transformed into a particle of divine energy—“*partakers of the divine nature.*” No amount of religious exercise or fervent effort will ever accomplish this. This was the message Christ continually sought to bring to the Pharisees, who continued to assume that they had the capacity to satisfy God’s requirement. This does not mean that we will act like God, but rather, possessed of His nature, become part of His Spirit realm to dwell with Him forever. Actually, the Spirit of God within us makes us, now, eternal.

The power to do exceedingly abundantly... The Greek word—περισσός (*perissos*)—by itself, means “great abundance.” To this word, is added a preposition—*ek*—which lifts the word beyond “great abundance” to “extraordinary abundance.” To this Paul adds still another preposition—*υπερ* (*huper*)—which carries the word even farther, to heights beyond human imagining. And so, He says further that it is “*above all things which we ask or think.*” Unfortunately, this superlative promise which, according to the context, focuses on the transforming of our human spirits into something of the nature of God, has been beggared by identifying it with the attaining of earthly benefits from God. It is like children comparing notes on what mom and dad have done for them today. It is important to note that Paul experienced very little of earthly or material benefits in his unstinting efforts to carry the message of the glory of God,

and the reflecting of that glory in His people. His catalog of afflictions leaves little room for earthly bliss. Nor does he promise it to the people of God. His promise of the supply of earthly needs, like the promise of Jesus, extends to food and clothing. Paul echoes that thought to Timothy—“*Having food and raiment let us be therewith content*” (I Timothy 6:8). That is not to say that one cannot have earthly possessions, but that they should not become the focus of one’s life. Nor is it to say that one could not pray to God for material help. That seems to be a common practice in the Scripture. But there are no guarantees as far as this world is concerned. It is completely unsound to make the answer to material requests a test, either of God or of our own faith.

According to the power which energizes us... This has, not to do with our capacity to extract something from God, but rather, His capacity to transform us and transfer us into His Kingdom.

To Him is the glory in the church... As surely as He is in us and among us, we reflect His glory back to Him. “*We all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror, the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of Christ*” (II Corinthians 3:18). What greater glory could there be than God’s own glory reflected back to Him? So also was God glorified in His Son Jesus Christ—the very image of His Person. In Jesus’ own words—“*Now has the Son of man been glorified, and God has been glorified in Him. If God has been glorified in Him, God also shall glorify Himself in Him...*” (John 13:31, 32). It follows then that the church is also glorified with Christ, since “*He is the Head of the body*” and the body is “*the fullness of the One*

who fulfills all things" (Ephesians 1:23). The magnitude of this declaration is beyond the capacity of the mind to grasp, but our spirits appropriate it beyond the mind.

Unto all generations forever... γενεά (*genea*)—has not to do with time, but progeny. When Jesus said to His Disciples—*"This generation will not pass away till all these things be fulfilled."* He was not speaking of time, but of His family—Israel. And so it has been. Perhaps no ethnic group on earth has been more threatened with genocide than Israel. But still they remain. And so they

shall remain, in spite of all efforts of Middle Eastern hostility to eliminate them. And so also, with the church which has become a part of Israel, entering into God's covenant and promises. One of the great testimonies to the veracity of the Scriptures is the fact that that nation, Israel, but a tiny dot on the face of the globe and surrounded by a billion of her avowed enemies (stretching from the Caucasus Mountains south to Africa, and from the Atlantic in the west to the Pacific in the east), still exists today; and, as God promised to Abraham and to the prophets of the ages, his people will remain forever.

Ephesians 4:1-6

TRANSLATION

I, then, the prisoner by [the will of] the Lord, urge you to walk in a way that is becoming to the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and openness toward one another, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love; making an effort to keep the oneness of the Spirit in the binding cord of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, even as also you were called with one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

COMMENTARY

The Binding Cord of Peace

Paul was a prisoner! Not of Caesar; nor of Rome; nor of the Jewish leaders; nor even of Satan, but of Christ. An angel of the Lord struck off Peter's chains, but did not free James. God sent an earthquake to open the prison for Paul and Silas in Philippi, but it pleased Him to leave Paul a prisoner in Rome for a time. Had God wanted Paul free, all the hosts and bastions of the Roman Empire could never have held him. Who can fathom the purposes of God? Paul was the leading messenger of God to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles. We would have assumed that surely God would deliver him so that he could continue his work. Getting the work done is important, but not more important than the messenger. The history of God's dealings with His servants, throughout the ages, confirms this point beyond a doubt. His way of working is so contrary to the human methods, which are constantly focused on numbers and

efficiency and time. The message of Esther is an eloquent example—"Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this" (Esther 4:14).

The power of the message of Ephesians confirms the fact that God's purpose in Paul was being fulfilled in spite of the distress of his circumstances. And such was the case throughout Paul's life. He never participated in the earthly benefits so glibly promised from today's pulpits. Through a misapplication of Jesus' own words—"All things are possible to him that believes"—it is alleged by many that if you have enough faith and fervency you can have anything you want. It is a tragic deception. Through the ages, countless numbers of God's children have suffered pain and penury and imprisonment while serving the Lord selflessly and faithfully. Life for the believer is a

continual battle, and we dare not try to fight it with human weapons, however pious or persevering. We have no strength of our own with which to fight the enemy. Only the grace and power of God will cause us to stand. And we will stand. “*And he shall stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand*” (Romans 14:4).

In a manner becoming to the calling with which you are called... The common translation—“worthily”—is misleading. None of us can ever be worthy of the calling. Such a translation has kept many believers in a state of discouragement. They see themselves as “second rate” Christians, unsatisfying to Christ. And this, of course, robs them of the peace that Christ has promised them. Satan uses such careless teaching in his constant battle against the believers. It is certainly essential for those who aspire to be leaders of the people of God to equip themselves adequately so that they will not make such mistakes. It is not a matter of opinion, but a matter of technical semantics.

The Greek word—*αξιός* (*axios*)—is not a matter of merit, but of propriety. Believers can and will do things that are inappropriate to their position with Christ. To think that believers can ever reach a state of perfection where this will not happen, is sheer illusion. Nor does Paul ever suggest that unbecoming conduct will affect their salvation. It may affect their testimony or their circumstances or their relationship to others, but they are still members of “the family” or “the Kingdom of God.” In the fourth chapter of Ephesians, Paul has many things to say about the conduct of believers, but never indicates for a moment that their

conduct excludes them from their status in the kingdom of God.

Furthermore, Paul urges them to proper behavior. The Greek word is—*παρακαλέω* (*parakaleo*). It is the same word as *paraclete* or “comforter.” It does not have the same force as “command.” Paul urges, or encourages, the believers to be careful about their conduct for the sake of themselves and those around them.

With all lowliness and openness [to God and man]... Often sermons on this text will include numbers of items that the speaker judges to be “worthy” and appropriate conduct. What Paul identifies here as appropriate is not all that demanding for those who possess the Spirit of Christ (i.e. the redeemed).

Lowliness of mind... The Greek word is—*ταπεινοφροσύνης* (*tapeinophrosunes*)—and denotes a genuine sense of one’s position before God. It is not a quality of humility that one might aspire to, but rather a genuine sense of the complete inability of humans ever to identify with God without His help. This was a quality that the Pharisees never exhibited, because they never felt that they were not able to keep the commandments, and thus satisfy the requirements of salvation. The one who has identified with God through the “new birth” would have, *de facto*, assumed that salvation was not possible apart from Christ. The Greek word for lowliness involves “a mental set”—a pattern of thought—and not merely a transient willingness from time to time, to set aside one’s perceived superiority for the sake of assuming a pose of “Christian humility.” It is, rather, the genuine recognition that apart from Christ one is helpless.

Πραυτός (*prautos*)—is usually translated by “meekness.” It has some of the flavor, but more in the sense of openness to others, especially in view of the lowliness of our true position as flawed mortals on the earth. In a figurative sense, we are “all in the same boat.” We ought, therefore, to be flexible in our relationship to others, not being quick to judge or impose ourselves on them. It does not mean that as Christians we ought to let people take an unfair advantage of us.

With longsuffering, bearing with one another in love... As openness evolves out of lowliness, so longsuffering and bearing with one another evolves out of openness toward them. They are all interrelated as part of the appropriate behavior that Paul urges upon them. Such attitudes evolve out of the caring consciousness, which is a fruit of the Spirit, even as the love of Christ comes with His indwelling presence. It reaches out to others in an attitude of caring. While this love is true in our spirits, it does not always find expression in our flesh. Thus, Paul must remind the believers to look to the resource of that caring that is within them. He is not speaking here of human affection (*phile*), which requires us to like people in spite of bad behavior, but rather, the *agape* love of the Spirit which, cares about others whether or not we like them. But we have to care about them, as those for whom Christ died. Only the Spirit of Christ within us can enable us to reach out in caring for those whose actions we disapprove.

Making an effort to keep the oneness of the spirit... There is a sense in which we are all one in Christ by reason of the energizing power of the

Holy Spirit within us. That is not something that we can accomplish by human effort. What is in view here, is the outward expression of that inner unity. In a way, Paul is saying we are one in Christ; let us be mindful of that in our relationship to one another and act accordingly.

In the binding cord of peace. Strictly speaking, the unity of the Holy Spirit is something different than the oneness of the human spirit. The unity of the Holy Spirit is a divine process, binding all of the believers into one family. The oneness of the human spirit is an expression of that unity in maintaining a common fellowship in the meaning of our faith. That which binds us together at the human level, is the effort to be at peace with one another. Inner peace is the right and reality of every believer through the indwelling presence of Christ. The outward expression of that inner peace is openness toward all believers, and receiving them as members of the family. They may differ in the individuality of their faith and in the efforts to articulate that faith in doctrines and practices, but that does not exclude them from the family. This, of course, assumes the dwelling of Christ within as the basis of salvation. Much trouble within Christendom comes from two major fallacies—(1) The assumption that the human mind is capable of expressing the truth of God inerrantly; and (2) The effort to persuade others of the absolute rightness of one’s own beliefs. Paul is talking here about a kind of fellowship and camaraderie that goes beyond doctrinal differences.

There are, however, certain basic elements that are crucial to this oneness. Paul is not talking about a universal acceptance of all religious

beliefs. Christ is the Lord of all—we can accept no other allegiance, whatever the claims. There is only one faith—that which is produced by the energy of God within us. There is one baptism—the symbol of that allegiance (the symbols and methods may vary, but the meaning is the same). There is one God and Father of all—the ultimate source of all life and energies of the universe.

The oneness of the believers is based upon these major elements, and not upon thinking alike about every detail of the Christian experience. According to John (I John 4:2), apart from the presence of the Holy Spirit within, one could not identify Jesus as the anointed, incarnation of God. So those who do genuinely accept this, can be received as fellow members of the body. It is for God to determine that genuineness, and for us to be open to all who confess Christ as Savior.

So we maintain the oneness of the body by recognizing the limitations of the human capacity to articulate the truth,

and by being reserved in pressing our own concepts on others. We recognize the right of fellow believers to entertain their own kind of relationship to Christ, as we want them to respect ours.

Given our human limitations, there should be great flexibility in relating to other members of the body. And thus, we recognize the oneness of the body by relating to one another in peace. Paul makes a strong point of this in Romans 14, where he says, “*Receive ye one another, but not in judgmental debate*” (v.1). There follows a strong discussion of the liberty of believers to entertain their own faith between themselves and God. The entire chapter is a classic statement of individuality, and a warning against believers who attempt to shape the lives of other believers. The body remains one, insofar as the members of the body, recognizing their own limitations, refrain from intruding upon the rights of other believers. And thus, we have the binding cord of peace.

Ephesians 4:7-10

TRANSLATION

To each one of us has been given grace, according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he says, "Having ascended on high, He led captive the captives, and He gave gifts to men." And the One who ascended, what is it but that He also descended into the lower part of the earth? He who descended, is Himself the One who ascended far above all the heavens, in order that He may fulfill all things.

COMMENTARY

The Measure of God's Immeasurable Gifts

This passage is one of the pivotal passages of the entire Bible. Nothing in all of human experience is more crucial than the interaction of God with His creatures; both in rescuing them from destruction and the offering to them of a share in His eternal energy and purposes in the universe, which He has created. If humans have corrupted the earth, God has provided a way of deliverance from the shackles of the space-time cosmos, into the glorious liberty of His own Spirit realm. The cosmos has been corrupted by the entrance of sin. Thus, life in the world today is a nightmare of catastrophe and confusion and inequity. Satan is assuredly the "prince of this world." That is, he has been allowed to enter into the earthly realm and to exercise his nefarious schemes. He takes special delight in attacking the people of God so as, if possible, to destroy their faith and deter them from the purposes of God. But victory is assured over the forces of Satan only as we find our ultimate identity with God and the

realm of the Spirit; otherwise Christians, as their non-Christian counterparts, are battered by the forces of Satan in this world. As victims of this earth, humans are weak and faulty and bound by the restrictions of time and space. However, as spirit beings possessed by Christ, they transcend the earthly quagmire and soar like the eagle in the Kingdom of God.

He led captive the captives... The cosmos is replete with the enemies of God. One day, they will be footstools of Christ. "*For it is necessary for Him to reign until all His enemies are set under His feet as a footstool*" (I Corinthians 15:25). Under Satan's rule, believers are battered and badgered—but that is only in the flesh. In the spirit, which is invulnerable to Satan. Christ reigns supreme and peace is our portion. Historically, this passage is a quotation from Psalm 68:18, which depicts the triumph of God over the enemies of His people, Israel (see author's book—*David, The Man of*

the Heart). This, of course, is symbolic of His triumph over the enemies of God, on the whole earth. At present, it seems that Satan is triumphant—that he exercises unlimited control over the realm of the cosmos. In reality, however, he is under the ultimate control of God, and is only allowed latitude within certain limits. We often wonder at Satan’s ability to attack the saint, but remember that is for a very limited time and a limited access. He cannot penetrate our spirits, where Christ reigns supreme. Even David, the pre-Christian prophet of the New Testament reign of the Holy Spirit, perceived that, “*My flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever*” (Psalm 73:26). The believers who seek ultimate satisfaction in this life—healing and prosperity—have missed this point. Unfortunately, many Christians, goaded by glorious testimonies of earthly benefits, feel abandoned when they do not seem to participate in these fleshly blessings. Paul saw himself as one whose earthly sojourn was “miserable.” “*If in this life, only we have hope in Christ, we’re of all men most miserable*” (I Corinthians 15:19). He did not see his own life as a glorious triumph over fleshly adversities. On the other hand, he saw his triumph in Christ to be complete—“*Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savor of His knowledge by us, in every place*” (II Corinthians 2:14). His triumph was in the spirit realm, which was never vulnerable to the machinations of Satan.

So the triumph of God over His enemies is ultimate. Satan may seem to be unfettered now, but his time is limited, as well as his power. God only allows him to do what, in His own purposes,

may be acceptable. He does not engineer all the circumstances of our lives, but does allow Satan a certain access in the flesh, for reasons quite beyond our own human perspective.

In His complete triumph over Satan in the realm of the Spirit, He is able to offer unlimited expressions of His energy and power to those who have become part of His Kingdom, through the interaction with His Holy Spirit. To those who have been the newborn, or revitalized, by the power and presence of His Holy Spirit, we have been lifted out of the realm of the flesh and delivered, in spirit, from the earthly cocoon. And are now citizens of the Kingdom of God; invulnerable to Satan and his earthly controls.

Christ thus supplies, in addition to His gift of life in the Spirit, capacities for coping with the needs of believers upon the earth. We as members of His Kingdom are immersed in the flow of His benevolence, which provides us with all of the energies necessary in coping with this world.

He who ascended, what is it except that He also descended... In the recovery of His creatures, God extended Himself in the person of Christ to reveal to all who are prisoners of the fleshly mind, the realities of God. In this, He became the Living Revelation.

As such, then, He took upon Him an earthly form—Jesus—and thus became a participant in the “lower” region of the earth. This is not a reference to “Hades” or “the underworld,” but rather, to the earthly realm, *per se*, where He experienced all the fetters and frustrations and follies of the flesh. And through His personal sacrifice, led all who would follow Him into the glory

of the kingdom of God—the realm of the Spirit.

He that descended, is Himself also the One ascended far above all the heavens... Above the heavens? How can this be? Are not the heavens the highest of the universe? The expression “above the heavens” is akin to the earlier expression in Ephesians—the “supra-heavenlies”—the ἐπουράνιος (*epouranios*)—which has not, to do with

the special quality of the heavens, but rather, with the spiritual quality which occupies the realm beyond the heavens—the realm of the Spirit.

In order that He may fulfill all things... God’s ultimate fulfillment of all of His purposes involve, not the material realm, but the realm of His limitless energy and power and glory. That is the realm that we shall occupy forever.

Ephesians 4:11-13

TRANSLATION

And He Himself gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some shepherds and teachers, for the restoring of the saints unto a work of service, unto a building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain unto the oneness of faith, and of a full knowledge of the Son of God, unto a consummated man, unto a measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

COMMENTARY

The Process of the Building of the Body

The most significant fact of the universe is that God made beings to inherit it, who have the capacity to interact with Him and to possess something of His nature. Whereas this capacity was limited by “the Fall,” it has been restored through the coming of the Spirit of Christ. The greatest gift, of course, is the coming of the Holy Spirit to dwell within us, but in addition to that, there is the myriad of gifts that enable humans to carry out God’s glorious purpose for His people—His Body. These gifts are applicable to the process of the building up of the body of Christ on earth. Whereas the gifts Paul mentions here are really persons—leadership—he suggests here and elsewhere, that there are a great many gifts given to the members of the body individually, which enable them to participate in the building up of this body, which He refers to as “the Holy Temple.”

There is some question as to just exactly how these gifts are expressed today, but it is certain that God has given to us

everything needed to fulfill His purposes and desires for us on the earth.

Some apostles, some prophets... The application of these gifts in the modern era, has given rise to considerable debate. Are there really any apostles around today in the capacity of Paul or the original twelve? Basically, an apostle was one with a very special mission, having to do primarily with the original development of the fledgling body of believers. One thing was certain—they had a very special calling. Today, the idea of a very special calling is far too easily assumed. Countless numbers of individuals have laid claim to this title over the centuries, but it has often been self-imposed by egoistic individuals, who have had their own special kind of ambitions and aspirations. The encouragement on the part of leadership, to “listen for voices from God” has given rise to a tragic string of uncontrolled visionaries and neurotics, who have been irresponsible in their handling of the sheep. Else they would not have assumed

such a careless attitude—insensitive to others and neurotically obsessed with self-importance. For such ones, the all-important issue is their own acceptance by God, rather than their place of responsibility for the people. When God suggested to Moses that he abandon the people and become the basis of a new nation, he rejected this suggestion and cast his lot with the people—“Unless you go with the people, I’m not going” The self-oriented leader would rather jump at the chance to be special with God and ignore the people.

The prophet of the early church was not so much a predictor, as an edifier. Thus, Paul says he would rather speak five words in a “prophecy” than five thousand words in a tongue. Prophecy was not fundamentally a “foretelling,” but a “forth-telling.” It was a communication from God to the people through an agent, in a day when there was no written revelation which explored the new relationship—a relationship which was evolving, not out of the Law, *per se*, but a “new birth.” It was a whole new concept, and needed some very special touch with God to validate it to the people. This, of course, was the fundamental reason behind the speaking in tongues. The message of Christ was, of course, a whole new concept, and really was quite out of keeping with the centuries of Jewish tradition. How would the Jews know that this was from God? The validation came in the message given by God through the leaders, in such a way that the people were convinced by God of its validity. In such communication there needs to be a double miracle—the miracle of the revelation and the miracle of the acceptance of that revelation as truly from God. Today we have a written revelation. It is imperative for the leaders first to master that revelation, before assuming that God is going to give them

some private word. So the prophet today is really one who edifies the Body with the understanding of truth, and not someone who has a “miraculous” revelation from God. In such presumed revelation, there is no way for the people to actually guarantee that such a revelation is truly from God.

When one prefaces one’s statement with the claim that, “God has told me” or “God says to you,” it is an indicator that the prophecy is not truly valid. It is certainly presumptuous for one to assume that God has indeed given one a personal revelation. If, however, one wants to “share an idea with the people” in an effort to bring comfort or help, that word might indeed be something that they have the liberty to say to the people.

Shepherds and teachers... The translation—“pastor”—is misleading. The modern pastor has quite a different role than the simple shepherd of the early church, and comports more with the modern view. The word “church” does not properly translate *ecclesia*. “Church” comes from the word—*κυριακε* (*kuriake*)—which merely meant “something that belonged to the Lord” (as for example, the Lord’s Table). It was adopted in later centuries and covers a very wide variety of functions which would belong to any membership group. That is why it can be used to designate such Christless societies as “Scientology,” or “Religious Science.”

The word *ecclesia*, which means “the called out ones,” can only properly be applied to those who are the members of the Body of Christ. Because of the modern usage of the word “church,” its functions are unclear and confusing, since they have no guidelines in Scripture. It can be and do whatever its membership decides. The common application, is to a group

with a common purpose, especially religious, and to its building and facilities. In this respect, the pastor becomes something of the administrative head, or chief executive officer, with responsibilities for expanding the membership and presenting religious lectures. Whether or not the lectures result in nourishment is secondary, as long as they serve to regulate and motivate the members. On the basis of the modern concept of the church, it becomes essential that a pastor be selected who has also administrative, promotional, and fund raising abilities.

For the restoring of the saints... The word “perfecting” (AV) is not true to *καταρτιζω* (*katartidzo*). Remember that in the Greek text there are two words that are often translated “perfect.” Neither of them has to do with “perfection” as we perceive it. *Τελεω* (*teleo*)—has to do with fulfillment or completeness—“*Be ye fulfilled, as your Father in heaven is fulfilled.*” The other has to do with “mending” or “restoring.” It was used of the disciples in Mark 1:19, who were said to be “mending their nets.” It was also used in Hebrews 13:20, 21, “*The God of peace...restore you [not perfect you] in every good thing to do His will.*” Here, the “gifts” are given to the body to restore them to God’s original purpose.

For the work of service... The translation “ministry” has obscured the real force of the word *διακονος* (*diakonos*). We have taken our word “deacon” from the original Greek, but our modern concept of the deacon gives it an official status, and removes it from the deeper implications of the service rendered by the individual believer.

For the edifying of the Body... Herein lies the true service—to enrich the lives of believers and establish them in their

relatedness to Christ. In this respect, the simplest believer can contribute to the “body” in ways not altogether realized as a “gift” from the Lord. Herein is the force of the “cup of cold water.” Any touch with the people of God by one of the members of the body might be of great importance to that one. Such a contribution does not necessarily have to come from a “leader;” God can use anyone to convey His blessings to His people. One must be careful, however, in not going beyond one’s capacity. Paul makes a point of this in Romans 12:3. It is important to function “*as God has dealt to everyone a measure of faith.*” The effort of believers to assume a position of authority without the proper anointing and appointing, has brought about confusion and grief to other members of the body. It is very risky to say to someone—“I think you ought to do this,” or “I think you ought to do that.” To take responsibility for another’s decisions, which may be of negative effect, is very perilous indeed. However, we are often used by God at the times we least expect that we are being used.

Until we all come in the oneness of the faith and of full knowledge... And what is this “point of arrival?” Is that something for this present odyssey on the earth? There are several cases that indicate otherwise—that we are dealing here with the ultimate fulfillment of The Bode. The expression “*the full knowledge of the Son of God*” does not seem to suggest the present “*knowing in part.*”

A measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ does not seem to comport with our present state. “*That we should be no longer babes*” fits rather with Paul’s assumption in I Corinthians 13; that as long as we are on the earth we all understand and think as children,

but after our glorification we shall know as we are known.

Unto a consummated person... Once again, we meet the word “perfect” as an unsound translation. It is the word—*τελεος* (*teleos*)—and has to do with completeness or consummation. That is the word used in Matthew 5:48, where we are told that we must “*be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect.*” When we use the word “consummated” or “fulfilled,” the passage makes more

sense. All of God’s children on the earth will ultimately come to fulfillment—to all that God intended them to be.

Unto a measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ... We can never reach the ultimate stature of Christ, but we can be “*partakers of the divine nature,*” as Peter suggests in his first epistle. Someday, we will come into all the fullness that God has intended for His earthly family.

Ephesians 4:14-16

TRANSLATION

That we may be no longer infants, tossed about like the waves and carried about with every wind of teaching, in the artifice of men, in craftiness with the wiles of delusion; that speaking the truth in love, we may grow in Him in all things, who is the Head—Christ—from whom all the body fitted together and knit together through that which every joint supplies, according to the energy in the measure of the portion of each one, accomplishes the growth of the body unto a building of itself in love.

COMMENTARY

The Fitting and Knitting of the Body of Christ

We are all children in the “cosmic sandbox.” The sooner we understand this, the sooner we will face life realistically. And the sooner we will quit judging our fellow believers. And in a way, as Paul himself says, “the sooner we will quit judging ourselves.” We are as biased in our judgment about ourselves as we are in our judgment of others. Inevitably, we have a child’s view of things. The wisest of earth’s philosophers are still fools as compared to God. This is the point Paul makes to the Corinthians (I Corinthians 1).

Children invariably live for the moment—they don’t think ahead. From the squealing baby in the crib to the petulant teenager and the pig-headed adult, humans invariably make faulty assessments of life. There is a very sound psychological and physiological reason for this. Contrary to the opinion of many, we are not born with *tabula rasa* (clean sheet) on our cortex. The brain has already been interlaced with

many traits or characters that are genetic. In a way “the dice are loaded.” And then, from birth on (or even prenatal) every input of data—experience, knowledge, environment—multiplies the intricate patterns that are being developed. Thus, when we attempt to make an evaluation or analysis, we are confronted with a myriad of data that inevitably affect the evaluation. Thus, as Paul says that we, like children, understand and think and speak as children because our vision is inescapably impaired. According to Paul, this condition will exist as long as we are on the earth. It will only change when we are face to face with Christ. Only then, do we truly become adults, as we were intended to be.

Tossed by the waves, and carried about by every wind of teaching... But are Christians today in such a state? Look around you. The body of Christ is shattered in millions of pieces. Ignorance in the leadership is rampant. Claims to

special revelation and special anointing have caused Christians to run hither and thither following after this new thought and that. Two thousand years after Paul wrote these words, the state of the church is still very much like the waves of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed. But what will be the end of the body of believers? That is what Paul deals with, here. The grace of Christ, and His grace alone, holds the church steadfast in the midst of this upheaval. The eternal spirit within us preserves us unto the coming of the Lord. As foolish and faulty as the general tenor of teaching may be. God does preserve His people and hold them steadfast. It is the brain that is, thus, inadequate and not the spirit. And thus, the words of Paul ring out—*“Unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory, with exceeding joy...”* (Jude 24).

Even in the matter of sin and faulty behavior, God preserves the Spirit. The case of the incestuous son is instructive. In I Corinthians 5, Paul deals with the case of a young man and his father’s wife. Paul abhors both the sin and the callous attitude toward it. But then, he says that he must deliver the young man to Satan *“For the destruction of his body, that his spirit may be saved.”* Many Christians are paying a heavy price for misdeeds and sins in the flesh, but the promise of Christ is that He is able to preserve us *blameless* at His coming. Remember, He said “blameless,” but not “faultless.” Many in the leadership of the church who have been grossly misrepresenting the truth, will have to face the consequences of their failure, and yet, they will be saved “as by fire,” with all of their works burned up.

And so, the river of God’s grace flows over the rocky and rugged surface of the church’s earthly odyssey, but He will

bring them through, according to His promise. Those who have misled the believers are branded as deceivers with crafty methods, manipulating the sheep for selfish purposes. Such prodigious abuse is rampant in the church today. As with Jesus’ words in the parable of the tares, we will have to await the coming of Christ for the sorting out of the “wheat from the weeds.”

Maintaining the truth in love... The Greek word—*αληθεια (aletheia)*—means “that which is genuine or real.” When Jesus said, *“I am the truth,”* He was, in effect saying, “I am the essence of reality—of all that is genuine.” When we possess Christ, we possess the essence of reality. In a certain sense, truth is the verbalization of reality. But truth is not so much spoken as it is experienced. When we possess Christ, our spirits experience reality though our human words may not always be able to express it correctly. In another sense of the word, humans do not have “absolute truth”—only God has that. We humans have only functional truth. That is to say, in the matter of electricity, for example, we may know enough to use electricity and work with it, but only God has the absolute truth about electro-magnetism. So, maintaining or experiencing truths is possible only in the experience of Christ. As Christ lives in our spirits, we have truth. Thus, we maintain reality, or live out reality, even if we cannot always articulate it.

Maintaining that reality in love does not mean that one will always feel affectionate, or speak in loving terms. Love must be understood in its *agape* force. That is, we are dealing here with a “caring consciousness,” and not with human feelings of affection. The misunderstanding of the word “love” can keep believers on a roller coaster all of

their lives. As we have said many times, human emotions are totally unreliable. If the measure of our faith is based upon the state of our human emotions, we are unstable indeed. But the *agape* love of the Bible is God-oriented, rather than human-oriented. Such love within us is part of the presence of Christ within us. It is a process of the Spirit, and not the flesh. It is there because Christ is there and we partake of His divine nature. But if that is true, why are we not more loving? It is imperative here that we recognize the difference between the flesh and the spirit. The love of Christ in our spirit reaches out to others in “caring consciousness” but does not always find expression in pure actions. If it were otherwise—if believers always acted in love, the believers would all be flawless. But, of course, they are not! The evidence that the love of Christ is in our spirits is that we care about our actions toward one another, even knowing that we fail in them. The issue of love is one of the most prominent considerations in the dialogue of believers. Believers are usually concerned over lack of love. We ought to act graciously with others; we ought to be kind and tenderhearted and forgiving, as Paul suggests, but we are not always. It is a matter of concern. Nevertheless, we can take comfort in the fact that the caring love of Christ is in our spirits in spite of our human reactions. The lack of love in the human sense is universal. But it must be noted, that efforts to motivate love in unbelievers is totally misplaced. On the one hand, the whole idea of love is misunderstood, and what passes for love is vacillating sentimentality. Such love is performance-oriented and comes and goes with the wind. On the other hand, it is impossible for humans—apart from the Spirit—to experience love in the truth, or reality, of Christ. So we are not talking here in this passage, about speaking in a loving matter. We are talking about the

experience of reality in the context of God’s love and a “caring consciousness.”

That we may grow in Him in all things... Picking up a grammatical construction from verse 14, the Greek verb form here, is not *hortatory*—“let us,” but rather *complimentary*—“that we may” If we possess the Spirit of Christ, growth is inevitable. Perhaps it may be limited by human failure, but it is, nevertheless, assured inasmuch as we are possessors of the new life in Christ; nor is it possible for one to judge one’s own growth, much less another’s. What is growth? How do we measure it? In the physiological sense, growth can never really be measured by size—especially given various hormonal considerations (as, for example, in dwarfs or giants). And, of course, we are all familiar with growth unobserved by those that are closest to it. The presence of the Spirit of Christ within us assures us of life, and therefore, a measured amount of growth—a growth that is real in spite of what others may think, or even we ourselves. We cannot trust ourselves, but we can trust the power of the Spirit of God within us. As Paul says to the Philippians—“*Being confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ*” (Philippians 1:6).

Who is the Head—Christ... If Christ is the Head, should He not be directing each of the members of the body? Instead, the leadership tends to feel that they have the right to direct the members of the body. It is not, in that case, a question of what does Christ want you to do, but what do we want you to do to carry on the program of the church. Thus, the members of the body are directed by the leadership, not in terms of their gift, but in terms of their obligation to the program as members of the “club.” But how can Christ direct so

many on a personal basis? How does the brain direct the various members of its body? The brain is in touch with trillions of neurons instantaneously. When a finger is pricked, for example, the brain recognizes instantly that tiny point on the skin. And so Christ is in instant touch with the members of His body. But how do I know it is Christ directing me? If Christ is directing you, you will be compelled by it and you will be comfortable with it. The church attempts to direct through motivational techniques and various kinds of leverage, such as guilt and obligation. When Christ directs you, you will do it freely and you will have the capacity to do it. Christ provides the compelling and the capacity. When Christ is directing, there will be no sense of obligation or guilt or reward. There are no “because” in our service to Christ. We do not serve Him because we love Him; or because we love people; or because we are obligated; or because we are seeking a reward. None of these things will matter. The Spirit of Christ will simply touch us and we will do

what He wants. If He wants something from us, He will see that we know it. Christ is the Head of the body.

Fitted together and knit together... “Fitted” has to do with a building; “knit” has to do with the cells of the body. Fitting is a work of the craftsman; knitting is a work of the creator. Christ is both. Fitting requires a high degree of skill; knitting requires the power of life. Through the work of Christ—Master Builder and Life Giver—the body *does* grow (not should grow) unto a “building in love.”

The accomplishment of this process is according to the measure of energy imparted to each one through the Spirit of Christ. The building, like the body, is evolved by Christ and belongs to Christ and finds its ultimate purpose in Christ. The feverish efforts of human craftsman are totally inadequate for a divine structure.

Ephesians 4:17-24

TRANSLATION

This I say then, and give testimony in the Lord, that you no longer walk even as also the Gentiles [nations] are walking in the futility of their mind; their understanding being darkened, alienated from the life of God on account of the ignorance which is in them, on account of the hardness of their hearts; which ones having become insensitive, have delivered themselves to licentious behavior unto a working of all uncleanness in selfish greed. But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and been taught in Him even as the reality is in Jesus, that you lay aside as far as your former manner of life is concerned, the old man which is corrupt in terms of the desires of deception, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which according to God has been created in righteousness [rightness] and the bounty of reality.

COMMENTARY

The Emptiness and Deceptiveness of Godless Behavior

Ephesus was a commercial and cultural crossroads on the western edge of the Eastern world. When Paul spoke of Asia, he was referring to what we know today as Asia Minor, which now comprises Turkey. At the time of Paul, Ephesus was a port city on the Aegean Sea. At the present time, the location of the ruins of Ephesus is many miles from the sea, the harbor having been completely filled up with silt. The remnants of its former magnificence are clearly evident in its marble paved boulevards and fluted columns and arcades of mosaic tile. There, the caravan trails met from the East and the North and the South while ships came from western seas. Like most port cities, it was the crossroads of culture. There, the religions and

philosophies of the world mingled and left their mark. The primary religion of the city was devotion to the goddess Diana (or Artemis), for whom they erected a splendid temple at the northern edge of the city.

In addition to the Gentile nations, the Jews were there, having been dispersed from the welcome. The word—*εθνη* (*ethne*)—was the Greek counterpart of the Hebrew *Goyim*. It referred to all who were non-Jews. In the Old Testament, it was synonymous with “godless” or “pagan” There was a large community of Christians as well as of Jews. This has a good deal of bearing on the content of the book of Ephesians and, in a particular sense, in the book of Revelation, which is

strongly focused on the Jews and the Middle East. In fact, much of the book focuses on events that take place *after* the believers are in heaven.

Some epistles were written particularly to the “Diaspora,” or the Jews of the Dispersion—Hebrews, James, I Peter and II Peter. These, like all of the books of the Bible, have some universal applications and some specific applications. It is well to keep this in mind, especially in view of cultural changes that have taken place in the world since the Bible was written. That is not to take away anything from the principles, but rather, from the applications of the principles. Furthermore, it is well to recognize that, in principle, the New Testament speaks to the believers as having been liberated from the Law and brought under the grace of Christ. The essential point of this is not that behavior does not matter, but rather, that it is not the basis of salvation. Thus, we are members of the family of Christ and embraced by Him as His children, who, though sometimes out of order are not, *de facto*, “thrown out of the house.” There are a great many guideposts in the New Testament that are most important, if not essential, to a life of peace and harmony, but do not cause Christ to turn away from us. This is not to take away from the importance of these principles, but rather, to put them in the New Testament perspective. In the Old Testament, failure to follow the Law could bring penalties as severe as death.

No longer walk as the Gentiles walk...

It is obvious here, that Paul is making a distinction between believers and nonbelievers in his reference to the Gentiles, or the nations. Many of the believers were behaving in the same manner as the nonbelievers, in some respects, but were, nevertheless, not classified with them. The characteristics

of the behavior of the nonbelievers could hardly be true of believers, and yet, Paul says only, “Don’t be like them.” The believers, even when misbehaving, are hardly “alienated from the life of God.” Similarly, being “delivered up unto the practicing of all uncleanness and greed” is different than the careless and sometimes greedy actions of the believers. This is not to soften the seriousness of behavior patterns in the believers, but rather, to refrain from disowning them from the family of Christ.

As the truth [reality] is in Jesus. The word “truth” has been used very carelessly. It has often been applied to the teachings of a given sect or denomination—“We have the truth.” The Greek word used here is “reality.” There is a vast difference between reality and truth. Truth is the verbalizing of reality and depends, for its accuracy, on the capacity of the one who is thus defining reality. Only God has absolute truth. We humans can only exercise relative truth. That is to say, that the perfect articulation of reality is beyond human capacity. The best we humans can do is to offer a certain degree of accuracy in the use of words, based upon careful scholarship. The idea that the Holy Spirit will give us the words in spite of our own lack of scholarship, has led to a great deal of confusion and tragedy in the church. The claims to direct revelations from the Holy Spirit have been legion throughout the church, as have been the misguided commitment to unsound teachings, such as the identifying of the time of the return of Christ. The tragedy is not so much the consequences for the individual leader, but for the large number of followers who are depending on the leader for responsible guidance. If one is going to lead the people of God, one ought to be adequately equipped to do so. The word “truth” is crucial here. We must be careful

how we use it. Remember that the English word “truth” is applied to the process of articulating reality. The reality of Christ, within us, is absolute. The capacity to define and describe that presence, is relative.

[That] you put off...the old man...and put on the new man... The most fundamental question here is this—Is Paul addressing believers or unbelievers? The next question is—“If he is addressing believers, what, in his mind, is their condition? If unbelievers, what are they doing in a letter to believers? We must examine the text very carefully and avoid the temptation to use it as leverage to “keep the believers in line.”

To examine the text we must look at some very important definitions. First of all, to whom does the expression “Gentiles” refer? The Greek word is—*εθνη* (*ethne*). It is actually the New Testament counterpart of *Goyim*, which referred to everyone who was not a Jew. In that context it was assumed that all non-Jews were pagans. It was not necessarily true that there were no believers in God outside the Jews, but that was the common usage of the term. The Greek word was far broader in application, especially outside the New Testament. But Paul apparently reverts to the Old Testament usage and is talking about all who were unbelievers. Here, it is important to understand that a great many of those whom Paul was addressing in Ephesus were, as a matter of fact, part of the Diaspora—the Jews who had been exiled from Rome. Secondly, we must determine what is meant by “the old man” and “the new man.” We must also determine how these terms can be applied to believers. First of all, Paul’s description of the *εθνη* (*ethne*) could not possibly apply to believers, since they are described as being alienated from the life

of God. He concludes the description by saying to the believers, “but you have not so learned Christ.” Furthermore, there would be no point in telling unbelievers to put off the old man and put on the new. What he is saying to the believers is that they were behaving like the unbelievers, in spite of the fact that they had received the life of Christ within them. Of course, the life of Christ is given to our spirits in the new birth experience, and while it inevitably has certain effects on the natural personality, there are no guarantees. The believers still have to struggle with the flesh, as Paul himself makes abundantly clear. It is in this area of the natural propensities of the flesh that Paul discusses the problems of the “old man.”

In his letter to the Colossians, Paul makes a very definitive statement relative to the “old man” “*Now you also, put off all these things—anger, wrath, unsound behavior, blasphemy, shameful communication out of your mouths. Lie not one to another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man which is renewed in knowledge according to the image of the One who created him...*” (Colossians 3:8-10). It is obvious here, that Paul sees unsound behavior patterns in the believers—in spite of their having put off the old man with his deeds. The assumption is that, if one has been truly touched by the Holy Spirit, one will automatically undergo a change of behavior patterns. Some things do seem to change; many things do not. Apparently, in Paul’s view, these behavior patterns do not constitute a test of whether or not one is in Christ or, for that matter, whether or not one has been filled with the Spirit. In connection with these admonitions, both in Colossians and in Ephesians, Paul does not classify the struggling believers in terms of

“backsliding.” The word is itself of human origin. The Bible does not use the expression anywhere. In fact, Paul himself, by his own admission, was often struggling with the flesh. What his problems were he never indicates, but does admit to a continual struggle: *“Without were fightings within were fears”* (II Corinthians 7:5). In the Colossians passage, Paul regards the believers as having already put off the old man and put on the new. It then becomes a matter of watching one’s conduct in view of the position one occupies with Christ.

Paul does not deny the struggle, nor does he give the believers license to be careless. In the discussion of these issues throughout the New Testament, the crucial point is that, whereas in the Old Testament the keeping of the Law was the basis of redemption; in the New Testament, salvation has been purchased by Christ, and conduct becomes a matter of propriety rather than a price of redemption. The believer is not disowned from the family, but must face the consequences of one’s choices. Personality has a great deal to do with one’s conduct. Whether that personality has been based upon genetic factors or acquired habits and attitudes, behavior patterns are a fact of life with which we all must contend. It is patently true that the struggle varies considerably from person to person. Things that may be a continual problem to some people are readily handled by others. This does not excuse behavior, but only explains it. The consolation is that the Bible recognizes weakness in the individual and promises the strength of Christ in the midst of it. Such understanding is also the basis for a proper relationship between believers, taking into account the issue of weaknesses: *“We that are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of the weak and not to please ourselves”* (Romans 15: 1).

In what way then does God help us? What does it mean to put on the new man? When we are reborn, or when the Holy Spirit comes into our spirits, we undergo a change of attitude. We have a new relationship to God and a new attitude toward Him. We also have a new attitude toward ourselves and toward others. We have a new attitude toward the world and the meaning of life. The new relationship to God gives us the privilege of asking for His strength in living our lives in the world. Our own weakness puts us in a position of making it necessary to stay close to Christ. The new perspective we have on life and the world gives us the motivation to live appropriately and to engage in the struggle. The Spirit of Christ within us reaches out to others through us. It is common for believers to have an attitude of caring toward others. The problems usually come from fleshly reactions. We do not always like the people we care about. Often their own attitude and conduct toward us fosters the dislike. The Bible never says that we have to like people. It does say that we care about them. The Spirit within us causes us to pray for people that we do not care to be involved with personally.

Having been created in rightness and benevolence of reality... The word “holiness” (as in the A V) is not the same as “sanctifying.” It is rather, akin to the word for “mercies.” It is the New Testament counterpart of the Old Testament Hebrew word *Chesed*, which meant “mercies,” as extended to others. It is used by Isaiah to refer to the mercies extended by God to David—*“I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David”* (Isaiah 55:3). When we have come to Christ, our attitude has been changed toward God and others. We have come to a new sense of what is real. Jesus said, *“You shall*

know the truth [reality] and reality shall make you free” (John 8:32). The freedom that we experience in Christ gives us the

divine perspective on life, including the meaning of mercy.

Ephesians 4:25-32

TRANSLATION

Therefore, laying aside falsehood, let each one speak truth with his neighbor, because we are members of one another. Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down upon your wrath, neither give place to the devil. He who is stealing let him no longer steal; but rather let him labor, working with his hands that which is good in order that he may have something to share with the one who has need. Do not let any foul word go out of your mouth; but if there is any good word to the use of edifying, in order that it may give grace to the hearers. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed until the day of redemption. Let every bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and blasphemy be taken from you, along with all unsoundness. Be gracious unto one another; compassionate, forgiving yourselves, even as also God in Christ has forgiven you.

COMMENTARY

Further Concerns Regarding Appropriate Behavior

To put this passage in proper perspective, it is essential to understand that these are very important considerations, but not in the nature of distinguishing between acceptable and unacceptable believers. James said, in regard to the keeping of the law, that to be guilty of one point is to be guilty of the whole law (James 2:10). The New Testament standard is that good behavior is important, but not the basis of salvation. Whatever may be the weaknesses of the flesh—and Paul makes a strong point of this—one may work with them in conjunction with the Spirit of Christ. Salvation does not bring a complete recovery of all human weakness, but puts one in a position to handle weakness within the context of a familial

relationship. Parents work with their young people in terms of weaknesses, but do not throw them out of the family (normally).

We were born into the world with basic human weaknesses, which are the result of the Fall. We also have a whole slate of traits which are genetically oriented. This combination of things makes it very difficult for human beings to perform adequately. It is unrealistic to assume that we will get a handle on these traits prior to adulthood, if then. Many decisions are made during the early years which will affect us all of our lives. And yet, they must be made with a very limited self-knowledge. In a sound family relationship, these problems are

understood, and we try to give such help as will be accepted. By the same token, we are members of the family of Christ and we can depend on Him to be understanding about the faulty nature of human personality traits. David, the psalmist (who ought to know), describes the attitude of God toward His people—*“Like as a father pitieth [has mercy on] His children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him. For He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust”* (Psalm 103:13, 14). We must understand that Christ is not the “headmaster of an orphanage,” but the Father of His children. He wants us to succeed with our lives and is anxious to help us. The instructions He gives through His apostles are not intended as tests of salvation or sanctification, but rather, guideposts in a hostile world where we have limited equipment.

Putting away falsehood... Given the nature of the word—*ἀληθεια (aletheia)*—this could almost be translated—“Be real with one another because we are members of the same family.”

Be angry and yet sin not... Anger is a common part of human emotions, but should stop short of wronging others, in turn. Jesus was angry with the Pharisees, even to the extent of a violent reaction, but He did not commit any sin. Anger has a way of festering, and Paul suggests letting go of it before it does.

Let the one who steals, no longer steal... It is obvious here, that Paul was regarding the indolent practices of the believers as a form of stealing. Some had given up their work because they expected the immediate return of Christ. He did not want any “free-loaders.”

Let not any foul words go out of your mouths... Paul does not go into any

specifics here, but every generation in every culture has its polluted language forms. He is not talking here about slang expressions, which may be somewhat uncouth, but language admittedly filthy or gross. Generally speaking, people know when they are engaging in such, but one must guard against getting into such a habit as to become insensitive to it.

Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God...

The nature of the emotions which might be ascribed to the Holy Spirit, is uncertain; however, the Greek word here means to “vex” or “distress.” What is certain, is that the actions of believers are not always acceptable to Him. One can usually sense when this is so. On the other hand, such actions do not “break the seal” which secures our salvation. There are those in some quarters that feel that our salvation is a very fragile thing, which can be disrupted by human failure. This attitude is not in keeping with such a text as this one, as well as many others throughout the New Testament.

Let them be taken away from you...

Paul gives a catalogue of human practices and attitudes that he finds among the believers, and warns against them. Apparently, he is not saying that they will reflect a lack of salvation, but rather, that they will bring one to grief. Each of the items represents a careless or dangerous emotional level which should be brought under control. It is interesting to note that the word—*κακια (kakia)*—is a word which Paul uses concerning himself in Romans 7. It means “unsound behavior,” without specifying the nature of it. It was part of Paul’s struggle with his own personality. He did not find it acceptable with himself any more than with other believers. Blasphemy was a very serious offense, as expressed by Jesus, but apparently had a more moderate meaning in the context of

believers. Paul suggests discipline for some “that they may learn not to blaspheme” (I Timothy 1:20). Such blasphemy was apparently forgivable.

Gracious, compassionate, forgiving...

These were the characteristics Paul urged upon the believers in contrast to the human frailties. Apparently such traits did not come automatically with salvation, or the filling of the Spirit, but rather were to be cultivated. Χρηστοί (*chrestoi*)—means “agreeable” or “obliging.” It has to do with the expression of kindness. Ευσπλαγγνοί (*eusplangchnoi*)—has to do with the viscera, which were commonly used to express feelings of compassion. Paul suggests that the believers should “*rejoice with them that rejoice and weep with them that weep*” (Romans 12:15). χαριζομαι (*charidzomai*)—has its roots in the word for “grace”—“a flow of benevolence.” But remember that forgiveness requires both parties—the forgiver and the seeker of forgiveness. Apart from that interaction, one may overlook an offense, but cannot really forgive it without the other party. Jesus forgave the Roman soldiers because they were not involved in the family of God. When there is a genuine seeking of forgiveness, the Holy Spirit will give one

the grace to forgive. (For further discussion, see the author’s pamphlet—*Forgiveness.*)

This is a difficult passage because it is assumed, in the first place, that “putting off the old man” is an exercise that the believers ought to engage in. In Colossians 3, Paul assumes that there are personality problems among believers who are both “dead” and have “*put off the old man*” (Colossians 3:1-10). Apparently “putting on the new man” is what Paul is referring to in II Corinthians 5:17. The word “all” is not in the original text, but merely suggests that when we have come to Christ, we have become new. Our spirits have *been* changed from “mortality” to “immortality” The renewal takes place in our spirits, but does not automatically change our fleshly natures. This is the only practical explanation of the fact that throughout the history of Christendom—both in the New Testament era, as well as the succeeding generations of Christians—personality problems and behavioral problems have been constantly part of the struggle. But let it be well remembered, that the struggle is itself an indication of the presence of Christ within us. Else we would not struggle. And we can expect Christ to help us in the struggle.

Ephesians 5:1-5

TRANSLATION

Be therefore followers of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, even as also Christ loved us, and delivered Himself up on our behalf as an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet savor. But fornication [perversion], and all uncleanness, or greed, let it not be named among you, even as becomes saints; and vileness and impious speech or ribaldry, which are not appropriate, but rather thanksgiving. For be knowers of this, that every fornicator or unclean one or greedy one, which is idolatry, does not have an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Christ has forgiven you.

COMMENTARY

Continued Thoughts On Appropriate Conduct

Paul continues his penetrating examination of matters of conduct that were rampant among the nonbelievers, but unfortunately, being practiced by some of the believers. They were acting like the pagan society, even though they were, in fact, believers. And this is the crucial consideration. Could they still be identified as children of God, even though they were being careless in their behavior patterns? It is easy to forget what is the true nature of the children of God. We are not His children because we are flawless in our actions. The Pharisees were never questioned by Christ as to their meticulous keeping of the Law. In fact, he said that they even tithed the spices for cooking—"mint and anise and cumin." His quarrel with them was that they did not possess the love of God. They kept the letter of the Law very well, but not the spirit of it. The essence of salvation is the new birth—the possessing of the life of

Christ within.

But doesn't the coming of Christ to our spirits change us? Can one be a Christian and still practice some of the things that Paul talks about here?

The answer to that question is apparent from the very text that we are considering. Paul never addressed the immoralities of the pagan society. He simply did not want the believers joining with them in their pagan practices. He encourages them to walk in love, which is not something that he would have urged upon the unbelievers. He does state later on that those whose practices the believers were engaged in, were not themselves going to "have an inheritance in the Kingdom of Christ and of God." We will discuss that in more detail later. The whole issue is that the believers ought, rather, to behave in an appropriate

manner, as becomes those who are the followers of God. The word Paul uses for “followers”—μιμηται (*mimetai*)—is the basis of our word “mimic” or “imitator.” The common Greek usage was more “to resemble” or “use as an example,” than actually to imitate—something not possible for humans to do in the case of God. Jesus’ statement in the Sermon on the Mount, to “*be perfect as your Father which is in heaven is perfect,*” uses a Greek word—τελεο (*teleo*)—which means to be fulfilled or consummated. It does not mean “flawless” (something He certainly would not have urged upon the Pharisees).

Walk in love... It is vital that we understand the meaning of the word “love,” as it is used here. It is the word *agape* and not *phile*. We have examined these words and explained that *agape* has to do with the caring that is born of the Spirit and reaches out to others, apart from emotional involvement. In a sense, it “bypasses” the mental process of the psyche, or soul. *Phile*, on the other hand, does involve the emotions, and is the common word for family or friends. Thus, Christ can urge us to “love our enemies,” even though we do not like them or approve of them. Galatians 5:22 indicates that such love is a fruit of the Spirit. Paul is not telling the Galatians that if they have Christ in them, they should develop these virtues. He is rather, saying that they are resident within our spirits, as the Holy Spirit is resident within. The problem comes in the effort to express these virtues in our human souls. Thus, we care about people that we may not like at all and find ourselves praying for them. This is what Jesus meant when He said to pray for those that “despitefully” use us (Matthew 5:44). And this is the word used for the “love” of Christ. We can love as Christ loved because His Spirit *in* us reaches out to others *through* us. This is

also the word used of Christ’s love for the world. It was not an emotional thing, but a caring thing. People often mistake emotional reactions with the work of the Spirit. The Spirit does not, Himself, endow one with emotional reactions. That is a matter of the personality. People react differently to stimuli. Some are excitable and will react with exuberance to things that are basically human. Others do not react exuberantly in human situations, even where there is great stimulus. Those who feel comfortable in an atmosphere charged with emotional expression, may assume that those who do not so react are not being touched by the Holy Spirit. This is a grave error, and has caused considerable distress among those whose personalities are different. Groups of people that focus on outward expression are not more “spiritual” than groups that don’t. The truth of the matter is that people are attracted to the situations that fit their own personalities. And so it is with *agape* love. Those whose personalities are extroversive are more likely to include warmth of affection with their “caring consciousness,” than those who are more introversive. Salvation does not necessarily change this. Remember that salvation has to do with the coming of life; it does not govern the quality of that life, in the fleshly sense.

The love of Christ is identified with the offering of Himself as a sacrifice. His care for the world brought Him to this. His emotional suffering was great as He faced the prospect of being charged with the sins of the world, though He was innocent and “spotless.” Jesus said that there was no greater love than laying down one’s life for one’s friends (John 15:13). This was a statement about human love (*phile*). Divine love lays down one’s life for one’s enemies. Such love is beyond the capacity of the natural flesh, but is a fruit of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Fornication [sexual perversion]...all foulness or greediness... The word translated fornication—πορνεία (*porneia*)—comes from the word *pornos*, which means “harlot.” The word was always used by the Greeks for sexual perversion or orgiastic behavior. It did not refer to the liaisons of lovers, however indiscreet or unacceptable such activity might be. Paul devoted a special section in his letter to the Corinthians (Ch. 6), on the subject of prostitution. He warned the believers not to make their bodies, which belong to Christ, members of the body of a harlot. Corinth was notorious for its prostitution, and had on the hill behind the city, the temple of Apollo, which was a gathering place for prostitutes. Ephesus was no less such a place. As a port city (see the commentary of chapter 1), seamen were especially welcome in the “sin centers,” and were even directed by arrows imprinted in the sidewalks to the houses of ill fame. This is not to say that extramarital affairs among believers were condoned, but were not necessarily regarded in the same light as the sexual perversion implied in *porneia*.

Akatharsia (ακαθαρσία)—by the same token, was a word that went beyond simple human misbehavior. Purity of thought, word, and deed is, of course, a desirable objective of Christian behavior. This particular usage of the word, however, puts it in the category of things that are characteristic of unbelievers, who will not inherit the kingdom of God. Paul is not saying that these are things that keep unbelievers from inheriting the kingdom of God, but rather, that they are practiced by those who do not inherit the kingdom of God. We have a clue to the usage of this word in the statement of Jesus in regard to the vine and branches of John 15. He uses the antonym of *akatharsia*—*katharos*—in connection

with pruning. In an obvious reference to Israel as the unfruitful vineyard of Isaiah 5, He says that because it did not bear fruit, it will be destroyed. The meaning clearly is a reference to the apostasy of Israel in turning away from God, rather than misbehavior, which had been rather common among His people. On the other hand, there was a remnant that was faithful to God and, therefore, bearing fruit; but needing to be purified, or “pruned,” in terms of the ultimate purpose of God in the coming of the Messiah. Jesus uses the word *katharos* for this process, and says that it had already been done with the disciples. One of their number, Judas, however, had not been so pruned, or purified. Jesus used a similar concept in the earlier “foot washing” incident. The impulsive Peter had declined to have Jesus wash his feet, but Jesus said, “*If I do not wash you, you will have no part with Me.*” Peter immediately responded in his usual brashness, “*Not my feet only, but also my hands and my head.*” Jesus responded that those who had been purified needed only to have their feet washed, because they were already purified. Apparently, the symbolism of the foot-washing was intended to convey that, while the followers of Christ were indeed pure in God’s sight, the “walk” in this life was likely to have its tarnishing effects.

Paul’s usage of *akatharsia* comports with Jesus’ usage of the antonym *katharos*, as recorded in John 13 and 15. The unbelievers would be in the position of the apostate Israel who, unless they would come to Christ, would be gathered up and burned. The believers, who like the disciples had come to Christ, would be in a state of purity before God, as regards their status. However, they had to be warned about impurities that they might pick up in their earthly sojourn. This duality to the usage of the word

akatharsia clarifies the point that Paul could be warning against practices that were characteristic of those who were ultimately slated for destruction and yet, were still members of the body of Christ. It is nowhere indicated that the practices themselves were the things that were keeping the pagans from salvation, but rather, as with Israel, their complete rejection from God.

Greediness. Once again, we are dealing with a characteristic of the pagan world malicious enough to bring down the wrath of God, on those whose lives were immersed in it. They were not only given to the common problem of undue focus on material things, but were involved in extortion—a cynical disregard of the welfare of others in the drive for material gain. It is not uncommon for believers to want material things, even to the point of sacrificing other values. In many ways, that is inappropriate for the children of God and may lead to problems, but it is forgivable and does not bring about a loss of salvation. Again, even though the kind of extortionism indicated by Paul, is reprehensible; yet of itself, does not cause the loss of salvation. As with the children of Israel, God's wrath did not come down upon them for their misdeeds, which were many, but for their rejection of God. They who had been the object of God's tender care and constant provision, not only rejected Him, but turned, instead, to the heinous practices of other gods. Similarly, the wrath of God does not come upon the world for its immoralities which, of course, He does not approve, but rather, for their rejection of Him and their consequent immersion in the processes of Satan.

Nothing that has been said in this discussion, has been intended to minimize the wretchedness of the practices of a godless world, but rather to clarify the

implications of this passage for the believers; to give them hope to believe that, even though they have often been caught in the maelstrom of human failure, they are not, therefore, expelled from the kingdom of God. Paul is warning the believers about their conduct, and showing that they are “playing in the devil's arcade” and likely to suffer for it. On the other hand, the grace of God is limitless, even as illustrated in the life of Israel, which was a constant source of trouble to God.

In the same vein, we must treat another trilogy of words that have to do with human absurdities—vileness, buffoonery, and persiflage (calculated misleading). None of these words have to do with your common “garden variety” of what we consider to be “witty repartee.” “Jesting” is not a good translation for—*ευτραπelia* (*eutrapelia*). In any social gathering of believers there are likely to be jokes and “puns” (a modern usage). That is not what Paul has in mind here. What he does have in mind, is communication that arises out of the reservoir of human perversion, or the misuse of the mind which God has created as a marvelous instrument. On the other hand, as in the case of the previous trilogy, Christians do get involved in the careless use of God's instrument. However it may be defined and described, Paul is referring to human expressions that are part of the godless milieu of the pagan society. He was well familiar with the debaucheries and the revelries of the Greeks and Romans, all of which were the hallmarks of those who had made a mockery of God's original purpose in His creation. This too, the believers were dabbling with, and Paul is giving some strong warning. Like wayward children, they had not denied their heritage, but were treating it with a careless disregard. And yet, they were addressed by Paul, as the “beloved of

God.”

In conclusion, remember that you are the “beloved of God,” and subject to His

forgiving grace. The evidence that He is still with you, in spite of human failure, is the reality that you want Him to be with you.

Ephesians 5:6-14

TRANSLATION

Let no one deceive you with vain [empty] words; for on account of this, the wrath of God comes upon the children of disobedience [unbelief]. Do not, therefore, be fellowpartakers with them. For you were then darkness, but now are you Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light—for the fruit of the Light is in all goodness and righteousness and truth [reality]—proving what is well pleasing to the Lord. And do not fellowship together with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather, expose them; for it is indecent even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret. For all things which are exposed by the light are made manifest, for that which manifests all things is the light. Wherefore he says, “Arise, you who sleep, and rise up from the dead, and Christ shall give you light.”

COMMENTARY

Light Versus Darkness

The entire ancient world—whether Roman or Greek or Egyptian or Asian—was engulfed in darkness. And so, Jesus said to God’s people, the Jews—*“They that sat in darkness have seen a great Light.”* Not everyone saw the light that came with the coming of Jesus, the Messiah. The brilliant array of the angelic choir that lit up the sky around the Judean shepherds, was apparently not seen by Herod and people of Jerusalem, a few miles away. If God’s people were engulfed by the thick darkness of the pagan world, the Light of Christ dispelled it for all who were willing to see. The Magi saw it from afar, and brought their gifts. Herod was totally blind to it, and lashed out in murderous fury at the report of it. Those who think today, that the world is engulfed in darkness, are not

aware of the intensity of the thick darkness that then engulfed the people of God. The afterglow of Christ has touched every corner of the world today. The reality of the matter is that, as John indicated, He was *“the true [real] Light, who lights everyone who comes into the world”* (John 1:9). It is there for everyone who is willing to see it. *“The Light shined in the darkness; and the darkness could not overcome it”* (John 1:5). In World War II blackouts, even a cigarette was not permitted since it could be seen from thousands of feet in the air. The Ephesians, whom Paul addresses here as “the beloved of God,” did have the Light, but were engaging in things that belonged to the children of darkness. They were not hidden from the searchlight of God, and were in danger of God’s displeasure, even

though Paul nowhere indicated that their careless actions would result in their being cast out of the kingdom.

The wrath of God...the children of unbelief. Was the wrath of God indeed being poured out upon misbehaving believers? Were misbehaving believers, in fact, being classified as children of unbelief? The translation—“children of disobedience”—mishandles the Greek word—*απειθειας* (*apeitheias*)—which has to do with the rejection of Christ, rather than disobedience. In Acts 5:32, the same word is used to indicate those who became followers of God, although many translations indicated that the Spirit was given to those who “obey Him.” This is misleading, and gives rise to the idea that one can receive the Holy Spirit only if one is obedient to the requirements of God. Unfortunately, the act of obedience is not possible to those who do not have the Holy Spirit. The problem is cleared up when we realize the true meaning of the word—*πειθω* (*peitho*)—which means “to obey, in the sense of joining with or following.” In the same chapter, the same word is used regarding one Theudas, a false prophet who came to grief, and “*all, as many as followed him, were dispersed and came to nothing*” (Acts 5:36). The same word is used in both passages. So the wrath of God is said, not to come upon careless believers, but upon those who were unbelievers, or not followers of God.

So then, Paul was telling the believers that they were engaging in practices that were characteristic of those who were unbelievers. The wrath of God came upon them, not because of their bad behavior, but because they were unbelievers. Paul never spoke out against the practices of the pagan world, because he was well aware that attacking their immorality would not bring about their salvation. He addressed the believers as “children of

Light.” And it was important to him that as children of Light they should be careful about their conduct.

The fruit of the Light is in all goodness and righteousness and truth... All of these qualities are present in the spirit, as Christ is present in the spirit, for He is our “goodness and righteousness and truth [reality].” Paul presses the point in Philippians 3, that whereas he once possessed these qualities as a Pharisee, now he depended rather on the righteousness of Christ through the faith of God. However, Paul was very careful to point out that while he possessed the righteousness of Christ, he yet had his struggles in the flesh and regarded his flesh as “a body of death.” (Romans 7:24); nor did he depend on his flesh in any way, as he also points out in Philippians 3. And again, we confront the word “reality.” To say that Christ is our TRUTH, opens the whole issue of how we are using the word “truth.”

It is very common to hear the expression—“The Lord told me what this means.” The problem is; how do we know for sure what the Lord told someone? It is especially a problem when He seems to tell different things to different people. But if we say Christ is our REALITY, then we are not dependent upon human usages or misusages. Whatever people may say about Christ, or teach about Christ, there is a bedrock of reality within us that is not affected by human perceptions of that reality.

Approving what is acceptable to the Lord... The presence of the Holy Spirit within us gives us a certain sense of what is acceptable to Christ, in regard to the matters Paul has been discussing. The Greek word does not mean “to prove,” but “to approve.”

The unfruitful works of darkness...The fruit of darkness is death. So it was in the Garden of Eden, where God warned against partaking of the fruit of the certain tree—"the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." It is somewhat uncertain as to the ultimate impact of such a phrase. Knowledge is not, of course, evil in itself. It would obviously have to do with the usage of it. There is a clue in Ezekiel, where rulers in the pagan world were identified as "trees of Eden" (Ezekiel 28:13 and 31:18). Since the chronology is uncertain, perhaps in the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil," we are dealing with godless civilizations, extant at that time. We must remember that Cain went off to the land of Nod when he was judged by God in the death of Abel. So Adam and Eve were not necessarily involved in a simple "piece of fruit." Involvement with Satan's world of darkness was an inevitable "death knell," where obedience was a mandatory condition of the paradise of God. And so it was throughout the Old Testament, where keeping the Law was the basis of salvation. After the centuries of Israel's failure to satisfy the legal requirements, it became evident that such a condition was not possible apart from divine intervention. Thus it was that Christ came to be the true "Light of the world," and to provide that Light through His Spirit in the spirits everyone who would receive it. The fruit of that Light is then, the provision of the righteousness of Christ as the condition of salvation. Unfortunately, while guaranteeing salvation, the Light of Christ within does not guarantee perfection in the human flesh. And thus it is, that Paul must warn the Ephesians that while they may possess the Light of Christ within, it was unacceptable for them to be participating in the practices of those who walk in darkness.

But rather, expose them. For believers to attempt to reprove the immoralities of the godless, is both ludicrous and futile. The whole message of the New Testament is that, apart from Christ, all human moralities are of no avail. And if one thinks thereby, to improve the milieu in which we must live, the believers in Paul's day were in a much worse environment, especially for raising their families. And yet, it was never Paul's intent that Christians should "clean up the act" of the pagan society. Of course, without Christ, as the New Testament continually teaches, humans are not able to satisfy God's requirement of morality. But the Greek word used here—*ελεγχω* (*elegcho*)—has the force, rather, of exposing them. It is important that believers are not "taken in" by the veneer of unbelievers, who may disguise the satanic source of their actions. In World War II, Hitler and Stalin made a peace pact, which later turned out to be disastrous. Alexander Pushkin, one of Russia's greatest poets, called it correctly when he said, "Tis time for fear when tyrants seem to kiss." Paul warns the believers against "*being unequally yoked with unbelievers*" (II Corinthians 6:14). No matter what the surface of the arrangement may appear to be, the source of attitudes and actions is different. Only the Light of Christ can truly distinguish the difference. The Holy Spirit within us will give us that capacity if we ask Him. As long as one is "dead in trespasses and sins" (Ephesians 2:1), one is in darkness however one may consider oneself enlightened. Jesus said, "*He that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the Light of life*" (John 8:12). In another figure, we on earth are here, not to save the sinking ship, but to get the passengers onto the life boats. In all the flurry and fury over the inadequacies and perfidies of the government, for example, one must

realize that there has really never been a decent government in the world since humans began to manage it. Power tends always to bring out the worst in human

nature. The coming of the Holy Spirit into our spirits is like turning on a light in a dark room. Even the “nite-lite” dispels the darkness.

Ephesians 5:15-20

TRANSLATION

Give heed then how you walk—precisely [accurately, exactly]—not as unwise, but as wise, redeeming the time [season], because the days are evil. For this reason do not be senseless, but understanding what the will of the Lord is. And be not drunk with wine, in which is reckless profligacy, but be filled with the Spirit, communicating with yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual [of the spirit] songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; giving thanks always for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and God, the Father.

COMMENTARY

The Song of the Spirit

In the midst of the godless *milieu* in which the believers had to live, there was only one way to survive—through the power of the Holy Spirit within them. It was indeed a wilderness of pagan revelries and debaucheries. In the midst of this wilderness, the believers must walk very carefully.

Give heed then, how you walk—precisely... That is not to say that believers could not be imperfect or make mistakes. It was to say rather, that they must keep to the path established by Christ. The full force of the Greek word—*ακριβως* (*akribos*)—is precision and accuracy. It does not mean simply (as in English translations), “circumspectly.” But how can poor humans be thus precise and accurate? They can only be so by the hand of the “wilderness shepherd”—Jesus Christ. This does not call for flawless conduct, but rather, for total reliance upon Christ. We must find in Him, our

righteousness and sanctification and faith. Ours will never avail. We are surrounded by quicksand. Only Christ can take us through; nor do we have to “hang onto Christ,” but He hangs onto us.

Not as unwise, but as wise... The Greek word for wisdom used here, is—*σοφος* (*sophos*)—which has not, to do with human decision-making or conduct; it is rather, a word that relates to the understanding of the universe. When Paul said that the Greeks seek wisdom (I Corinthians 1:22), he was not talking about wise decision-making, but rather, the ultimate meaning of the universe. Plato, who was regarded as the father of Greek philosophy, believed that ideas were the essence of the universe. “The real is the ideal, and the ideal is the real.” However, he was never able to come to the reality of Christ, and felt that the human effort to ascertain the truth was hopeless, unless one could find some “sure

word of God;” which, of course, he never found and thus remained a prisoner of an unenlightened mind. To Plato, the Greek word *logos* was the kind of *word* he was seeking. To him, *logos* was the essence of ideas. John, countering this, said that the *logos*—the essential reality of the universe—was really Christ. So, in one stroke, John cuts to the heart of reality; which Plato never found in all of his philosophical “musings.” And such light comes flooding into the heart of any human who seeks to know Christ.

Redeeming the time... The Greek word here is—εξαγοραζω (*exagoradzo*). *Agoradzo* means to buy, and is the verb form of the word for marketplace—*agora*. The addition of the prefix means then, “to buy back.” In a certain sense, Satan has pervaded the time frame of the earthly age. The “times” are in the hands of Satan. But the times of the believer, are in the hands of Christ. The psalmist said, “*My times are in Thy hand, O Lord*” (Psalm 31:15). The Greek word for times is *kairos*, which refers to a period of time, rather than hours of time. We are living in evil times, but when have the believers not been living in evil times? Satan is the god of this age, or world era. How do believers survive in evil times? How did believers survive in the days of the Caesars, or the countless corrupt civilizations that have marked the process of human history? They identified with the kingdom of God, rather than the kingdoms of this world. They put their times in the hands of Christ. They became His family on the earth. And so they were under His care and direction. Paul was not, in this verse, attempting to put the believers on a treadmill—“to make every minute count for the Lord.” In Rudyard Kipling’s poem “If” he says, “If you can fill the unforgiving minute with sixty seconds worth of distance run, then yours is the world and all that’s in it, and

what’s more, you’ll be a man, my son.” I like to paraphrase that and say, “What’s more you’ll be a dead man, my son.” The believers are constantly being confronted today with the clock—“We are running out of time; we must get busy.” That is a sure formula for “burn out” or “break down.” If the Lord has a task for you to perform, He will give you the time to do it. If you are under pressure, it may be a task others have put on you and not the Lord. It is up to God to save the world. It is up to us to do only that which He gives us in the process.

Be not senseless, but understanding... The Greek word is—αφρονες (*aphrones*). It is the opposite of the *phrone*, which has to do with patterns of thought. It is something of a “mental set” or “view of life.” The word “understanding” is—συνιετε (*suniete*)—which means, literally, “to bring the data together in a meaningful way.” This does not have to do with specific decisions regarding the “will of God.” It has to do with the overall purposes of God for the universe. The unbeliever is somewhat “at sea.” The question is continually being asked—“What is it all about?” Only the Spirit of Christ in us can give us the true sense of “what it’s all about.” The “helmet of salvation,” which Paul talks about in chapter 6, protects us from the radical and idiotic concepts of the godless society.

Be not drunk with wine... Be filled with the Spirit. Let the Holy Spirit be the source of your joy and well being, rather than the superficial and debilitating pleasure which is often sought in revelry. This is not a statement against the use of wine, since Paul himself urged his colleague to drink wine instead of water “for his stomach’s sake.” (Nor are the author’s words here intended to make a judgment about the drinking of wine today.) If we use the passage in the latter

sense, we miss the most vital meaning of the implications of the Holy Spirit, within our spirits.

Singing...in your hearts to the Lord...

The force of this passage has, not to do so much with public worship, as with the song of the heart. Our lives are a hymn to the Lord. Such a hymn is not as much *externalized* as it is *internalized*. As Jesus pointed out to the women of Samaria, “*We worship the Father in spirit and in truth (reality)*” (John 4:24). External worship is always subject to a veneer or facade of religious ritual. Internal worship is not. Only Christ really hears our “song of the heart.” Even our “songs of praise” are most genuine when they arise from the depths of the spirit. Human praise is always subject to fleshly fabrication. This

is especially true when it is alleged that the Lord won't hear our prayers unless we express an adequate amount of praise. External praise and worship is important, but the praise of the heart, often unexpressed, is the most likely to be genuine. The Old Testament family of God did not possess the Holy Spirit within and were limited to outward expressions. And thus, the necessity of the feasts and rituals and offerings. The New Testament believers, possessing the Spirit of Christ, are not limited to the inadequacies of human expression. There is a continual flow between the Spirit of Christ and our spirit, as indicated by Paul in Romans 8:26—“*The Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with unuttered sighs.*”

Ephesians 5:21-33

TRANSLATION

Being submissive to one another [in an orderly relationship to] in the fear [reverence] of Christ; wives to your own husbands, as to the Lord, because the husband is the head of the wife, as also Christ is the head of the Church and He Himself is the Savior of the body But as the church is in an orderly relationship to Christ, so also let wives be to their husbands continually. Husbands, love your wives, even as also Christ loved the church and delivered Himself up for it in order that He may sanctify it, having purified it by the washing of water in the word, that He may present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it may be holy and unblamable. So ought men to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife, loves himself; for no one yet has hated his own body, but nourishes and cherishes it, even as Christ does the church, because we are members of His body For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery; but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Furthermore, let each one of you in particular so love his wife as himself; and the wife see that she respects her husband.

COMMENTARY

The Earthly Marriage and the Heavenly One

This passage has given rise to much confusion and much mischief. In the first place, the idea of “submission” has been used as an instrument of male ego and exploitation. It would seem that men have been more the recipients of liberty than women. The chains of the Old Testament law have often been used to enslave the women of the New Testament. Paul, who was very sensitive to the issue of the place of the women in the body, said to the Galatians in his great discourse on liberty—“For as many as were baptized in

Christ have put on Christ. For there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:27,28).

So then, what is the meaning of Paul’s discussion of submission, in Ephesians 5? The fundamental point is the meaning of the word translated “submission”. This word, from a word root—τάξις (*taxis*), “order”—means “to be in an orderly relationship to.” It is the basis of our

English word “taxonomy,” which has to do with putting the species in a proper order. So Paul is telling the Christians to be in an orderly relationship to one another. So what does that mean? The basic nature of our relationship to one another is, of course, spirit. That is to say, we are united to one another in the spirit. Such a unity supersedes all fleshly differences. It is universally and patently true that Christians everywhere are divided as to specific doctrines and practices and assemblies. There are some groups that insist on a fleshly unity as well as a spirit one. Such ones believe that we are all to have similar views and meet in mutually agreed upon locations. Those who are not in such a fleshly unity are regarded as out of order, as far as Christ is concerned. If this is indeed what God intended, there would be very few in His favor. (But this, of course, is what such groups contend.) The reality of the spiritual unity allows for a very extensive number of differences in background, personality, circumstances, and many other factors that tend to govern the ways people meet and think. The divisions that Paul spoke of in I Corinthians 3, were intended mostly to show that, as long as we are on the earth, we are going to be plagued by many human inadequacies. This is certainly in keeping with Paul’s further statements in Chapter 13, that as long as we are on the earth, we are children and behave as children. We will only come to maturity when we have come into our ultimate place with Him. At present, it might be said that we humans are really denizens of a “cosmic sandbox.” If we understand this we greatly reduce the harsh and judgmental attitudes, both to ourselves and others.

The message of the great choir of angels at the nativity was that Christ came to bring peace on the earth; especially, as Jesus later indicated, in the spirit. In the

push for perfection, we may expect far more of ourselves and of others than God expects. Perfectionism is actually a disease. The biblical use of the word “perfect” has to do with fulfillment of purpose, and not with flawless conduct. The church, having taken up the chant of perfection, has produced a society of malcontents—unhappy with themselves as well as others. It is not that one should not be diligent to fulfill one’s life on the earth, but rather, that there should be some measure of mercy, as God has, Himself, proclaimed. Jesus’ message to the Jews, who were under the bondage of the Pharisees, was that they should *take His yoke upon them, which was easy and light, and that He would give them rest* (Matthew 11:28-30). His peace was not the kind that the world gives—fleshly and circumstantial—but rather, peace in the spirit, which supersedes all fleshly and earthly considerations (John 14:27). In the “cosmic sandbox,” we often squabble like children, but Christ presides over this melee with His own mercy and grace. We are children of God, albeit children, nevertheless.

These comments have an important bearing on the text before us. Our relationship to one another is indeed familial, as children of God, but by the same token, subject to the frailties of the flesh. Thus, it must be remembered, while we are certainly fraught with divisions, we are nevertheless part of the family and must deal with one another charitably. In discussing the number of individual differences in the body of Christ, Paul is very specific about not being judgmental, and presses the point that if we are overbearing in our judgment of others, *“we are not walking charitably [in love]”* (Romans 14:15). It is unfortunate that the body of believers, founded in the matrix of love, should be awash in a flood tide of merciless

judgment upon one another, belying the very love of Christ which they so avidly proclaim.

Far from teaching that believers should be under the authority of other believers, “willy-nilly,” it teaches, specifically that the relationship between believers should be governed by the kind of love that Christ exhibited in His sacrifice. The instruction to believers, in general, is the same as the instruction to husbands and wives. As the believers are in an orderly relationship to one another, so ought wives be in an orderly relationship to their husband. The husband is not, thus, charged with the right of tyranny—to make of his wife an obedient subject, but rather, to function toward her as a representative of Christ, in a spirit of love and sacrifice. The husband is enjoined to be a spiritual guide—more of a shepherd than a ruler.

So ought husbands to love their wives as their own bodies. Thus, the husband who is not, himself, in communion with Christ and following His pattern of love, forfeits the right to be a shepherd and guide to his wife. These words come as a welcome relief to wives who are dominated by husbands who do not reflect the love of Christ. On the other hand, it may not be welcome to men who enjoy their position of domination without regard to the terms and conditions that the Scripture places upon them.

I speak concerning Christ and the church... This passage, long used as crucial to the marital relationship, must also be seen specifically as indicating the relationship between Christ and His church. Husbands and wives are enjoined to be in an orderly relationship to one another, but so also are the members of the body—treating one another with the same sacrificial love and caring that

Christ exhibited to the world, when He laid down His life for us.

Paul is not saying here, that believers must be subject to one another in guidance and criticism. Many believers have been thrown into confusion and despair over things that other believers have said to them. I have always recommended that one not listen to “amateurs.” An amateur is one who is not qualified to give instruction, whether in a position of self-styled leadership or merely a brother or sister. It is risky to follow the advice of any such ones, even when they come with the contention that “Christ has told them to say this.” That is perhaps the most dangerous of all. There are those in the body who have the gifts and technical qualifications to give instruction. But there are a great host of them who are either self-taught or inadequately prepared. It is impossible to really tell whether one has had “words from Christ,” or not.

But what about those who have been elected or appointed to positions of leadership?

The problem is that leadership in the church today, is largely a matter of organizational systems. A vote by a congregation or a board of directors is hardly equal to the casting of lots by the eleven disciples at Pentecost. In fact, the elders and leaders in the church today, have very little in common with the deacons and elders of Paul’s instructions to Timothy (I Timothy 3). It is not that sound leaders are not to be found in the body, but that we must exercise great care in identifying those who are qualified to lead and those who are not. The point is that, being in an orderly relationship to one another in the body of Christ, does not dictate the terms of that relationship, except in the matter of love and openness

as members of the family of Christ. Circumstances have changed quite radically over the hundreds of years since the New Testament was written. In the very next chapter, Paul deals with the issue of slavery, which at the present time is not relevant, at least in the Western world. Families are in a certain functional flexibility. Many times it is necessary for a wife to work, for example, and then must have help with the household chores. Many husbands are not qualified to lead and have, in fact, been the perpetrators of abuse and domination. The key word is flexibility. Within the framework of the love and liberty of Christ, we must relate to one another in terms of our individual situations and differences. The rigid cultural distinctives of earlier eras have all but vanished. The home of a hundred years ago was vastly different than the home of today. It is totally unacceptable to sacrifice the liberty and love of Christ in these human relationships, to the insistence upon rigid

requirements that are, at best, only ambiguous in the scriptural statements. We become in the exact position of the Pharisees, who followed the minutest letter of the law, but ignored the principles of justice and mercy and faith (Matthew 23:23).

Let the criteria of our relationships to one another in the body, as well as the criteria of the relationships in the home, be love and grace and flexibility, rather than judgment and criticism and rigidity. Every home is different; every assembly, as well as every individual. It is vital to understand this, both in our connection with Christ, as well as with one another. Remember that we are faultless and not *flawless*; so therefore, we need to exercise charity, not only to others, but also to ourselves as well. So go in peace; and in dependence upon the Lord for guidance, in the exercise of these most difficult of relationships.

Ephesians 6:1-9

TRANSLATION

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and your mother—which is the first commandment with promise—that it may be well with you, and you may live long upon the earth. And fathers, do not provoke your children to anger; but nourish them in the child training and mindset of the Lord.

Slaves, be obedient to your masters according to the flesh, with respect and veneration in the singleness of your heart as to Christ; not only while eyes are on you as men-pleasers, but as servants of Christ doing the will of God from the heart; serving in good will as to the Lord, and not to men; knowing that each one, if he does good, shall receive this back from the Lord whether slave or free. And you masters, do the same thing toward them, avoiding threatening, knowing that the Lord in heaven is the same for them and you, and there is no respect of persons with Him.

COMMENTARY

Of Parents and Children and Slaves

Human relationships are very complex. There are so many factors to be taken into consideration. The principles governing these relationships cannot really be forced into rigid rules and regulations. In the case of husbands and wives, as well as relationships in general in the family of believers, the most basic consideration is being open to one another in the love and grace of Christ, realizing the complex factors involved in the development of each individual. Conversion does not wipe out all the personality traits and habit patterns of the mind. Paul says that our relationship with one another should be on the same sacrificial basis as the relationship of

Christ to us. We have observed that the circumstances of life vary considerably from age to age and culture to culture. Patterns of behavior of a century ago in America, have undergone considerable changes. It is always in order for us to relate to one another in love and grace, and in the sense of our familial relationship, but how we express those things may depend a good deal on the current cultural realities. In Paul's day, for example, women occupied a very secondary place, and would have been considered out of order to have aspired to the roles that they have today, as a matter of course. Those who insist, today, on maintaining the status of a society

that is 2000 years old have missed the main thrust and meaning of the suggestions that Paul has made to such a society.

An extremely important consideration in this matter, is the issue of slavery. In Paul's day, there was no real onus on having slaves. It was accepted as a standard part of society. Two hundred years ago it nearly tore our country apart. Even where slaves were legally acceptable, the ethical questions were still crucial for the believers. Thus, the whole section on masters and slaves is not relevant in our society today. On the other hand, the need for the recognition of equality among all is as important today as it was in the days of Paul. However, the principles expressed here, between slaves and masters are not completely out of order, in terms of the relationship between one's self and one's employer. The same principles are there in terms of doing one's work as a member of the family of Christ and giving full measure, rather than being merely out for one's self.

By the same token, there are many complex considerations in today's society with reference to the raising of children. There are some very difficult questions and problems that face today's parent. The pressures of society around us have constantly forced the re-evaluation of the roles of parent and child. That is not to say that there is any less need for the issues of respect and compliance on the part of children, but the ways in which these may be effected must often be re-evaluated. Nor can parents afford to ignore the impact of the social environments on their children.

In the bygone eras, it was quite in order for parents to deal with their children as they saw fit, even to the point of meting

out very harsh discipline. In today's society, for good or for ill, the methods of discipline are under very careful scrutiny. Nor is it all together unreasonable that one might have a better effect upon their children by using alternative methods of "child-training." It is patently true that children are individuals and that methods of dealing with them must take into consideration that fact. With some children, the harsher the discipline, the more rebellion is fostered. It is vital that parents be sensitive to this difference. It is universally true that children in any given household respond differently. It is also true that there is a genetic factor which is crucial to how children and parents react to each other. Those outside this genetic reality, however expert, do not always take this factor into consideration.

Paul urges parents not to **"provoke their children to anger."** The same measures can bring forth change on the part of one child, and rebellion on the part of another. The thing to remember, is that the word "discipline" means "to teach." Any kind of discipline that does not accomplish meaningful instruction, is not sound. The main object of the parent is to make sure that the children know, thoroughly, their system of values. Parents cannot always guarantee that children will follow these patterns. In spite of everything, children will tend to experiment and to go their own way. One cannot make prisoners of them in the home. But what will hold them steadfast is a deep sense of what it is that the parents stand for, in terms of their allegiance to Christ and their set of moral values. In the end, this will prevail more than mere coercion. So raising children is really a matter of helping them come to terms with the meaning of life and providing such restrictions as will reinforce proper behavior patterns. It is

not so much a question of “either/or,” but “both/and.” Remember, it is hard for children to learn in a context of emotional upheaval. The bottom line is probably a process of positive and negative reinforcement. That is to say that things that are wrong are always wrong, and things that are right are always right. It is a matter of consistent teaching and not radical penalties, that will prevail in the end.

And there is the issue of example. No amount of discipline will take the place of proper example. It is certainly not a question of “Do as I say and not as I do.” Children are not charges in an orphanage, they are part of a family unit and, as in the body of Christ, will usually respond to a prevailing attitude of kindness and grace, as well as firmness and leadership.

Ultimately, it is vital that parents seek

the counsel of Christ in their difficult responsibility of raising children. Expertise, no matter how advanced, will never take the place of prayer and guidance in the individual issues. Our data is always limited, and we work from imperfect understanding. It is, therefore, essential to pray continually for guidance. Once one has consulted the Lord in these matters, it is vital that one remain firm and not vacillate in an attempt to compromise and win the approval of the children. Children do not respect parents who try to compromise. Usually the young person knows that the parent is right, but seeks to gain as much leeway as possible.

We were never intended to be master psychologists in order to bear and raise children. We were, however, enjoined and expected to be an example, and to instill the knowledge of Christ and allegiance to Him.

Ephesians 6: 10-17

TRANSLATION

As for the rest, be empowered in the Lord and in the grip of His strength. Be clothed with the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the cunning devices of the devil; because our warfare is not against blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the “supra-heavenlies.” Because of this, take up the full armor of God in order that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having worked out all things, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth [reality], and putting on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparedness of the gospel of peace; in all things having taken up the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench the fiery arrows of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God.

COMMENTARY

The Cosmic Warfare

From the evolving of the magnificent creature called “Lucifer,” a titanic battle has been raging between the forces of God and the forces of Satan. How did this come about? How does it affect us? We must take the measure of the enemy, and the parameters of the battle.

The common conceptions, or misconceptions, of Satan range all the way from the Aggravator, out to make life miserable for us, to the omnipotent and omnipresent evil spirit, who shackles the believers with doubt and fear and discouragement and effectively hinders them from following Christ. It is important to understand, in the first place, that Satan is not interested in merely aggravating the believers—he

wants to destroy them. The fact that he doesn't, is really the ultimate witness to the power of God to preserve us. As for his omnipotence and omniscience, he is highly overrated. He is probably more clever than the average human, but he is not in God's league at all. We make a mistake, both in overrating Satan's power and in underrating it. Overrating him keeps believers in constant fear and turbulence, while underrating him keeps them from recognizing their own inadequacy in trying to fight him; and thus, relying on Christ as the ultimate Defender.

So how did it all get started? How did God let the world get filled with satanic forces? In the first place, we must

recognize that Satan is, after all, God's creation. That Satan went astray, is based upon the qualities that God created in him. Without free will, Satan would only have been a puppet and would not have been in any way an expression of God's creative power. On the other hand, the very greatness of his being (see Ezekiel 28) also made him the potential "evil-genius" that he actually became. It was a calculated risk on the part of God, and yet it could not be otherwise, given His creative power; as well might a human produce an animal. That Adam and Eve succumbed to the cunning of Satan, was also a side of their "free will." Had they not succumbed, possibly Satan would have been deterred from the start. This, of course, is only speculation. It is interesting to note the comparison between the humans and Satan, in Genesis 3. We are accustomed to use the word "naked," in translating the preceding verse on Adam and Eve—"The man and the woman were naked"—but the Hebrew word *arum*, is what we call a *hapaxlegomena* which means it is used only once and, therefore, very difficult to determine exactly what it means; however, in the very next verse (3:1) it says of the serpent, that "he was more *arum* than any beast of the field." It is not likely that it was a reference to his nakedness. The translators usually use the word "subtil" [ingenious], but for some reason, do not use that in connection with the previous verse. So whatever the humans possessed, the serpent possessed more than any other beast. The spirit of Satan was apparently able to possess the beast, and Eve did not have the revulsion that is commonly felt today in the presence of serpents. She became an easy prey.

And so begins the battle—Satan beginning to exercise his obvious power and, however it came to be, rose to the

place of "the god of this world—the spirit that now energizes the children of disobedience [unbelief]." Although Satan is not omnipotent or omniscient, he does exercise a power that is far beyond humans, being able to occupy a spirit realm. He is a formidable foe. Ultimately, he will be vanquished, but only by the power of God. In its ultimate reality, the battle is really between God and Satan. We humans have the fallout from it, in our fleshly situation. The fallout includes a continual vulnerability to Satan's effect upon circumstances, but no believer possessing Christ within the spirit—can be possessed by Satan. Jude 24 says, "*Unto Him who is able to keep you from falling, and present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy...*" And of course, Jesus' own words recorded in John 10:29—"No man shall pluck them out of My Father's hand." The debate does continue over the degree to which Christians can be affected by Satan, but if our salvation rests upon the capacity of humans to cling to God, we are all in great trouble indeed. Jesus promised to be with His disciples "*to the end of the world,*" and Hebrews 13:5 (Deuteronomy 31:6)—"*I will never, in any way, leave you nor forsake you.*" While it is obvious that we cannot base our theology on simple "proof texts," such thoughts are completely in keeping with the ultimate power of God, and the complete inadequacy of humans.

Somewhere in the primordial reaches of time and space, an evil force emerged whom we call Satan. Humans became his early victims, and God took up the battle for their souls. The essential message of the Bible is the process of redemption. There is much that we do not understand about it, but this we know for sure—Satan does affect us in the external realities of our lives; He does not possess our spirits; we are not capable of fighting

Him; He will ultimately be vanquished by God.

Meanwhile, how do we handle Satan on the earth?

First of all, it is very important to understand the nature of the battle as well as the measure of the enemy. For humans to try to fight Satan with religious rituals and regimens, is like trying to battle air power with the cavalry. No amount of personal piety or perseverance or prayer vigils will avail. The only thing that will avail is the power of God. But if we think we can muster up the power of God by proving our own personal piety or perseverance, we are sadly mistaken. Everywhere in the Scripture, Jesus dealt with Satan with a word. When He engaged His own servants, such as Paul, in the fight, they too merely had to utter a word, which the Lord gave them. When Paul was troubled exceedingly by the demon possessed girl at Philippi, he merely said, *"I declare, in the name of Jesus, that you come out of her"* (Acts 16:18). Often, bad behavior is mistaken for demon possession and, therefore, does not yield to *bona fide* "exorcism." The main point is that, in dealing with Satan in our daily struggles, we must realize that we are no match for him; but Satan is no match for God. Sometimes we mistake victory for euphoria. That is to say, it is often assumed that unless we feel joyfulness in the midst of the victory it is not a victory. It is essential to remember that the human emotions have nothing to do with the battle. Depression and distress in the flesh, does not mean that the spirit is not victorious. The truth of the matter is, that Satan's chief concern is to snatch us away from Christ, and not merely to aggravate us. When we stay with Christ in the midst of our distress, we are victorious. Feelings in the flesh have so many

different aspects to them, that it is very difficult to sort them out and determine what particular feelings will be the signal of victory. Appearances are always deceptive. They may hinge on matters of genetics or hormones, or even nutrition. The guarantee that Satan has been overcome is not that we feel good about things, but rather, that we still care about Christ. The concept of the victorious Christian life as one in which one is always in a state of emotional elation, is neither realistic nor necessary. The human psyche is affected by a great many things that have nothing to do with one's state of spirituality or "victory." Leave to God the universal battle between Himself and Satan. He is "Well equipped to handle it. The protection of your own individual spirit is God's responsibility, so you can leave that to Him as well.

So what then is our responsibility?

Our responsibility is simply to function as His children in the world, and do whatever it is that He gives us to do.

So how do we know we are doing what He wants us to do?

If we are open to Him, He will see to it. We can't really outguess God, so we have to depend on Him to see to it that we do what we're supposed to do.

And how does He manage that?

That is, of course, up to Him, and it depends upon who we are. In other words, we are each motivated and guided by different means. Paul's Macedonian call came from a male figure when he was at Troy, but when he got to Philippi, the contact point turned out to be a woman. Arguably, if the vision had been of a woman instead of a man, it is possible that Paul might have regarded it as not

being from God. God has His purposes, and we have our motivational processes. It is up to God to get those two points together. If we are open to Him, He will do that in spite of ourselves.

Our warfare is not against blood and flesh, but against rulers, against authorities, against cosmic powers...

To think of our struggles in the flesh as the essence of the battle, is to miss this fundamental point. To be sure, there is fallout in the effects of Satan upon our physical person, but that is only like laying siege to the external area of the castle. The spirit within is the citadel which God protects. The surrounding area of the flesh may be ravaged from time to time, but that is only the fallout of the battle. The Lord does give us help in these areas, but often believers are wounded in the battle and suffer loss. Nevertheless, the citadel of the spirit stands secure. The Lord does, of course, give help in the external battle and does protect our fleshly circumstances, but does not always prevent Satan from ravaging them. Christians' houses burn alongside non-Christians', and the effects of cancer often engulf the believer; but through it all, the spirit stands secure, and that is what God is concerned with. When we use the external battle as a gauge of the internal one, we have failed to take either the measure of the enemy or the parameters of the battle. In II Corinthians 10:4, Paul makes very clear the issue of the spiritual battle, when he says, "*The weapons of our warfare are not carnal [fleshly], but mighty in God, to the pulling down of strongholds...*" The warfare between Christ and Satan can only be waged by Him, while we must stand at the sidelines and trust Him to carry on successfully against the enemy.

Rulers...authorities...cosmic powers of this darkness...spiritual forces of

evil in the supra-heavenlies. This is the theatre of battle. The real identity is shown in the phrase "spiritual forces of evil in the heavenlies." That does not refer to evil within the religious order. Often we feel that Satan has, in many different forms, invaded the church; but that is not what is in view here. *Αρχος* (*archos*)—refers to the old Greek ruler of the city-state—the *archon*. He was an ultimate ruler, and not just a "main leader." *Exousias* refers to authorities—"the powers that be." *While*—*κοσμοκραταρος* (*kosmokratarios*)—means those in whose grip is the ultimate power of this dark sphere of evil. Christ alone is able to handle this dread arena.

So then what must we do?

Our job is simply "to stand." The "Word "resist" connotes the idea of a "resistance movement," as in the war, but that is not what is in view here. What is in view is that we simply stand pat, and let the Lord do His work. In a famed incident with Jehoshaphat (II Chronicles 20), Israel was surrounded by the enemy and Jehoshaphat realized that he was unable to *resist*—"We have no might against this great company, neither know we what to do, but our eyes are upon Thee." When he took it to God, God said "*You shall not need to fight in this battle: set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salvation of the Lord with you, O Judah and Jerusalem. Fear not, nor be dismayed; tomorrow go out against them, for the Lord will be with you.*" It happened continuously in the history of Israel. Israel "Was surrounded by powerful enemies and was never able to really stand up against them, except that God was constantly with them, and did battle through them. The word of God to His people everywhere is simply, "Stand!" We do not need to make progress; we do not need to feel anything; we do not need to exercise spirituality.

“So stand fast in the Lord, my beloved...”
(Philippians 4:1).

Loins gird about with truth [reality]... Jesus said, “I am the Truth [reality].” Once again, as we focus on truth, *per se*, we are focusing on our own perception of reality. But if we focus on Christ, we are focusing on the most essential reality in the universe. We have Christ within as our strength in spite of the inadequacy of our human perceptions of Him. We can be trapped in the “truth.” That is to say, a great many groups claim to have the truth and miss the most essential element of truth. The only absolute truth is Christ. The human mind is not capable of such absolutes, and yet there is a constant effort to claim “truth” for a particular religious sect. When we take on Christ, our spirits become eternally real. Satan can easily confuse issues in the search for “truth,” but he cannot confuse the reality of Christ.

The breastplate of righteousness [rightness]... Christ is our righteousness (I Corinthians 1:30). To the Philippians, Paul confessed that his own righteousness was not adequate (Philippians 3:4-9). The effort to “shape up our piety” in order to fight Satan, is absurd. Confronting Satan with our own goodness plays into his hands because he has always been the master of accusation (Revelation 12:10).

Feet shod...with the gospel of peace... The gospel of peace prepares us for the arduous journey. Christ came to bring peace. That is the essence of the Gospel more than “rules of the road.” If nothing else, our own fleshly guilt over human inadequacy will cut like stones on the bare feet. But, understanding that we are complete in Christ and that there is “no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1), will soften

the rugged demands of the climb. The phrase “gospel of peace” is used in other connections, but here, it does not refer to “spreading the word.”

The shield of faith... trying always to maintain the level of ones’ confidence in Christ, would be a heavy shield, indeed, and subject to the “dropping of the guard.” Once again, this does not have anything to do with human capacities. The faith here, as everywhere, is the energy of Christ within us. It is not subject to our vacillating feelings of “trust.” Paul tells the Galatians, “*The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God...*” (Galatians 2:20). The proper usage of the Greek grammar here, is not—“faith *in* the Son of God,” but “the faith *of* the Son of God.” It is His faith, not ours. If we were dependent on our own human capacity to trust, we would have vanquished long ago. But think of the shield of faith rather as a flow of divine energy around us (like an electric eye), totally preserving our spirits from surprise attacks by Satan. Satan’s “fiery arrows” will never be able to penetrate that shield.

The helmet of salvation... The Spirit of Christ in us protects us against the absurd misconceptions of the godless. For Christians, there is always a certain instinctive sense that many of the declarations of the sociologists and psychologists and scientists are to be taken with skepticism. One who eliminates God from the universe, cannot help but be ridiculous.

The sword of the Spirit... This is not the *logos*, but the *rhema*. Most people think of the word of God here, as the biblical revelation. That would be primarily *logos*. *Rhema* has to do with individual words or units of speech, and we are dealing now, with a work of the

Spirit in the various encounters that we would have with Satan. It is the Spirit's word to Satan on our behalf, in each given encounter. A classic example is when Jesus dealt with the demons on the shores of Galilee (Mark 5:1-20). They begged Him not to send them into the "abyss," but rather, into a herd of swine. Jesus bid them, "Go!" That is the kind of word we are dealing with here. When Paul encountered the demon possessed girl in Philippi, he declared to her, "*in the Spirit and in the name of Jesus Christ,*" to come out of her. This again, is what is meant by the Sword of the Spirit which is the word of God. It is not something we

can do by memorizing more scriptures. It is something that Christ must do for us when we encounter the enemy. It is a weapon wielded by the Spirit, and not by ourselves.

Thus, the entire section on the armor gives the power to Christ, and not to ourselves; nor do we have to make some special effort to "put the armor on." It comes with Christ. We are equipped to handle Satan, not by our own piety or perseverance, but by the very power of Christ, who alone is equipped to deal with him. Our place is simply to turn it over to Christ and stand fast.

Ephesians 6:18-24

TRANSLATION

Praying through every prayer and petition, in every circumstance, in the Spirit; and watching in it with all readiness and petition concerning all the saints; and on behalf of me, that I may be given a word in the opening of my mouth to make known, with authority, the mystery of the proclamation, on behalf of which I am an elder in chains; that, in Him, I may speak with authority, as it is necessary for me to speak.

And that you may know also the things concerning me, what I am doing, Tychicus, my beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, I have sent to you for this purpose, that he may make known to you the things concerning us, and may encourage your hearts.

Peace to the brethren, and love with faith from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.

COMMENTARY

The Ultimate Recourse

If one prevailing theme can be deduced from the Epistle to the Ephesians—a thread that runs through the entire letter—it is God’s energizing action, through His Holy Spirit, in fulfilling His purpose with His earthly creation. It is a hard lesson to learn, but we humans are completely unable to fulfill His purposes and desires for us, apart from His Holy Spirit working in us. In his closing statement, Paul speaks of the absolute necessity of consistent and persistent prayer, not only for the believers in general but for himself, that he may speak with authority.

That I may make known with authority, the mystery of the proclamation... Paul had already received extensive revelations from God, especially in Arabia, but was now asking for the special and particular words that God would use in His current ministry. More importantly, he needed the authority that would accompany them. There are two parts to any revelation. There must be the revelation itself to the speaker, but there must also be the reception of that revelation in the hearers. The voice of authority comes with the power of the Holy Spirit. Even Paul, articulate orator that he was and trained

in the knowledge of his day, could not convince anyone of the truths of the revelation of God, apart from the Holy Spirit working through him. It must be remembered that Paul was coming to the Jews with an entirely new message from God, cutting across lines of the age old legal system. It would be natural for them to be skeptical, if not hostile. By the same token, the Greeks looked upon him as just another philosopher. How could his message possibly come through with authority? The only way, of course, was the dynamic of the Holy Spirit speaking through him. Before this, he requested the prayers of the believers, whom he obviously assumed would have God's ear. The countless books written on the subject of prayer tend to make it so special that one could only reach God on the stepladder of one's escalating faith and piety. In the minds of many, everything must be just right in one's life and fine tuned in one's sensitivities to God, before they will have His ear; as well would parents demand perfection from their children before they would give them an ear.

Chains, both figuratively and literally, were a common part of Paul's sojourn on the earth. Satan was allowed to hinder Paul from time to time. To the Thessalonians he said, "*I would have come unto you once and again, but Satan hindered me*" (I Thessalonians 2:18). Why was Satan allowed to hinder Paul, and to bring him into bondage? We would assume that, given Paul's crucial place in the body, God would have cleared a path for him so that he could get to all the believers. Did it reflect any lack on Paul's part? There is no such indication. It is a source of great encouragement to know that even Paul had his bruising encounters with Satan and, for God's own reasons, was not always readily delivered. It is not always easy to determine just

why God allows these things. One thing is certain—the tragedy of Eden will never recur. The Spirit of Christ within, will keep the citadel of His people's hearts and they will hold fast in their spirits, whatever Satan may bring to bear on them. The chains will fall when God is ready for them to fall and meanwhile, He will supply His grace both to stand fast and to fulfill His purposes in the life.

That He may encourage your hearts...

The Greek verb—*παρακαλεω* (*parakaleo*)—is from the same root as the word used for the Holy Spirit—the Paraclete, Comforter. The English word "comfort" is from the Latin which means "to strengthen." Our present usage of "comfort" has drifted away from that specific idea. Probably the word "encourage" is closer to the actual meaning. "Encourage" comes directly from the French word *cour*—heart. Thus, the idea is "to enhearten" or "to encourage." While the Holy Spirit provides us with the energy to hold steadfast, He provides the strengthening of our hearts. The word is often translated by "exhort," which probably misses the main point.

Peace to the brethren, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

While these words represent rather common greetings, they were not so in Paul's letters. All of these are gifts of Christ, and become a part of us when He becomes part of us. On a number of occasions, Jesus offered peace to the disciples, even in the midst of turmoil (John 14:27 and 16:33). Such peace is of the Spirit, and not the flesh. The *agape* love of Christ, is also the possession of every believer in His "caring consciousness," though not always in human affection. Faith is also the gift of Christ, and does not depend on human feelings of confidence. These ideas are prevalent throughout the letter to the

Ephesians and should have been readily understood by them at that point; as they should now be understood by us at the conclusion of the letter. The grace of

Christ is the flow of divine benevolence to all His people continuously, despite the failures and vacillations of our earthly odyssey.

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