

# **Your Identity in Christ**

**Sermons in Ephesians**

Scott Kercheville

I am indebted to a few key people and resources in the writing of these sermons. I tried to give credit where credit was due as I wrote each sermon, but I am sure I failed to always give credit. Please reference the sermons of my brother, Brent Kercheville at [www.westpalmbeachchurchofchrist.com](http://www.westpalmbeachchurchofchrist.com) and the sermons of my father, Berry Kercheville, and [www.brentwoodchurch.com](http://www.brentwoodchurch.com). Also, I found the commentaries on Ephesians by Harold W. Hoehner, Peter T. O'Brien, and Walter L. Liefeld to all be very helpful in their own unique ways. I have leaned heavily on the work of these five men. I have primarily attempted to stand on the shoulders of Paul and the shoulders of these five men in these sermons.

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—Scott Kercheville

## Your New Identity (Ephesians 1-3)

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Today we begin “Your Identity in Christ” - a series in Ephesians 1-3 seeing how we can find hope and purpose in the spiritual blessings God gives us. We will begin by overviewing Ephesians 1-3 to see this theme: your new identity and purpose. Let’s begin with a question.

### **An Identity Crisis**

Who do you think you are? Many say different things. I am rich. I am poor. I am smart. I am funny. I am creative. These ways we identify ourselves often begin in youth. I am the first-born, the middle-child, or the baby. I am the out-going one, or the shy one. This question affects us tremendously as we grow up. Who am I? In high school we have an identity crisis as we are forced to choose a group. Am I the nerd, the fun-loving jokester, the jock, the emo, the cheerleader, or the class president? How we answer this question affects our walk, talk, dress, and friends. Teens are overcome with loads of stress as they try and fail to fit in. College kids have a different identity crisis as they run from degree to degree anxiously determining who they are and what they do. The job comes and many men find their entire identity in the career. We become the doctor, engineer, preacher, nurse, teacher, accountant, or waste removal guy. Kids come and many women discover their identity in the children. “Hi, I am Mom. I take care of runny noses, laundry, baths, and meals.”

But what often happens to Mom when the kids they have found their identity in for decades leave the house? It is often not good. “Am I still Mom? I think I was a bad mom. What value do I have to now?” What often happens to men when they retire from the job they’ve grown for decades? This can turn out bad too. “What do I do now? I was important, now I’m not. Maybe I should work on a sports car to keep myself occupied?” Life is filled with times when our place of identity fails us. We found comfort in being the funny guy, but people stopped laughing. We found comfort in being the numbers or sports guy or in being the trendy super-mom, but now that is gone and nobody cares.

Where we derive our sense of identity means a lot. It affects our values, our source of self-esteem, and whole life. It causes us to constantly earn and prove this identity; otherwise, we will have no place, uniqueness, or purpose. We need to put our accomplishments in a box and say, “I am special! I am the funny, intelligent preacher who surprisingly cooks well.” If we do this, we derive our sense of identity and purpose by our passions and by our actions and abilities. Consequently, we build our life on temporary, man-made passions and foundations that will not last. Even if we seek to find our identity in our spouse - this will not last. When they die, all hope and meaning will be lost!

But what if we focused on a divinely preordained identity and purpose that cannot be earned or lost? Ephesians 1-3 describes this calling and identity of Christians. But in order to properly understand our calling in Ephesians 1-3, we need to see Paul's transition to the second half in Ephesians 4:1.

### Walk Worthy of the Calling (Ephesians 4:1)

On the whole, Ephesians tells Christians what God has done for us and what we should be doing because of what God has done. This verse is a pivot point that reveals this flow in Ephesians so we can understand how Ephesians reveals the calling and identity of Christians. Paul says, "walk worthy of the calling..." If the second half of Ephesians tells us how to walk worthy, then chapters 1-3 tell us the basis of that worthy walk. The basis of this walk is "the calling of the Christian."

Consider then that there is a difference between the Christian's calling and the Christian's walk. The walk is to be worthy of the calling, but the calling is not the walk. If you would have asked me to describe the Christian's calling a few years ago, I would have described the walk. Be unified with a faithful church, speak lovingly, be pure, be a Christ-like spouse, obey the parents, and work hard. We will study these actions later, but they do not describe the calling that gives our walk purpose.

Why does this biblical distinction matter? We do not always live or walk right. If we understand our calling correctly and biblically, we will see an imperfect walk does not ruin our calling and purpose. But if we don't see it correctly, discouragement is easy. If I define myself as a preacher and my purpose in life is to preach, I feel worthless when I give a subpar sermon. If we find our calling and purpose in being the car guy or the Mom or the Engineer, we feel directionless and empty when we cannot fill these roles. When our walk, actions, or roles become the calling, we want to give up when we fail. Or, the opposite happens. We succeed as a preacher, car guy, funny guy, mom, or engineer and we feel fulfilled and as if we have purpose. Finding identity in what we do either results in unneeded depression or a false sense of a calling in life.

### The Calling of the Christian (Ephesians 1-3)

If this is not the right way of describing the calling, what is the calling of the Christian described in Ephesians 1-3? Notice a summary of what Christians are called to in **Ephesians 1:18-21**. Paul prays that the Ephesians "*may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.*"

Paul's prayer is that the Ephesians would know the hope and the rich inheritance believers are called to receive through Christ's resurrection and ascension to power. Paul describes the hope and many blessings they have been called to receive throughout Ephesians 1-3. You are chosen and adopted. You are redeemed. You have an inheritance. You were dead, but now you are alive. You are reconciled to God. You are God's dwelling place. You are strengthened. This calling is the message of Ephesians 1-3: you have received every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. But how does this calling give us true identity and purpose? When we see God's purpose in blessing us we will see an identity worth holding on to. Notice God's reasoning in **Ephesians 1:5-6, 11-14; 3:9-11, 20-21**.

**Ephesians 1:5-6**, "... he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved." **Ephesians 1:11-14**, "In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory." **Ephesians 3:9-11**, Paul was selected to preach "... to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord." **Ephesians 3:20-21**, "Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen."

Notice the common thread. God called us to receive every spiritual blessing in Christ so his grace and wisdom could be praised, glorified, and made known to all people and all spiritual beings. Consider why this needs to happen. Do non-Christians know of God's goodness? No. When bad things happen - wildfires, floods, ISIS beheadings - the world replies, "If God exists, he is not good."

But God decided there was a need for his grace and wisdom to be made known before humans were created, so God must be making his wisdom known to more than humans. Notice **Ephesians 3:10**. "... through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places." There are "rulers and authorities in heavenly places" who also lack knowledge of God's wisdom, not just humans. Satan and his demons have been hurling accusations about God's non-goodness since before we were created. God does not disprove accusations by stopping evil; this would require removing free will. God does not instantly annihilate the haters - this is not gracious. God proves his goodness to all physical and spiritual beings through what he does for you - Christ's church. By calling us to be his children when we were his

enemies, God shows all seen and unseen creation that he is holy and unlike any other: gracious, wise, powerful, and good.

When accusations against God's goodness come before his throne, God's response is simply seen in Job 2:3. *"Have you considered my servant Job?... He still holds fast his integrity..."* Have you considered my servants in Houston? These all serve me and love me when all physical blessings are gone. Since they have me, they know they have everything they will need or desire for eternity. Let's consider three conclusions for us to remember when we struggle to know our identity, calling and purpose.

## **Conclusion**

**1. God blesses us with every spiritual blessing for his glory.** We were created for a reason. We have eternal purpose for God's glory through our blessings in Christ.

**2. God will not leave his children for the sake of his holy name.** God speaks of this reasoning and result through out the Bible. I want to point to one place in **Ezekiel 36:22-23**. God had punished Israel, but notice the basis of the hope God now promises. *"It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Lord GOD, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes."* God does not act for our sake, but for the sake of his name. Read all of Ezekiel 36 later to see more. This means God will not forsake believers for the sake of his name. What a great motivator to follow his direction in all things and to give him all praise and glory.

**3. Lasting identity and purpose is only found in our adoption.** Our identity is simple: we are God's children. We must stop seeking eternal purpose and satisfaction in other relationships. We must stop emphasizing that our earthly passions are what make us special or important. The goal of life is not to put all we did in a box so we can say, "This is who I was. I meant something!" The goal of our living and salvation is for God to be able to point to us and say, "Look what I did for those undeserving people." Our creation and salvation is all about God's glory, not ours. When we place our hope and identity in the right place - in being God's child for God's glory - the trials of life begin to have purpose. How can I find meaning in this? I am God's child for God's glory. Even death is filled with hope. As Henri Nouwen said, "...death is not the total dissolution of our identity but the way to its fullest revelation." Let us stop finding our identity in things that pass away. We are God's children created for his glory. Embrace God's eternal purpose fulfilled in you.

## You Are Chosen (Ephesians 1:1-4)

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Who are you? We are constantly plagued with the pressure of discovering ourselves. We want to be special, important, and to belong. When we seek a unique identity and place to belong in our physical roles, possessions, and relationships, we ultimately find ourselves empty and directionless. But we saw two weeks ago that we can find permanent identity in God's call for us to receive every spiritual blessing to the praise of his glory. In fact, notice this theme in Ephesians 1:1-3.

Paul begins in verse 3 by blessing and praising God for blessing us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. These words introduce Ephesians 1-3 perfectly because Paul does not mention a single physical blessing in these chapters. If we are honest, our personal praise is often based on physical blessings because we struggle to grasp the significance of passages like this describing our spiritual blessings. Spiritual blessings can feel very intangible. This is a problem for both God and us. We desire lasting value and a place to belong and God desires his glory to be praised through giving this to us. Neither are accomplished when we do not appreciate all our eternal blessings in Christ.

For God-glorifying, earth-and-heaven-changing praise to come from our lips, we need adopt the story of what God has done for us into the core of our being. We need to understand it and feel it. Specific spiritual blessings need to be real and tangible. Though few see God as good, God's goodness can be displayed through us when we discover how valuable we are to God as seen Ephesians 1-3. So, let's zoom into Ephesians 1:3-4 to see our first spiritual blessing in Christ.

### He Chose Us

Verses 3-14 are one, monstrous sentence in the Greek. Paul begins this sentence by praising God because he chose us. But what does it mean that God chose us? What is Paul conveying to us? This is a concept that has escaped me for a long time. Others share my confusion as well. But this concept actually becomes very simple and comforting when we see that the Bible says a lot about what it means to be chosen by God - in both the Old and New Testaments. Christians are spoken of as elect and chosen, but Israel is spoken of in the same way. Paul is adopting Old Testament language. In order to understand and appreciate the significance of being chosen, we will study in parallel **how** and **when** Israel and we as saints were chosen, and **what** Israel was and we were chosen **to be**.

### (When?) He Chose Us Before the Foundation of the World.

First, the how and when. Paul says the Father chose us in Christ *before the foundation of the world*. But what does this mean and why is this significant? Many passages speak of how God chose Israel, but let's consider one of the passages that emphasizes this same aspect of how God chose beforehand.

**Deuteronomy 7:6–8**, “<sup>6</sup> For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. <sup>7</sup> It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, <sup>8</sup> but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.”

Moses says Israel is “holy to the LORD” - set apart from all people to be God’s treasured possession. Notice the basis of God’s choice in verses 7-8. God selected Israel because he loves them and because he made an oath to their fathers. God made a promise to Abraham 470 years beforehand and he would be faithful to that promise. God set his affection on Israel because he chose Israel beforehand. I love Moses’ clarification in verse 7. God did not choose Israel because of their size. This could not have been the case because God chose Israel beforehand and they were the fewest of all people.

But this is not all Moses says about how God chose Israel. **Deuteronomy 9:4–6**, “<sup>4</sup> Do not say in your heart, after the LORD your God has thrust them out before you, ‘It is because of my righteousness that the LORD has brought me in to possess this land,’ whereas it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is driving them out before you. <sup>5</sup> Not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart are you going in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations the LORD your God is driving them out from before you, and that he may confirm the word that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. <sup>6</sup> Know, therefore, that the LORD your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness, for you are a stubborn people.”

At the end of verse 5 Moses again emphasizes that God is doing this for Israel because of the promise he made beforehand to their fathers. But just as in Deuteronomy 7, Moses ensures this is crystal clear. God was not about to give Israel Canaan because of their righteousness. This could not have been the case because they were a rebellious people and because they were chosen beforehand. Moses is making every effort to ensure Israel understands God’s choice was not based on their merit.

I hate the process of being picked for teams in basketball. I enjoy basketball, but I am terrible. I am usually picked last - unless they don’t know I am bad. Not being picked or being picked last stinks. When Ashley and I lived in Bowling Green I played basketball on Sunday afternoons with some Christians. I specifically remember one afternoon when two guys not only picked me early, but also, without a word, gave me the ball as much as they could - despite knowing that I was awful. I played some of the worst basketball I have ever played that day, but those guys kept me on their team every game and continued to feed me the ball and tell me to take the shot. Even now that is an awesome day to think back to. Without deserving any of it, those guys made my day because they wanted to.

In a world where we are passed over, there is something amazing about being chosen, not because of all your merits and abilities, but because of love. This is what is so great about the day you get engaged - if the love is real. Out of all the women, he selected and proposed to you. Out of all the men, she chose and said yes to you. There is no deserving. There is just unconditional love.

This becomes a powerful thought as we return to Ephesians 1. Paul says God chose us to be his saints - his set apart people - before the world was even created. This removes any hope of us ever deserving God's choice. If anything, the fact that God chose us to set us apart from the rest of the world before we were created shows that God knew we would be of the world and lost. The fact that God chose us before the world was created should do two things for us. First, this should give us amazing peace and comfort. The fact that you and I are in relationships with God is not an accident. When we fall short and sin, God is not looking down thinking, "How annoying that they thought this would work out!" No. This was not our idea. God chose us. God sought us out. It is not a decision he regrets. Rest in this. As one man wrote, "No wonder God is to be praised."

Second, this should give us humility. Moses told Israel God chose them beforehand so they would not boast. Imagine if I started talking about how I was a greater asset to the basketball team than everybody else because those guys chose and passed to me. I would be making a fool of myself. Learning of how God chose us before creation should cause us to stop comparing ourselves to others and to stop boasting in ourselves and to start boasting in the one who loved and chose us before he even created us in spite of who we would be. So, God chose us before creation because he loved us.

### **(What?) He Chose Us to Be Holy and Blameless.**

Second, what were we chosen to be? Return to Ephesians 1:4. We have seen that God's choice beforehand clearly shows that God did not choose us because of our holiness or uprightness. Ephesians 2:1 will later hammer this down by telling us we were dead. Though God did not choose us because we were blameless, he chose us that we should be holy and blameless before him in love.

Consider how Moses gave the same directive to Israel in **Deuteronomy 10:14–17**, "<sup>14</sup> Behold, to the LORD your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it. <sup>15</sup> Yet the LORD set his heart in love on your fathers and chose their offspring after them, you above all peoples, as you are this day. <sup>16</sup> Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn. <sup>17</sup> For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe." God spoke in the same way about Abraham. **Genesis 18:19**, "For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing

*righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring to Abraham what he has promised him.”*

Though God owns the whole world, from the beginning God has spoken about his desire to have a people of his own possession to set apart from all others. In choosing Israel, he did not choose them because they they were set apart and righteous, but he chose them and revealed his ways to them so they would be set apart as they obeyed his ways and commanded those after them to do so as well.

Sadly, though God chose Israel, Israel did not accept or walk in God’s ways. They did not give themselves to God to be his treasured possession. Because of this, they were destroyed. My brother Brent has helped me see how this points to an important reality with respect to Israel as God’s chosen people. Israel was chosen, but that did not have a direct bearing on their personal salvation. The Jews were confused about this. Remember how Paul had to argue in Romans that not all of physical Israel was spiritual Israel. The 603,550 men of war are an example of this. Were they chosen Israelites? Yes; yet, only two survived the wilderness.

God did not choose us so we could walk around like we own our lives. God chose us so we could walk around living like we are really set apart to belong to him. I love how Peter encourages us in this in **2 Peter 1:10–11 (NIV11)**, *“<sup>10</sup> Therefore, my brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election. For if you do these things, you will never stumble, <sup>11</sup> and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”* Out of the whole world, God has set us aside as his chosen people for his own possession. We need to appreciate and take God’s purpose in his choosing seriously. Being called and into a relationship with the Father and being chosen does not mean the race is over. It is motivation to run diligently and confirm our election.

## **Conclusion**

Let’s conclude with **1 Peter 2:9–10. (NIV11)** *“<sup>9</sup> But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. <sup>10</sup> Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”* Before you and I were created, God chose us. It was not for our abilities or our righteousness - for he knew we would be in darkness. It was because he loved us. The world has forsaken and despised their Creator. But now the Creator has chosen us in our poverty out of all creation to be his people. We are chosen and despite our imperfections, he does not regret this. Christian, let us live like God’s chosen people - holy and blameless - and let us live like it for his glory. Let us test ourselves. Are we living distinct, set apart lifestyles? Or do we look like everyone else? Let us live like we are chosen - praising God and causing others to do so as well.

## You Are Predestined (Ephesians 1:5-6)

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Millions of orphans wait every day for parents to love them and take them home. Imagine what this would be like. Day by day you are passed over. Day by day other kids find homes, but you wait. This would cause anyone to feel sad and unloved. The future is bleak. There is not real hope or destiny. Orphans experience this in the deepest ways. Feeling unloved and hopeless about the future is common among others too. Circumstances can cause us to feel not valued, displaced, and without destiny. This is handled in various ways. We make ourselves crazy busy so we are distracted from thinking deeply about the future. But when busyness ceases and the same void future remains, we are still disappointed by our circumstances and relationships. Many turn to seemingly harmless activities for comfort - binging on food, shopping, Netflix, or Facebook. These still leave us without the love and the sense of purpose, future, and destiny that we crave. Many will seek this in pornography, pain killers, and alcohol. Others take their lives because the emptiness of the future overwhelms them.

Was this hopelessness God's plan for us when he created us? Certainly not. We were not created to fill the hopeless lack of destiny we feel in our hearts with temporary things. We were not created to be disconnected from hope and destiny in the first place. Paul has been praising God for blessing us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. But in **Ephesians 1:5-6** Paul writes of a blessing that describes the destiny God created man to hold onto and the goal God created mankind for.

### He Predestined Us (1:5)

Paul says in verse 5 that God predestined us. To predestine simply means “to determine beforehand.” Last week we saw in verse 4 that God chose us. We did not first choose God, God chose us. God did not choose us because we were holy, for God chose us before the world was created and we were spiritually dead anyway. However, we were chosen that we should be holy and blameless. Therefore, “chosen” refers to who chose, when we were chosen, and what we were chosen to be, but predestination refers to the destiny we were chosen to hope in and the end for which God chose us. Therefore our question about this text should not be *how* did God predestine us, but *what* did God predestine us for - what is our destiny - and *why* did he give us this destiny?

### He Predestined Us for Adoption As Sons (1:5)

If you notice verse 5, you will see Paul says we were predestined “*for adoption as sons.*” If we are satisfied by the world, “adoption” is a nebulous word that has little impact. But to the needy and spiritually poor, this word sparks hope. Belonging to a father and mother is important. Nobody knows this more than one who has been an orphan. Parents cause us to feel loved. Parents cause us to feel secure about the future. We are not scared. We are protected. We have hope and destiny. Therefore, when Paul very simply says the Father predestined us for adoption as sons, Paul was painting a powerful picture. But how is

being predestined for adoption as sons by the Father a powerful spiritual image? Let's take the time to consider **four reasons** why predestination for adoption is a powerful spiritual image biblically so this blessing can become tangible for us today.

**First**, to be adopted you have to be chosen. Sadly, it hardly matters if a child wants to be adopted. The important thing is whether parents are willing to adopt and choose you at all. Furthermore, notice how **Ephesians 2:1-3** points to a problem for us. There is nothing desirable in us. I hate how waiting orphans often feel like there is nothing desirable in them - it is not true. But it is true of us. We were the trouble-makers, not the cute kids parents die to adopt. We were sons of disobedience.

This makes verse 4 even more powerful. "... *he chose us in him before the foundation of the world...*" We were children of wrath and did not want God, but God stayed the course because he had chosen us. We have rejected God as Father and are still tempted from time to time to return to our previous father, the Devil. But God determined beforehand that he wanted you - a child of disobedience - to belong to him and to be his child. God chose you to be his child. The Father wants you.

**Second**, to be adopted the adopters must not only choose you, they must be willing to go through the difficulty and expense of adoption. Adoption is very expensive - tens of thousands of dollars. On top of this, there is tons of paperwork, background checks, legal proceedings, long waiting periods, etc. Roman adoption - which the Ephesians were familiar with - was also costly, but the process was different. To adopt a child, a man would have to buy the child for the price of a slave from the previous father *three* times. Only on the second payment was the child free to leave the previous father. On the third payment the child belonged to his new father. The cost was and is significant!

We will consider this more in two weeks, but notice in verse 7 that God was willing to pay this significant cost to set us free from bondage to become his adoptive children. "*We have redemption through [Jesus'] blood...*" Ashley and I hope to adopt in the future. We look forward to it. But because of my small capacity to love as I ought, I do not think I could look forward to adopting a child if I knew ahead of time that they would be rebellious and bring harm to the children I already had. No child of mine harms my children! Yet, God was willing to adopt us at the cost of his Son's blood.

If this were not powerful enough, notice the rest of verse 5. Most translations except the ESV correctly translate that it brought God pleasure to do this. God was willing to do this according to the purpose and good pleasure of his will. There was no hand forcing God into this. He wanted this. What great love the father has shown us! It was a great pleasure for God to adopt us at great cost!

**Third**, once you are adopted, you receive all the privileges of the children and there is no distinction. Once parents adopt a child into their family the parents do not make

distinctions between the adopted and natural children. All receive the love, discipline, blessings, and inheritance of the parents without favoritism. Even the rule of Roman emperors was frequently passed down to adopted sons. This is the beauty of adoption. Once you are in, you are in. It is like you were always there.

This is great when we compare what we deserve with the privileges of being God's child. Notice verse 11. We will receive the Father's inheritance. Consider how family is another privilege of being God's child. We here are family because we have the same adoptive Father. Is this not a wonderful family? Furthermore, Christ is our brother. **Romans 8:29**, *"For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers."*

What is most powerful about this is how Christ himself embraces us as brothers. Notice **Hebrews 2:10-11**, *"<sup>10</sup> For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering. <sup>11</sup> For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers."* We are not worthy to be called God's children or Jesus' brothers. We are not worthy of Jesus' suffering that made this possible. Yet Jesus is not ashamed to call us brothers. This is not common among brothers. We say, "I'm not like them, I don't know them, you have the wrong person, etc." We all have family we are ashamed of. Jesus should be ashamed of us, but he is not. We have a brother before God's throne who accepts us. In weakness, Christ is our brother who can relate to us. But why does it matter that God chose, adopts us at great expense, and gives us all the benefits of being his children?

**Fourth, predestination for adoption matters because it provides a real destiny to hope in in insecure times.** Consider the situation of these first-century Christians. We learn in 3:1 that Paul is in prison as he writes this letter. We learn in Acts 19 that there was a huge riot in Ephesus over the gospel. This is a reminder that the pain Jesus promised would come to Christians was very present. **Matthew 10:21-22, 36, 39**. *"Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, and you will be hated by all for my name's sake... And a person's enemies will be those of his own household... Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."* Times were bad for Christians. Many were not wanted by their families. Many would be afflicted. Physically, the Christian walk was filled with darkness and insecurity. Yet, Paul writes from prison praising God because all saints have security. Their destiny to be adopted by the Father is written in stone. They are predestined.

While we are considered God's children now, this reminds us that there is still a future "destiny" aspect to our adoption. **Romans 8:22-25**, *"<sup>22</sup> For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. <sup>23</sup> And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. <sup>24</sup> For in this hope we were saved. Now hope*

*that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? 25 But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.*” Many passages say we are God’s children, but Romans 8 points to the “not yet-ness” of our adoption. Paul says we only have the firstfruits of the Spirit and we groan as we wait eagerly for adoption. We were saved in this hope. We do not hope for seen things. We wait for them. Ephesians 1:5 points to this. God *predestined* us for adoption. Our adoption is a predetermined destiny, not a current reality.

This matters because the Christian life is not an easy path. It can be a path of discouragement. Jesus calls his followers to forsake every possession and person. He calls his followers to stop seeking life here. Many move from family, change careers, lose friends, lose family, and sell all for Jesus. The fact that we are predestined for adoption by the Father matters because if we put our hope in the right destiny, we can joyfully embrace losing any life here. This is the hope we were created to put all our stock in when we life seems empty and the future looks bleak. The world never delivers on their promises, but our Father does. We are not hopeless. We have real a destiny. We will receive adoption.

### **He Predestined Us to the Praise of His Glorious Grace (1:6)**

Consider why God gives us destiny in verse 6. Adoption is not God’s end game. The praise of God’s glorious grace is the end for which God has adopted us. This makes sense. When a couple endures difficulty to adopt a child, we do not praise that child’s worthiness. The parents are the great ones. God is not good in the world’s eyes, but God displays his goodness by giving you a future to hope in while suffering here. Let us seek God’s purpose by giving him all praise and glory in our hope.

### **Conclusion**

We can only glorify God if we actively hope in the destiny God predetermined for us. Take a new outlook on life’s discouraging, bleak days. The next time life does not meet your expectations, remember that this life is not our destiny and is not meant to fill our dreams. We have a destiny to hold onto and a story that is not finished, so it does not matter what is against us. When we lose our jobs, when people disappoint us or when we face illness, sin, persecution, and loneliness - pause. We can continue to binge on constant busyness or earthly pleasures, or we can patiently meditate on and hope in the reality that our stories are not finished because God has pre-ordained our destiny. God has guaranteed that the groaning will cease. When this life is over, this only means the never-ending good part is beginning. Hope in the destiny of adoption preordained for you. Give God glory.

## You Are Redeemed (Ephesians 1:7-10)

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For those who walk by the flesh, the future can seem bleak. There is not lasting identity or hope to hold onto. There is not a permanent place to belong. But Paul has been telling us about our spiritual blessings in the heavenly places. When people disappoint and loneliness looms, we can know the Father values us because he chose us. When life does not meet expectations and trials rock us, we can have hope because the Father has secured our future adoption. Our stories are not finished. But we must consider why we need every spiritual blessing. There is a reason we needed God to choose us to be holy and to predetermine our destiny to be adopted - sin. Paul has focused on the Father's work before creation, but now Paul turns to speak of the Son's work of redemption and forgiveness which specifically addresses our problem of sin so the Father's plan can continue. Notice Ephesians 1:7-10.

### You Are Redeemed and Forgiven (1:7)

Paul says that in Christ we have redemption. Many have ideas about what this word means, but we should avoid forcing our wide variety of English uses and definitions onto the original meaning and usage of the word in Greek. In the simplest way possible, this word - *apolutrosis* - is a noun which refers to "a deliverance," "a release," or a situation in which someone or something is set free. It could refer to a slave who is set free from a master, a prisoner from prison, or a debtor from a debt. Anyone or anything can receive "redemption" or "deliverance" from any plight or bad situation.

But what is it that we receive redemption or freedom from? Scripture makes it plain that we need redemption from sin and the slavery and death it brings. Consider one instance of this in **Hebrews 9:15**, "*... a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.*" The redemption here is from transgressions - sin. Other passages point to this - even our passage here in Ephesians 1:7. Paul qualifies our redemption as the forgiveness of our sins. **Colossians 1:14** points to this as well. **Colossians 1:14**, "*we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*"

It is no secret that we sin. But when this passage says we need redemption, it demands we realize the seriousness of sin. Needing redemption from sin implies that sin has control over us and we cannot get out from underneath it. Think of it in terms of slavery. Slaves cannot do anything about their situation or future. The result of our sin is spiritual death and separation from God (cf. Romans 6:23; Isaiah 59:2). Would it help this problem of separation and death if we changed our living? No. Imagine a man on death row saying he decided he wanted to live. "I will volunteer at soup kitchens the rest of my life." When the sentence is death, we cannot redeem ourselves. Take it further. Jesus says in John 8:34 that "*everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.*" What would happen if tomorrow you woke up and decided you were never going to sin again? You would fail. We cannot get rid of sins' consequences - let alone stop sinning. Every single infraction

seals our slavery and death more. We cannot free ourselves from death or forgive ourselves. Every angry word, every prideful or lustful thought, every bit of gossip and lie testifies that we are stuck as slaves to sin and death.

Imagine living every day with this hopeless future narrowing in closer and closer. But Paul says that in Christ we have redemption. We have freedom. We are released. We are forgiven. Let's look at two aspects of our redemption - the cost of our redemption and the project redemption is part of.

### **Redeemed through His Blood (1:7-8)**

First, the cost. This Greek word for "redemption" does not refer to a purchase as I used to think, but often this deliverance would happen at some sort of cost - a redemption cost or the payment of a ransom. See verse 7. The cost of our deliverance was the blood of the Son of God. Under the old covenant sacrificial animals could not be killed by strangulation - their blood had to be spilled. The same is true for Jesus. He had to be beaten. He had to freely allow his blood to pour out. If God had to bleed to redeem us from sin, how serious sin must be. How much pain our sin causes God!

But do you see in verses 7-8 the reason why he was willing and able to redeem and forgive us by his blood? "*According to the riches of his grace, which he lavished on us...*" Grace is the reason he was able to do this. Jesus died for us because of his grace. This is powerful. I like how my brother Brent put it, "This is why we love Jesus so much!" What is so powerful here is how this passage shows both the cost and the intentionality of Jesus' grace. This grace of redemption by shedding his blood was not an off-handed decision. This grace is not coerced and it is not a one time deal. He did this according to the *riches* of his grace, which he *lavished* on us. I rarely value digging into words because of how it is abused. But I love the word for "lavished." It means grace abounds, is richly furnished, exists in full quantity, and is over and above what is needed. Grace pours out in superfluous amounts.

But why does this matter? Lavish grace is key to the picture of redemption because without the knowledge of Jesus' rich grace, we are not truly free from slavery to sin. What I mean is that if we continue to live in fear of sin and fear of death, are we truly free? I think we all have this fear that we have sinned too much to experience God's favor. Jesus could not be willing to apply his blood for our redemption. Christians, this is why it is called grace. This is why God says he gives grace lavishly.

Christ did not bleed and die to pay the great redemption cost to redeem from something small. The blood was needed and the grace is lavish because our sins were great. But Christ did not bleed and die to simply free us from past sins. Jesus' gracing abounds because it is needed for future sins too. **Romans 5:20** says, "... where sin increased, grace abounded all the more..." Aside from willful rebellion, no quantity of sin abounds more than Jesus' grace! Redemption from sin according to richly lavished grace brings

permanent forgiveness and freedom. We are redeemed at the cost of Jesus' blood due to abounding grace.

### **Redeemed for Unification in Christ (1:9-10)**

But what is the bigger scheme or project redemption is part of? All is happening to the praise of his glorious grace and this describes God's purpose, but it does not describe the ultimate project God is doing to meet this purpose. Consider, when we undertake a project, we have a purpose for starting that project, but the purpose is not the project. Ashley and I have been working on a headboard project for the past couple of months. We are not building a headboard for the purpose of building a headboard. Our purpose in building this headboard is to spend time together.

It is the same with God. The purpose of his project is so that his glorious grace will be praised, but this is not the project. But the project is also not redemption. Redemption is one step that moves that project along. Our next step with the headboard is to attach batting and then the fabric. At the conclusion of these and other steps, we will have completed the headboard project. Redemption is one step completed by Christ after God chose us to be holy and predestined us to adoption.

To see this grand project God is working on, notice Ephesians 1:7-10 again. God's project had been a mystery, but Paul says it was God's pleasure and purpose to give us insight into this mysterious plan that he set forth in Christ. The planned project is stated in verse 10. The plan is to unite all things in Christ - "*things in heaven and things on earth.*" This is fascinating because this unity through Christ as the head is seen throughout Ephesians 1-3, especially in chapter 2. Through Christ we are reconciled to sit with God in the heavenly places and have peace with God. Through Christ formerly hostile groups are merged peacefully into the same body. God could see the war before time, but it has been his plan to solve this by making Christ the head and to unite all under him into a peaceful body.

Paul says this is a plan for the fullness of time. This means "history is not a meaningless succession of events" (Liefeld, page 43). God designed all time to move towards the completion of his plan and project to unite all things under Christ as the head. God is bringing peace and unity to his relationship with his church and peace and unity to the souls in his church. This all matters because it is for God's glory. Creation is selfish. We worship ourselves and make ourselves enemies with God and enemies with one another. But central to God's plan was the Christ's sacrifice to redeem us from enmity into unity with God and one another, to the praise of his glory. It is no wonder then that maintaining and attaining unity in Christ's body is the first way we walk worthy.

## Conclusion

Unfortunately, Christians often receive redemption into unity with God and his children only to return to slavery in the world. Let's consider three ways to live like we have redemption in Christ.

**1. Have confidence because of our freedom.** It is helpful to be reminded of sin's seriousness and Hell's torment. However, I find it counter-productive for me to constantly dwell on this. "Don't commit that sin. Stop it. You will go to Hell for that." This only unhelpfully causes us to become enslaved to thinking about that sin and then enslaved to the depression of spiritual death afterwards - which does not help. Christians, these are not the thoughts of someone who has redemption. If a slave truly has redemption, are they constantly looking behind their backs? No! They either secretly escaped or they are not enjoying the freedom they have. If we are going to live like we have redemption from sin, we must dwell on the freedom and life we have - not on fear. After all, 1 John 3:3 does not say we purify ourselves in fear of death, we purify ourselves in hope. Let us wake each day praising God for our freedom and for our life. Let us not spend all our time thinking how we can avoid sin, but instead contemplating how we can joyously live as bondservants of Christ.

**2. Have fear because of the cost.** It is very sad to see someone boast of God's redemption and grace but not appreciate its cost. **1 Peter 1:17-19** says , "*... conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.*" The cost of ransoming us from futile living was the precious blood of Christ. If we find pride in our hearts, we do not need fear of sin, but we need to be slapped in the face with a holy respect and fear for cheapening Jesus' blood. This great cost and great grace cleanses us from huge crimes. Let us never forget this cost and never stop praising Christ for willing to bleed for us.

**3. Have unity because of insight into God's plan.** Paul says in this passage that God has given us wisdom and insight making known to us his mysterious plan to unite all in Christ. It is good for us to be individually faithful, but if we are trying to live simply as redeemed individuals apart from unity with God's church we do not have insight into God's plan. God has given us insight for a reason. He wants us to appreciate he is not just about our personal redemption - he is about all things in heaven and earth being united under Christ as head. Paul makes it clear in Ephesians 2-3 that this begins with us for God's glory. If we are living an individualistic Christian life, let's stop this and pursue God's purpose of unity with one another. Know the joy of exhorting or receiving exhortation from fellow children of God. Let's pursue unity based not on earthly things, but based on our common freedom from sin and death due to the rich, lavish grace of Jesus Christ.

## You Are God's Heritage (Ephesians 1:11-14)

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Paul has been telling us of our spiritual blessings in the heavenly places. When we build our lives on seeking satisfaction from our physical relationships, activities, and possessions, the shifts of life will reveal that our lives are built on sand. Lasting life is only found in a relationship with God. But as we study how God blesses us, how often do we pause to consider what God receives from this?

### Israel Was God's Heritage

Before we answer this question in Ephesians, let's unpack what God says he wanted when he redeemed Israel in **Exodus 19:5**. *"<sup>5</sup> Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine."* The whole earth belongs to God, but God brought Israel to himself to be his treasured possession among all peoples. Moses wrote more about this in **Deuteronomy 32:8-9**. *"<sup>8</sup> When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he divided mankind, he fixed the borders of the peoples according to the number of the sons of God. <sup>9</sup> But the LORD's portion is his people, Jacob his allotted heritage."* A "heritage" means "an inheritance," "a special possession," or "an allotted portion." God gave the nations inheritances of land; surprisingly, God's portion and heritage is his people - Israel. But why?

We can see God's purpose in how Moses told Israel to live in view of being God's inheritance. **Deuteronomy 4:19-20**, *"<sup>19</sup> And beware lest you raise your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, you be drawn away and bow down to them and serve them, things that the LORD your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven. <sup>20</sup> But the LORD has taken you and brought you out of the iron furnace, out of Egypt, to be a people of his own inheritance, as you are this day."* Israel must not worship created things because God set Israel free to be God's own inheritance. A snapshot of God's purpose in allotting a heritage for himself materializes here. God wants to possess and put his name on a people devoted to serving and worshipping him alone. It is even clearer in **Isaiah 43:21**. God says he formed Israel for himself *"that they might declare my praise."*

Yet, instead of praising and honoring God's name, Israel profaned God's name. Israel behaved rebelliously and worshipped other gods while wearing God's name and blessings. Therefore, God disowned Israel as his heritage, removed Israel from their inheritance in Canaan, and scattered Israel among the nations. But God promised through the prophets that one day he would not only resurrect his people, but invite the nations to be apart of a new Israel, a new heritage for God. Imagine hearing this promise. We will return home and God will make us his heritage again. We will no longer be possessed by the nations. We will be owned, ruled, and treasured by YHWH our God.

## **You Are God's Heritage (Ephesians 1:11-14)**

Ephesians shows how this promise was first fulfilled for the Jews and then also for the Gentiles. **Ephesians 1:11-14 (NET)**, "<sup>11</sup> *In Christ we too have been claimed as God's own possession, since we were predestined according to the one purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to the counsel of his will* <sup>12</sup> *so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, would be to the praise of his glory.* <sup>13</sup> *And when you heard the word of truth (the gospel of your salvation)–when you believed in Christ–you were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit,* <sup>14</sup> *who is the down payment of our inheritance, until the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of his glory.*" Your translation in verse 11 may differ from the NET by saying "we have obtained an inheritance" instead of "we too have been claimed as God's own possession." The Greek can be translated either way. The NET follows the ASV and the notes in the margin of the NASB which say, "we were made a heritage." We will favor this translation.

Since being claimed as God's possession and heritage began with Israel, God's same purpose carries over to us. We will conclude with this. But how else does being God's heritage have significance?

**1. Being part of God's heritage means God predestined us to this according to his purpose (1:11).** Consider for a moment how amazing it is that out of all peoples, God's will was to have us here as his special possession. Think about how God spoke of this in Deuteronomy. God allotted lands and inheritance to all the nations, but do you know who he has set aside for himself? You and me. "*The Lord's portion is his people...*" We sing a song that says, "I know not why God's wondrous grace to me he hath made known, nor why, unworthy, Christ in love redeemed me for his own." God is telling us right here why he has done this. It was his purpose and will to make us his inheritance. In Christ, we are a treasure to him. All I can think is, "Me? Us?" Meditate on that thought. "How deep the Father's love for us, how vast beyond all measure that he should give his only Son to make a wretch his treasure." If that does not move us to give God our lives, what will?

**2. We were made God's heritage when we heard the word of truth and believed in Christ (1:13).** This is not a concept we are unfamiliar with. Consider two aspects of this. First, faith is spoken of similarly in **Romans 10:10-11**, "<sup>10</sup> *For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.* <sup>11</sup> *For the Scripture says, 'Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.'*" Familiarity with this truth can lead us to not appreciate it. Consider how perplexingly simple it is that God offers us the amazing privilege of belonging to him - not on the basis of family, race, circumcision, education, or riches - but on the basis of trusting Jesus Christ. How amazing!

Furthermore, this faith is created by hearing God's word. **Romans 10:17** similarly says, "*So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.*" This is powerful because sometimes we might think the process to faith is more complicated. We may ask,

“How can I help someone come to faith?” One might say, “Show them this great video.” No! Faith comes through hearing God’s word. Read the Bible - Mark and Acts - with them. Do you want to build your faith? Read the word! Somehow we think God’s word is not enough. “It might be boring.” If hearing God’s voice bores us or someone else, it does not matter what approach we take — they will never truly belong to God until they love his voice. God’s word alone creates the type of faith God accepts in his heritage.

Darrell Hymel studied with a Chinese unbeliever who asked about evolution for years. Darrell finally told him he would answer no more scientific questions until the man read the Bible for himself. When Darrell returned, the man he was on his third time through the Bible and he wanted to be baptized. His questions and fears were gone; he trusted Jesus. How beautiful is that? God’s word is powerful! How awesome it is to be part of God’s portion - those who trust and treasure God’s voice!

**3. God’s heritage is sealed with the Spirit who is the guarantee of our inheritance until God redeems his possession (1:13-14).** Ephesians 4:30 and 2 Corinthians 1:22 also say believers are sealed by the Spirit. “Sealing” is used different ways, but here it refers to an identification of ownership. The Spirit is a mark identifying that God owns us. This fits with verse 11: we have been made God’s heritage. This concept is seen in 1 Corinthians 6:19 when Paul says we do not own ourselves because our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit within us.

But how is the Spirit a seal of God’s ownership of us? At baptism, Acts 2:38 says we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit and Titus 3:5 says the Spirit does a work of renewal on our hearts. If the Spirit is with us, there is fruit. His presence is evidenced by a life that is being molded into God’s likeness. In this way the Spirit is a seal marking who belongs to God. “This soul belongs to my heritage.” Is it not great to see how God’s Spirit has changed someone? Even more, it is great to see this in ourselves!

Notice why Paul says this matters in verse 14. This matters because God has not fully obtained us as his possession and the Spirit is the guarantee of our inheritance until God does redeem us. A guarantee or downpayment refers to the first installment of a greater pledge. If the bank loans you money for a house, you need to pay 20% as a downpayment - proof that you will be reliable to pay the whole amount. When God does obtain us as his heritage, he has promised to give us an inheritance of eternal life with him. The Spirit is the downpayment of our inheritance.

We need to be sealed with the Spirit as our guarantee because we still toil, hunger, fear, suffer, and die outside of the fullness of God’s presence. We need assurance that we truly are God’s heritage and that God truly has an inheritance of eternal life stored up for us. As Romans 8 says, when we see how God has caused us to submit to his law and put sin to death, we see that God’s Spirit is truly in us. For those who suffer and labor for God, this renews hope. We receive a taste of eternal life with God and are assured that we belong to God. Paul speaks of this comfort in **Romans 8:11**. *“If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus*

*from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.” Paul continues in **Romans 8:23–24**, “<sup>23</sup> And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. <sup>24</sup> For in this hope we were saved.”*

As we groan and near death, we would have no hope of the redemption of our bodies to an incorruptible resurrection if we could not see the fruit of the Spirit in us through our raised spiritual life. But we have received the Spirit as a seal and a guarantee. I hope this evidence is in each of our lives. I hope we are walking by the Spirit. If we are, when we struggle with our flesh and the pain of life in the flesh, let’s see God’s Spirit in ourselves as a reminder of God’s promise. We have been set aside as his heritage. We do have a rich inheritance of eternal life waiting for us. We are just not there yet. The love, joy, peace, and righteousness the Spirit has caused in us are just a firstfruits and downpayment - a taste of a future life of full freedom from all corruption. It is wonderful to be in God’s heritage because God gives us evidence of this and of our future inheritance through his Spirit.

**4. We are God’s possession and heritage so we can praise his glory (1:12, 14).** This purpose is also seen in **1 Peter 2:9-10**. “... *you are... God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you...*” Are we living like God’s special possession? Are we *living* to praise him? Do we wear a different “seal” of ownership from others? Has God truly possessed us for his praise? We can get so wrapped up in the minutia of this life. Let us never forget that this is why we are here. This is why Jesus died. This is why God chose us to be holy, predestined us to adoption, and redeemed us from sin. God wanted to bless a people wholly devoted to blessing him. He makes praise natural for us by richly blessing us. He has made us his treasure. Praise him for giving us the first fruits of the Spirit while we wait for him to obtain us. Tell your children what God has done. Tell the world.

## **Conclusion**

After John sees heaven and earth pass away, God makes a beautiful declaration in **Revelation 21:3–7**. “*And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away... The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son.’*” One day God will redeem us so he can have his heritage and we can have ours. He will have us as sons and we will have him as our Father for eternity. Build your faith in the word of truth so that - when fleshly pains and temptations war against you - you can see the Spirit’s fruit in your life and remember you have this identity and future. You are God’s heritage.

## Hearts Enlightened (Ephesians 1:15-23)

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God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. God chose us before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless. In love God predestined us to adoption as sons. We have redemption from sin through Christ's blood. God lavished all wisdom and insight on us so we know God's final plan to unite all things under Christ. God set us aside as his heritage and gave us his Spirit to assure us that we are his and to give us a downpayment on our inheritance until he obtains us. We have finished Paul's first major sentence from verses 3-14.

Having never seen how each sentence ties to the next in Ephesians, I have been wondering how Paul can transition from "every spiritual blessing." We have seen how the most important response we can have is to praise God's glory. This is the awesome purpose for which God created us. But what do we do next? Paul shows us in Ephesians 1:15-23 what must now follow when he recounts how he does not cease to pray because of what God has done. But why is prayer such an important response to these blessings? What are the contents of Paul's unceasing prayers? Notice Ephesians 1:15-16.

### **Pray with Thanksgiving (1:15-16)**

Paul's first prayer is a thanksgiving. But why? Remember that Paul wrote this letter from prison (cf. Ephesians 3:1, 4:1, 6:20). Put yourself in Paul's shoes for a moment. You travel thousands of miles by foot and by sea to city after city, staying in people's homes, and sharing the gospel with them. You come to love them. You share your heart and life with them. Months and years pass while you admonish them night and day. When you leave these "children" you know false teachers will come, but you know you will not be there to help. In fact, you know you will never see them again. As you sit in chains six years later, you have to feel so helpless wondering how these Christians are fairing.

Parents, you know the helpless feeling you have when you send your kids off to school after putting years of blood, sweat, and tears into them. You are anxiously hoping and praying they will not crash and burn. Paul saying he has heard of the Ephesians' faith in the Lord and love toward saints is proof they did not fall. This is what Paul hoped to hear because this is the essence of the Christian walk.

Paul says "*For this reason...*" he does not cease giving thanks to God for the Ephesians. Paul gives thanks to God for these Christians because Paul has worked tirelessly for their souls and God has moved heaven and earth to pour all of heaven's goodness into their lives - and now Paul hears that God's spiritual blessings have not been vain. When Paul's sits in prison praying endlessly for the souls he loves so much, the joy and comfort and thanksgiving he received from this report had to be great.

When we serve, shepherd, teach, care and pray for souls, we often have no clue if God's blessings and our labor are changing anything. There is no greater heartbreak than hearing that no life change has resulted. But when we work and pray for one another and see God give them everything, there is just not greater joy than to hear that fruit has been born in their life. I have only been with you 14 months, but I cannot describe the joy and encouragement I experience when I see God move you to trust Jesus more and love his saints more. It is a gift to catch you serving, teaching, praying for, and reaching out to a weaker member or answering an unbeliever's questions.

I have had many experiences of this over the past year. I remember when I found out about the Weekly Alief/Alston Road Lady's Class. To just find out off-hand that you meet week after week to consume God's word and serve the saints here - it was so great. I thank God for you - and I need to thank God for you more. Let us praise God for giving us all spiritual blessings, but let us also not cease thanking God when we are encouraged by how his blessings cause faith and love in each others' lives. It is a wonderful reminder that our work is not in vain. It is a sign that God did not choose us, Jesus did not die for us, and the Spirit has not sealed us in vain. You would not expect that Paul could possibly pray for anything else - but he does. Notice verses 16-23.

### **Pray for Enlightenment (1:16-23)**

Knowing the Ephesians have received every spiritual blessing and that they have faith in Jesus and love for all the saints, Paul says he asks God to give the Ephesians a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God. The most recent updates of the ESV and NIV capitalize the word "spirit." It is possible Paul is telling the Ephesians that he asks God to give them the miraculous gifts of the Spirit in wisdom and revelation (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:31, 14:1-5, 39); however, it is much more likely that most translations are correct to keep the 's' lowercase to refer to our spirit. Paul wants the Ephesians to have alert spirits as they experience God's blessings. Paul is asking God to give the Ephesians spirits, hearts, or dispositions seeking wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God.

Why did the Spirit inspire Paul to record this prayer in his letter? Brothers and sisters, it is because God does not want us to develop complacent hearts. As Peter O'Brien writes, "He does not assume that because everything is theirs in Christ they do not need to grow in their understanding or experience of these Christian blessings." How many become disciples and receive every spiritual blessing, but do not have spirits of wisdom and revelation that seek to increase in their knowledge of God? There is a song that cheerfully proclaims, "I need no other argument, I need no other plea, it is enough that Jesus died, and that He died for me." This song may have a place, but it can make it sound like it is okay for us to be satisfied with ignorance of everything we have in Christ, as long as we know Jesus died to save us from Hell. If we see we are in this camp - satisfied with our current knowledge of God - let us know that we must not remain in this mindset.

It is not that we need to grow in our knowledge about Bible facts. We cannot truly begin to know God outside of the Bible, but being aware of inspired information is not life changing. We would not say someone knew us if they read an online dating profile about us - the same is true for growing in our knowledge of God. Having this spirit means we want to know more of God's heart, more of God's character, more of what God sees in the world, and more of what he wants from us.

When we come to know God more, Paul's prayer is that the eyes of our hearts will be enlightened to know three things. Notice verses 18-19 again. **First**, Paul prays that we will know the hope to which we have been called. This speaks to the future God has secured for us. One day we will be with God and we will see Jesus face to face. One day we will be surrounded by saints who love and praise God. We will receive full adoption with God as our Father and Jesus as our brother. We have great hope!

**Second**, Paul prays that we will know what are the riches of God's glorious inheritance in the saints. We studied two weeks ago how we are God's inheritance and heritage. We are God's possession. Once we were not a people and we were not anything special. But now we are God's people and we have been given great blessings through the downpayment of the Spirit on our inheritance. Those who are God's inheritance are no longer spiritually poor, they are so rich!

**Third**, Paul prays for us to know the immeasurable greatness of God's power is towards we who believe. We do not think very much about power in our culture. We have many religious and political freedoms. Through our wealth and intellect we think that we mold our own future. But we need to see the true reality is that we have no power or control without God. What power do we have over diseases? What power do we have over the nukes in Iran or over radical Islamists? We do not even have power over ourselves. On our own we cannot even prevent being taken captive by Satan to do his will and serve our flesh. We are powerless over every physical and spiritual power.

It is for this reason that Paul wants us to know God's power toward us who believe. What is so neat about this is how Paul says God demonstrates his power toward us in a real, relevant way through Christ. The powers that existed mocked, abused, and killed Jesus. Yet God took one who wore our perishable flesh and raised him from death to a position of power - to rule over every power in this age and ages to come. No matter what we fear and no matter if every physical and spiritual foe of darkness seeks to strike us down and capture us - God raised Jesus from the dead to be our head so we could know the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us is far greater.

This prayer is so unique because Paul is not praying for us to be apart of God's rich inheritance or that God will use his great power for us. Paul is praying that we would have the eyes of our hearts enlightened to really know and experience how awesome it is to have these spiritual blessings. If all we have gained so far from our five studies in

Ephesians is a clinical memorization of the fact that God chose us, predestined us to adoption, redeemed us, gave us insight, and made us his heritage - our studies have not been fruitful. We have slowed down with each of these blessings so our hearts can be enlightened to truly know and experience what we have in Christ. Without this enlightenment, God may preordain our future, but we will not have hope. God may make his power available to us, but we will not ask for it.

## **Conclusion**

We may know and experience some of these things, but so did the Ephesians and Paul still prayed for them. The prayer is that we would know God more so our hearts would be enlightened to know more of our hope, riches, and power through Jesus. How can we do this?

- 1. Ask God to give you a spirit that seeks to know God so you can be enlightened to know.** It is great to pray for God's blessings, but we have been given every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. Let us start praying more and more that we would know how rich those blessings are.
- 2. Re-study Ephesians 1:1-14.** If it did not sink in before, go back and read it. Study each blessing. Write about each blessing. Pray and thank God for each spiritual gift. If you struggle seeing their relevance, go back and listen to the sermons on the website to re-ignite your studies.
- 3. Study the Bible to grow in knowing God and knowing all we have been given.** Ephesians is just one place where we learn about God and our spiritual blessings in Christ. All scripture is given to reveal to us God's glory and greatness. Do not read Scripture to check it off of a list. Read Scripture to know and love God. As you read, allow God to enlighten your heart to understand the hope, riches, and power we have in Christ. Only through hearts enlightened to know these blessings can God change our lives and be glorified in us. Be enlightened.

## You Are Saved (Ephesians 2:1-10)

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The first word of Ephesians 2 is “*And*.” After praising God for giving us every spiritual blessing, Paul says he does not cease praying that their hearts would be enlightened to know how blessed they are. God wants us to know the hope we have been called to, what are the riches of God’s inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of God’s power toward we who believe. The first word of Ephesians 2 is “*And*” because Paul has not described what the immeasurable greatness of God’s power toward believers is. Paul has only described how God demonstrated this power when he raised Christ from the dead to sit in the heavenly places above all rulers in all ages.

Before we see the greatness of God’s power toward believers and why he used this power toward us, we need to ask why we need heaven’s blessings and God’s power in the first place. The answer to this question is seen in Ephesians 2:1-3 when Paul tells us who and what we once were. Once we see this, it becomes clear why our only hope is belief in God’s power. Notice Ephesians 2:1-3.

### **You Were Dead (2:1-3)**

We must not miss how shocking it is to hear these words for the first time. “*And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked.*” Would you have described yourself in this way before Christ found you? We would like to look back to our life before Christ and say we were miserably aware of this deadness in our spirits, but we were probably clueless of how bad off we were. We did not see ourselves as sinners - those were the thieves and murderers we heard about on TV. We were normal! But if we notice why Paul says we were dead in our sins we will see why we felt this way.

Paul says in verse 2 we were dead in our sins because we were following the course of this world. We felt like normal people when we were dead in sin because we are normal when we are dead in sin. Paul says in verse 3 we were dead in our sins because we were living in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind. Sadly, we usually feel quite safe following our passions and what is normal. In fact, we use what is normal and what our passions are to comfort ourselves and to give one another counsel. “It is perfectly *normal* to do x-y-z.” “Just do what *feels right* to you.” We tell kids, “Follow your passion!” Paul says this is what killed us. According to verses 2-3, this killed us because when we followed the world and our desires, we were really following Satan - the prince of the power of the air. We can learn a couple of things from this.

**First**, let’s always remember that we were dead and we all once lived in the passions of our flesh. We have all followed Satan and had his spirit work in our hearts. If we do not see that we were spiritually dead and followers of Satan before, we should be frightened. How can we live and appreciate a contrasting life if we do not know that we were dead and what we were doing when we were dead?

**Second**, think about everyone around you outside of Christ. They are dead. They are sons of disobedience. They are not good people. They may be ignorant of this, but they are not innocent. Every single one of them is following Satan. We make God weary when we say someone is not a Christian but that they are a good person. *“Woe to those who call evil good...”* (Isaiah 5:20). Many protest at this, but those who do not give their lives for God’s glory are dead. This knowledge will help us not be so casual about sharing the gospel. This knowledge will also help us not be so naive so we are not deceived by the “it is okay because it is normal” argument.

**Third**, we must not listen to our fleshly passions and desires. Every day I feel the weight of living in a world that tells us to do what feels right to us. “What do you want to watch on TV?” “How would you like to spend your time today?” “Where do you want to live?” “What do you want to do with your life?” Choices are made based on what I think, what my passion is, and what feels best for my flesh. We are crucified if we ever ask what God wants. From small decisions to large ones, Satan is programming us to feel good about carrying out our passions and the desires of our body and mind.

How would you finish this sentence? “I have a passion for...” The word *“epithumia”* (“passion”) is used 38 times in the New Testament, three of which are positive uses. Jesus desired to eat the passover with his disciples (Luke 22:15). Paul had a passion to depart and be with Christ and he desired to see the Thessalonians (Philippians 1:23; 1 Thessalonians 2:17). All other uses are negative (Hoehner, 318-319). Our passions and desires are rarely holy. Jesus says in the parable of the sower “desires for other things” cause many to be fruitless (Mark 4:19). Next time we impulsively desire something - let’s pause. We died because we carried out fleshly desires, so we do not have to act on these desires. If our passion does not relate to God and his people or is not specifically condoned in Scripture, do not “obey your thirst.” Dethrone it and seek holy passions. Regardless, the message here is the same: you were dead. But God’s immeasurable power toward us is seen in 2:4-9.

### **You Are Saved (2:4-9)**

The first words of verse 4, *“But God,”* are wonderful. Irrespective of what we did, God acted. God demonstrated his power when he raised Christ from the dead to sit in the heavenly places. Now Paul shows us what the immeasurable greatness of God’s power toward us is in verses 5-6. We were sons of disobedience who obeyed our fleshly desires and followed Satan. But *when we were dead*, God made us alive with Christ and raised us up to sit with him in the heavenly places. You have been saved. The power of this message lies in the means by which we are now alive. Verse 5: *“... by grace you have been saved...”* Verse 8: *“For by grace you have been saved through faith,”* and *“This is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.”* Verse 9: *“Not a result of works...”* Paul continues to repeat the same message. You did not do this, God did. You are saved by grace.

I hope it is obvious why Paul hits this so much. It is because we struggle to get it through our thick skulls that we cannot save ourselves by our own power. Turning away from sin to live in holiness now does not change what we did in the past. We have already acted dishonorably. We already gave control of our lives to Satan. We are already condemned. We are in the last seconds of the Super Bowl and we are losing 98-0. The most spectacular touchdown ever does not change our loss. In the final seconds, the other team's owner has come to our benches and - ignoring all trade deadlines - has offered to pay any cost to let us share in the honor of being on his team when he wins the Lombardi.

Everything in us says this is not right or fair. We do not deserve this. We are right - except that it is eternal life and honor with Christ in the heavenly places that we do not deserve. Nothing we do can earn this. But Paul says in verse 4 that God did this because he is "*rich in mercy*" and "*because of the great love with which he loved us.*" While we happily committed shameful things in the dark, God loved us with great love. God's love for us truly surpasses knowledge (3:18-19).

Paul says in verse 8 that our part in receiving grace is faith. This is where it gets tough. It is not tough because God expects us to achieve great feats of strength and righteousness. It is difficult because we have to stop believing in ourselves, our desires, our wisdom, and our works to receive God's gift. We have to go against our nature and stop following the world and our flesh. We have to tune out those voices and trust God has life and joy - even when our flesh does not understand.

Let us be clear. Faith does not take God's gift of life with a casual attitude and that rejects walking in his light. Furthermore, if we take his gift of life and then say we are going to earn it, we insult God's gift. There is no place for these puffed up attitudes of pride - whether we take God's gift for granted or we think God gives us his gift because of our good works. The only souls God receives are the ones who believe in him because they are so broken by their sin and so thankful for his love. You were dead, but because God loves you with great love, you are alive!

### **Why God Saved You (2:7-10)**

But in his typical fashion, God does not just tell us what he did - he gives us insight into why he did it. Consider three reasons why God decided to save us by grace through faith.

**1. "*So that in the coming ages, he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus*" (2:7).** After God gives us this amazing gift of grace and seats us with Christ in the heavenly places, we initially have great confidence. But after falling into sin and seeing more of our weaknesses, we have all probably started doubting that God will continue to be merciful to us. We think he is willing to forgive the big sins in the beginning, but not into the future. But we have been seated with him in the heavenly places and God is telling us he gave us this initial gift so he could show us the

immeasurable riches of his grace in *coming* ages! This makes sense. Parents do not adopt a child so they can be stingy with them later. Parents adopt children to show them more love and kindness into the future. In fact, the future displays of love are greater than the initial ones. Our greatest experience of grace has not yet been experienced. God has seated us with Christ so he can continue lavishing grace on us into the future. We are so blessed to call God our Father!

**2. "... so that no one may boast" (2:9).** It is natural to wonder why God would promise us so much when our works do not deserve this. But we are not seeing this from God's perspective. We are thinking of how unfair it is to receive all of heaven's blessings for free. Verse 9 reminds us to think of God's glory. God unfairly gives us everything because he wants us to boast in him, not in ourselves. We have spoken of the need to live for God's glory, but let us take care to not fail in this by pausing to gander at our good works. Certainly, we should test ourselves and make sure we are walking right. But we fall into a trap when we take our eyes off of what God has done and think of all we have done. We start comparing ourselves to others to make ourselves feel good. We start trusting our works instead of God. Christians let us "feel good" because of how little we deserve the great love with which God loves us. Let us not take glory from the one to whom we owe our very existence.

**3. So we could be "his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (2:10).** Our purpose is to glorify God, but this is one key way we bring glory to God. We were walking in sin and God saved us by grace so the dead could be raised to walk in good works. So, are we doing what we were created to do? Christians do not only flee wickedness. Are we waking each day to praise God and to show our love for God by walking in good works? Good works do not consist of driving an eco car, recycling, brushing our teeth, voting, and "going to church." Many opportunities have been offered - are you taking them? Are we walking in service towards others? Are we sacrificing our time and possessions to meet others' needs? Are we living to share the gospel with those in darkness? A life cluttered by acting on what my body and mind desire is not excusable. We died because we did whatever we wanted before. God has now made us alive and given us eyes to see the darkness. We have been saved by grace through *faith*. Will we have faith that God's works and desires are better than our natural inclination to follow the world and carry out our passions? I am thankful for those who are walking in good works. Let us flee from the selfishness of the dark into the selfless life of good works. Be saved. Be God's workmanship.

## You Are Reconciled (Ephesians 2:11-22)

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Modern Christian understanding rarely progress beyond Ephesians 2:10. "I was dead, now I am forgiven, alive, and saved by grace - that is all I need to know." We can slip into these basic, individualistic views of salvation. It is important to appreciate this aspect of what Christ has done in us; however, Paul continues past Ephesians 2:10 because there is more to our spiritual identity in Christ. In Ephesians 2:1-10, Paul described our past, present, and resulting future. We were dead, we are alive and saved by grace, and God will show us the immeasurable riches of his grace in coming ages. This is a helpful structure to see because in verses 11-22 Paul explains another problematic past, another blessed present, and another resulting future. Let's see our past in Ephesians 2:11-12.

### You Were Separated (2:11-12)

Since Paul is writing to a predominately uncircumcised, Gentile church, we can receive Paul's words directly. Paul tells us to "*remember.*" But before he explains what we must remember, he addresses us as "*Gentiles in the flesh, called 'the uncircumcision' by what is called the circumcision...*" Since we do not live in the first century, we do not immediately feel the weight of this identity. The Jews calling the everyone else "Gentiles" and "the uncircumcision" reeked of an attitude of superiority. The fact that there is even a separate title for those who are not Jewish ("Gentile") tells us this. Though the attitude was inappropriate, it was true that being born Jewish came with advantages over being born Gentile.

The disadvantages of being uncircumcised Gentiles are precisely what Paul tells us to remember in verse 12. We were separated from Christ, alienated from citizenship in Israel, strangers to the covenants of promise, without hope, and without God. Israel had all this. **Romans 9:4-5**, "*4 They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. 5 To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever.*" Do you want to know the Messiah and Christ? Too bad! The Messiah is from the Jews. Do you want to read the Scriptures to know God more? Sorry, the Scriptures were entrusted to Israel. Would you like to worship God with his people? Foreigners die if they come near the temple! Naaman had to bring Israel's dirt to Syria and worship God there. Do you want security in God's covenants of promise? YHWH's covenant is with Abraham's offspring, not you!

Though Gentiles could find God outside of Israel, Jesus' words to the Samaritan woman in **John 4:22** more accurately describe most Gentiles. "*You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.*" Imagine what it would be like to live in a Gentile nation of idolaters, know what YHWH had done for Israel, conclude he alone is God, and yet be unable to participate in Israel's worship and covenant. Gentiles fumbled in the dark, but with Israel there was every advantage. This is why Gentiles

accepted circumcision as grown men. They wanted to live in Israel and enjoy some of what they had. This is why Ruth's words to Naomi in **Ruth 1:16** are both beautiful and enlightening. "... where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God." Boaz later tells Ruth that when she came to Israel, she took refuge under the wings of YHWH, the God of Israel. Separation from Naomi and Israel is separation from the God of Israel and from security with his people. Choosing Israel meant choosing the Lord.

We were strangers to Israel, to Israel's savior, to Israel's covenant, to Israel's hope, and to Israel's God. Paul instructs us to remember this because remembering our past is the only way our eyes can be enlightened to truly and more deeply how rich we are as God's inheritance in the saints. Let us not forget how hopeless we were separated from God's people. Notice our present situation in 2:13-18.

### **You Are Reconciled (2:13-18)**

Though we were once far off, in Christ we are brought near. Christ does not only bring peace - he himself is our peace. Verse 14 speaks of a metaphorical wall of hostility that separated the world from Israel and consequently from Israel's God. Paul says in verses 14 and 16 that Christ broke down this dividing wall of hostility and killed the hostility. This is why the gospel is called "*the gospel of peace*" (Ephesians 6:15) and "*the good news of peace through Jesus Christ*" (Acts 10:36).

But how did Christ to break down this separating wall of hostility and make peace? Verse 15 says Jesus did this by abolishing, nullifying, or rendering inoperative "*the law of commandments expressed in ordinances.*" I initially tried to read this as Christ only nullifying the Mosaic ceremonial laws, but Paul does not speak of a portion of the Law. He simply says Christ caused the law of commandments to cease operating. To understand this, I had to ask two questions.

**1. What does the text say Jesus' goal was in rendering the law of commandments inoperative?** Verse 15 says nullifying the Law allowed Christ create "*in himself one new man in the place of two...*" Verse 16 says nullifying the Law allowed Christ to "*reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross...*" To summarize, rendering the Law inoperative allowed Christ to kill the hostility and make peace. Jews and Gentiles are reconciled into one body and, as verses 16-18 say, both are reconciled to God in one body, both have peace with God, and both have access in one Spirit to the Father.

**2. What was the function of the Law that required Jesus to make it cease operations in order to reconcile Jews and Gentiles into one body and reconcile both to God?** Within the context, the Law did two things that prevented this full reconciliation. First, as long as the Law of Moses stood, it completely separated Jews from Gentiles. Circumcision, food laws, marriage laws, and worship restrictions all ensured that there was a "wall" that

completely separated the two. The Law is the wall. Second, the Law is good, but it does make Jews or Gentiles right with God. Instead, because sin dwells in our flesh and deceives us into disobeying God, the Law points out our sin and our separation from God (cf. Romans 3:19-20, 7:4-13ff; Galatians 3:20-21).

Christ himself is our peace because it is in him that all the hostility and separation can be killed. In Christ, previously hostile parties - no matter their past, nationality, or blood type - are joined to the same body, nation, church, and family. As **Galatians 3:27-29** says, *"27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise."* We are no longer separated from Christ, from the true spiritual Israel, or from the covenants of promise. Furthermore, in Christ, the Law loses all its condemning power so that we can all have peace with God. As **Colossians 2:13-14** says, Christ did this forgiving us and by cancelling *"the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross."* Let us praise God because in Christ all the hostility is now dead.

We need to make something clear in our relativistic and pluralistic culture. So far in Ephesians Paul has said this all happens "in Christ" and "in him" 15 times and he will still say it more. Paul does not say everyone now has peace with God by default as if Christ died so he could say "it's all good" and to tell us to stay where we previously were. I have to battle this as well, but people have lost their fear of God. People grow up automatically assuming that - "if there is a God"- God is okay with us. Everyone is the same. We are all part of one big family who will live with God in the end. Christians, we must flee from this relativism and pluralism. God does not let "nice" people live with him. Those in Christ are part of God's inheritance in the saints and it is in Christ that we are reconciled to God.

As Galatians 3:27-29 says, we must also remember that those who obey God's call to be baptized into Christ are now in Christ and part of us. There are false teachers and those who follow them, but when it comes to those who are truly in Christ, we must make no distinctions between Jew or Greek, male or female, rich or poor. "Red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in his sight." I appreciate the diversity in this body, but man's natural inclination is to segregate by nationality and social status. We have a family friend here in Texas who, for the last two decades, has been told by members and elders in churches and cities we are familiar with that, because he is an African American, he will never be able to serve as an elder in their church. This is shameful. Let us keep the hostility dead and truly live in this Christ-authored unity between God and his people. We have seen our past disadvantages and our present advantages. Let's read 2:19-22 to see our resulting future.

## **You Are Being Built Together (2:19-22)**

There are three current and future results spoken of here. First, we are fellow citizens. Before, Gentiles became proselytes to enjoy any privileges in Israel because foreigners and aliens have no rights. We can often miss how important citizenship is. The moment we walk on another nation's soil, we lose all the rights and privileges we had at home. My family is from San Diego. My brother Brent has spoken of how, when his friends wanted to go have fun across the border in Tijuana, he would try explaining to them how dangerous that was. If anything goes wrong, you are at the mercy of the Mexican government. You have no rights. You do not receive the benefit of the doubt. In Christ, we Gentiles are now citizens who have the same rights Abraham, Moses, David, and all Israel had. The prophesied blessings regarding the new Israel and the Messiah do and will belong to us!

The second result in this text is that we are "*members of the household of God...*" As fellow citizens, we are members in the same family of God. Jewish Christians are not superior to Gentile Christians. Unless someone acts rebelliously, there is no distinction among children in the family. We are the new spiritual Israel and we are all family. We should appreciate that we are family more. Christ did not make peace so our picture could be put on a board and we could come to church. God's household is not something to be attended. It is something we are part of - and it is a privilege. There is truly no more important family than this one. Serving our physical family is Biblical, but Jesus told his disciples to leave family to follow him, not to "focus on the family." The purpose, activity, and future of most physical families is not the same as these in God's family. We will give verse 20 another pass in the next study, but notice the purpose and future of God's household in verses 20-22.

A holy temple in the Lord is being built. Since the beginning, man has needed a fit place for God to dwell among us so we can meet and have life and joy with our Father. The Garden of Eden, the tabernacle in the wilderness, and Solomon's temple all imperfectly served this purpose temporarily. Both the unclean and the foreigners were prohibited from entering and God was not there in his fullness. Solomon's prayer in 1 Kings 8 shows us we need God's dwelling among us because this means God will be near us to respond to us and our cries for help. The temple is a place where people come to know and offer worship to God. There is no crying, toil, sickness, or dying in the fullness of God's presence; yet, these have existed in great magnitude all along. When Ephesians was written, Herod's temple stood in Jerusalem. But soon it would be destroyed to signify to all that a new city, a new temple, a new dwelling place for God was being built where God would fully dwell.

It is a theological shock, but God has been growing his saints into a holy temple to the Lord and you and I are being built into this dwelling place for God. We still face toil, sickness, mourning, death, and sin, but Christ's enemies are being vanquished, Christ has

cleansed us, and Christ has sent his Spirit to transform us into the perfect bride and the perfect place for God to make his home.

The end of being built together as this temple and dwelling place for God is seen in Revelation 21. We will need no special, separate place to meet him in the end - for he will be fully with his cleansed and sanctified people. **Revelation 21:1-4**, "<sup>1</sup> Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. <sup>2</sup> And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. <sup>3</sup> And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. <sup>4</sup> He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.'" **Revelation 21:9-11**, "<sup>9</sup> Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me, saying, 'Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.' <sup>10</sup> And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, <sup>11</sup> having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal." **Revelation 21:22-23**, "<sup>22</sup> And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. <sup>23</sup> And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb."

We were at enmity with God and at enmity with each other. But now we have been reconciled for a great purpose. What a blessing to no longer be foreigners. What a joy and a privilege to be citizens in God's family. Brothers and sisters, let us be pure and grow as a proper dwelling place for our holy God. Let us set aside all hostility and work together to build each other up and add to God's family.

## God Displays Wisdom in Us (Ephesians 3:1-13)

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Everyone loves a good mystery. There is something exciting about having a pile of seemingly unrelated details that you know point to a solution. When the mystery involves questions about us, the anticipation for a solution is ramped up. We compile evidence, ask questions, and speculate to no end. Paul says in Ephesians 3 that God had a mystery which relates to us Gentiles. Though all nations live under the curse of sin, the Law and Prophets anticipate a time when all nations could be blessed in Abraham. Some passages speak of how God's servant would bring salvation to the world. Others speak of Gentiles praising God with Israel. But how could the Gentiles receive salvation through Abraham and the Jewish Messiah? How could Gentiles worship with Israel when circumcision and the Law divided the two? Why would God invite more into a covenant with him? All this is answered in Ephesians 2:11-3:1-13. This text can really be divided by asking 4 questions. How can we know the mystery (3:1-5)? What is the solution to the mystery (3:6)? What job does Paul have with this mystery (3:7-9)? What is God's goal in revealing this mystery (3:10-13)? Like this passage, our study today will focus less on the actual mystery and more on how God reveals the mystery and why God reveals this solution. Let's begin by reading **verses 1-5**.

### **1. How Can We Know the Mystery? (3:1-5)**

God did not make the solution to his mystery known to people in other generations, but he has now revealed it to his apostles and prophets by the Spirit. Paul is an apostle, so God revealed the mystery to Paul. It is interesting to consider how God wants everyone to know this mystery, but God does not do this by giving everyone a direct revelation. This is a big misunderstanding today. People are told to listen for God's voice. Millions claim that God speaks to them. This is the opposite of what Paul says here. God's mystery was finally revealed 2000 years ago, but God only revealed it directly to the apostles and prophets. This is essence of what it took to be an apostle and prophet. Apostles were firsthand eye-and-ear witnesses of Christ's resurrection and of God's words (Acts 2:21-22; 2 Peter 1:16-18; 1 John 1:1-4); prophets were firsthand earwitnesses of God's words (2 Peter 1:20-21).

How can we know God's mystery? Notice verses 3-4. When God made known the mystery to Paul by revelation, Paul wrote it in this letter. When the Ephesians read this and when we read this today, we can perceive Paul's insight into the mystery of Christ. This is an awesome blessing. This matches with Paul's prayer in Ephesians 1:16-23. Our hearts will be enlightened to have all the insight of the apostles and prophets when we read what they wrote with wise spirits craving to know God. This does not excite people today. People want a special experience. This is sad because we have been given the full revelation of God's mystery and will, but it is often ignored because the real desire is for the supernatural experience. Paul's words here should excite us because we do not have

wait for a direct revelation. All the revelation God says we need is written here by the apostles and prophets.

We are so blessed to have the fullness of God's written word so easily accessible to us. But what was once hidden is only revealed to us if we access and read the Bible. I fear at times that we can take the accessibility of God's word for granted. It is old hat. We know it and understand it. We need to have the heart Paul prayed for that does not see God's word as mundane. When you read the Bible, think of it as it is: it is the holy, heart-enlightening, mystery-revealing, and life-changing revelation of God.

## **2. What Is the Solution to the Mystery? (3:6)**

How could God bless Gentiles and cause them to praise God with Israel when there is only one chosen, circumcised people? How could Jews and Gentiles have a relationship with God together when the Law separated Jews from Gentiles and people from God? Jews and Gentiles anticipated the solving of this mystery. The answer to the mystery is found in the aspects of the gospel we studied in Ephesians 2:13-22: Christ abolished the hostility-creating Law through the cross so Gentiles could be fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise.

These first six verses are so exciting because they tell us that everyone is on a level plane. Through the written word, everyone has equal access to knowing God and the revelation he gave his apostles and prophets. Through Christ, everyone can join the same body of believers and become equal heirs to the promises of God. There are no special groups with special privileges or special knowledge within God's family. Jews and Gentiles who believe in Christ have the same revelation and blessings.

Even in this local body with varying gifts and functions, there is nothing different about the access each of us have to God and his will. I used to wonder if preachers and elders had unique strength and knowledge. I quickly learned this is not the case. The blessings I have from God, the things I do, and the things I preach and teach come from the equal access we all have. God does not speak to me directly and I am not an heir to a unique body or unique blessings. God has laid out all mysteries and blessings on the table. We can have the same insight and be heirs to the same promises - we just have to read what he wrote with the same yearning and faith. When I preach and teach, I am only sharing what I have read in God's word. I have zero original ideas about how we should live our lives.

We can see how wise God is to put us all on the same level when we see how often religion turns into a power play. People say, "I know something you do not" and "I have a blessing you don't have." God did not even have Jesus or his apostles act like this. This should empower a desire to know God. There is no barrier preventing us from drawing as near to God as any human ever has. You do not need to be born a certain way. You do not

need a certain education or degree. I have an Accounting degree and served food in college. All you need is to read God's word. If you follow Christ, never believe you cannot understand God's word or that you aren't part of the same body we are all part of.

### **3. What Was Paul's Job with This Mystery? (3:7-9)**

God's plan had been hidden in God's mind for ages. Though Paul was the least of all the saints, God gave Paul the task of being a steward and servant of this good news. The reason there is so much depth in the word God's apostles and prophets wrote is because the rich blessings they speak of are so deep and unsearchable. Paul's job was to preach to the Gentiles these unsearchable riches of Christ and bring to light God's plan and mystery to everyone without any discrimination.

When we read Acts 21-22, we find that Paul's preaching of this all-inclusive message to Jews and Gentiles is precisely what caused Paul to write this letter from prison. Acts 21:27-28 and 22:17-22 show this fact. This is why Paul says in Ephesians 3:1 that he is *"a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles..."* And yet, knowing the suffering that awaited him in each city and in Jerusalem, Paul says he saw his mission as a gift of grace and he spoke boldly - bringing this truth to all.

How could he do this? Paul saw himself as the least of all saints. When we realize we deserve nothing, God emboldens us when he gives us everything he has. God has revealed to us through the apostles that in Christ every single person can know God's will, join his household, and receive his promises. We deserve nothing, but we have been saved by this message. Let us see the gift God has given us to boldly proclaim the good news of peace and happiness. Notice **verse 13**. Even if this results in suffering, in being rejected, or in watching the suffering of others, we should not lose heart. But why should we not lose heart when we or others suffer for proclaiming this gospel? God has a comforting purpose in revealing the mystery through Paul. Notice **3:10-13**.

### **4. What Is God's Goal in Revealing This Mystery? (3:10-12)**

"Manifold" means "many and various," "multi-faceted," or "immense." God graced Paul with the task of preaching this mystery in Christ so that through the church the manifold and multifaceted wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in heavenly places. Rulers and authorities in heavenly places can be good, but the focus here is clearly on the evil ones who need to know the manifold wisdom of God. Paul says our battle is against these spiritual forces of evil in Ephesians 6:12. We do not think of them much, but these forces are also referred to in Job, Daniel, the Gospels, and Revelation. When these evil forces are seen, they are described as princes at work in other nations - battling the holy activity of God and his spiritual forces in Israel. Satan and these evil forces accuse God's people and lead humankind - the sons of disobedience - away from God. This is a very invisible and confusing world to us; yet, Ephesians 1:21 says God seated Jesus at his right hand in the heavenly places far above all rule, authority,

power, and dominion. Through us - Jesus' church - God is making known his diverse wisdom to these evil rulers and authorities.

Yet, how is it, because of Paul preaching God's mystery, that God's wisdom is made known to them through the church? Through Christ, God invites Jews and Gentiles to know, worship and follow him; yet, not all worship him. Others follow the "prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience" and they are spiritually dead for doing so. But in Christ, these sons of disobedience from all nations who once followed the world and these evil forces are of their own free will choosing to join a different people and serve a different ruler - the King of Kings, Jesus Christ the Lord. They love him and never want to leave him. Who could draw men and women from all walks, fleshly desires, and nations under the influence of evil rulers to himself? It is only God in his immense goodness and wisdom who can do this. Only God can change evil, selfish people and join them in harmony to praise his name. It is in us - Christ's growing, diverse, and large church that God's wisdom is displayed to the rulers and authorities in heavenly places. This was part of God's eternal purpose, and he has realized it in Christ Jesus our Lord. Let's conclude with a fifth question.

## **5. What Does This Mean for Us?**

- A. There is value in learning and having knowledge in academics and practices in this world, but let us set the writings of the apostles and prophets at the center of our attention. Let us pursue the God's revelation with hunger, curiosity, and eagerness. Let us not do this to gain intelligence or to impress people with our Scripture-quoting abilities. Let us seek Scripture because the path to righteousness and the unsearchable riches of Christ are revealed in it. In no other learning and in knowing no one else will we find riches like those found in Christ and revealed in God's word.
- B. When we pursue knowledge of God's mysteries and of the riches of Christ, we will no longer be fumbling saints who do not know what God has revealed. We will have the insight of God's apostles and prophets. Then we will be able to confidently speak from our experience and knowledge of these riches and point others to the Scriptures where God has illuminated them.
- C. When we or others suffer for illuminating these riches to all, do not lose heart. Many will not listen, but when we and those we teach choose of our own free will to stop following the evil powers in this world to listen to the Spirit of Christ and obey the King of Kings - we and they are participating in God's eternal purpose God. Do not lose heart because in us, God displays his manifold wisdom to all in heaven and earth by drawing people from all nations into into Christ's kingdom to praise for his name for all eternity. Know and experience the unsearchable riches of Christ through the revealed mystery of God. Tell others. Let God show his wisdom through you.

## God's Power at Work in Us (Ephesians 3:14-21)

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Paul has told the Ephesians how he suffers since he preaches the riches of Christ to both Jews and Gentiles. He suffers to preach to the Gentiles so that - through Christ's diverse and faithful church - God can reveal his great, manifold wisdom to the rulers and authorities in heavenly places. Now Paul writes in Ephesians 3:14, "*For this reason I bow my knees before the Father...*" Prayer is Paul's main mode of writing in the first three chapters. Paul has praised God for giving us every spiritual blessing and has asked that we might truly know the great hope, riches, and power God has made available to us. Notice in **Ephesians 3:14-19** how Paul completes the first half of his letter with a third prayer.

### **God Strengthens Us (3:14-17a)**

Paul has two main requests. Paul's first prayer in verses 16-17a is that God would strengthen the Ephesians. Paul is not praying for physical power. Our enemies in the heavenly places cannot be beaten by physical power. Paul's prayer is that the Ephesians would be empowered through God's Spirit in their *inner being* and be indwelt by Christ in their hearts. Paul often writes of the Spirit and of Christ dwelling in believers. God had often promised to give the gift and downpayment of the Spirit to his people in the new covenant. Consider the prophesied impact of the Spirit in **Ezekiel 36:25-27, 31**. "*<sup>25</sup> I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. <sup>26</sup> And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup> And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules... <sup>31</sup> Then you will remember your evil ways, and your deeds that were not good, and you will loathe yourselves for your iniquities and your abominations.*" Here God promises to cleanse us from our uncleannesses, to remove our stony hearts, and to put his Spirit in us. When God does this, the picture is that God is causing people who were once not ashamed by sin to be ashamed and to begin carefully obeying God's rules. A new person is born. A new spirit - God's life-giving Spirit - now guides us.

But this not a completely instantaneous change. After being cleansed and given of God's Spirit, we have all found that God does not just zap away all our trials and temptations. We continue to need to be empowered with inner strength from God to overcome. Temptations will be put in our path, friends and family will forsake us, jobs and money will fade, our health will fail, and dark doubt will plague us. The spiritual forces of darkness will do anything to distract and weaken us. If we try giving one in these battles a self-help book, a motivational pep talk, or a wad of cash, we will see how quickly man's answers fail to strengthen the inner man. We are flesh and we will not be sinless towers, but despite feeling powerless to overcome at times, Paul's prayer here means that we do not have to be powerless. Sometimes I have found that we just need to trust that through God's life-giving, heart-training Spirit, we really can overcome. God has cleansed us from

our uncleannesses, removed our heart of stone, and has given us his Spirit. He has caused us to loathe sin and he is training us to know and to walk in God's will. When a new tenant moves into a home the home's decorations begin to reflect who its new tenants are. The Spirit has made our hearts his home and he is writing God's law inside us so our lives will reflect his power, strength, and holiness. As Paul tells Timothy in **2 Timothy 1:7**, "*God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.*"

Paul will say later in this letter that the word of God is the sword of the Spirit. It is his indispensable weapon against our spiritual foes of wickedness. Christ said his words are "*Spirit and life.*" The word is "*living and active*" and it is the Spirit's key means of strengthening, empowering, and training us. We need to be consumed with God's word because they are not just words on a page. In our weak times, let us humble ourselves, allow God's word to come to our mind, and obey where God's Spirit has trained us to go. Satan puts evil in our heart and hardens us, but we have been given softened hearts and God's Spirit can bear witness to our spirit and strengthen us with the words of truth. The more we trust God's directing, we will die and Christ will live in us. This sounds weak, but it actually leads to more strength. When we exalt ourselves, do as we desire, and commit sin, we feel weak, powerless, hopeless, and dead. But when we refuse Satan and the desires of the flesh to submit to the Spirit's leading and let Christ live in us, do not we feel empowered and full of life? This is the power we can have when we pray for and submit to God's Spirit. The more we trust God, the more God will live in and strengthen us through Christ and his Spirit and the less Satan can control us.

### **God Grounds Us (3:17b-19a)**

Paul's second request in verses 17a-19 is that the Ephesians would be rooted and grounded in love. To be rooted calls upon an image from nature. As trees grow thicker and higher, their roots are also growing deeper into the earth. When I lived in West Palm Beach my brother pointed out how impressive the palm trees are. It is shocking how powerful the gusts are in hurricanes. Despite this, one of the reasons people plant so many palm trees in tropical environments is because they withstand the winds due to their strong roots. They will tilt and curve, but they are rarely uprooted. Paul also prays for the Ephesians to be grounded. My brother also pointed out how tall towers can continue to stand even in strong winds. Just like the St. Louis arch, buildings will sway. But while the top sways the foundation remains firm because the buildings are grounded. When we think about the strong gusts Satan will bring upon us and our family, we want to be rooted and grounded so we are not blown away. What can we be rooted and grounded in to have this? Love.

This is why Paul prays what he does in verses 18-19. Our translations are somewhat awkward, but most agree that Paul is praying that the Ephesians would have the strength to comprehend the breadth, length, height, and depth of the love of Christ. He wants them to have strength to comprehend the greatness of every dimension of Christ's love.

But you have to love how Paul describes the love of Christ. Paul prays that they would have strength to comprehend and to know the love of Christ, but really, the love of Christ surpasses knowledge. Think about this. It takes God-given strength to plumb the depths of the love of Christ, but even then it surpasses our knowledge.

Paul's prayer is that we would be rooted and grounded in this love. Let's consider our own hearts. Into what have we sunk our roots? Who or what could be taken away that would cause us feel like the very foundation of our lives would be blown away with it? Nobody wants to be flakey or wishy-washy - tossed to and fro by life's storms. If we truly desire to be rooted and grounded, we must sink our roots into no thing or person but Christ the Rock and his love. We know from experience the stability Christ's love gives us. Why else does **Romans 8:31–39** impact us so much? *"If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

Our hope and strength is renewed when we read a passage like this. It helps us comprehend the love of Christ more. It tells us that no storm can separate us from Christ's love for us. Let us never think we have comprehended the depths of Christ's love - for it surpasses our knowledge. Even if we think we know everything in God's word, we have not fully comprehended Christ's love. Let us dig deep into God's word - writing, meditating, and praying about it. As we do this, let our fervent prayer be that God would help us comprehend all dimensions of his love for us.

### **Why Strengthens and Grounds Us (Ephesians 3:19b)**

Why? Paul states the aim of his prayer for strengthening and grounding in verse 19. *"... that you may be filled with all the fullness of God."* This is similar to our aim in Ephesians 4:13. *"... until we all attain to... mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."* Paul desires God to fill, complete, and perfect the Ephesians. Paul has just reminded these Gentiles how he suffers for them, so it is natural for him to pray for their strengthening and grounding. Even though we have been given great blessings, purpose, and access to God, Paul knows that many become weak. Many will lose hope when the weight of circumstances worsens. Many will be distracted from their first love and grow comfortable. Many will be enticed again by the world's pleasures and lack the strength and maturity to make righteous decisions. These dangers were real for the Ephesians and they are real for us. Paul's prayer reminds us that his thanksgiving for our

spiritual blessings, his prayers that we will comprehend the great hope, riches, and power God gives us, and his sufferings to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ are not ends in themselves. These are meant to push us forward to maturity and to being filled with God's fullness. Paul does not want God's blessings and his suffering for them to be in vain. It is "*for this reason*" and to this end that Paul bows before the Father.

I have openly stated my failures to rely on God in prayer as I should. I and we all must relentlessly pursue growth in prayer because, without conversing with our God, God will not be able to complete, perfect, and fill us. Being given innumerable spiritual blessings from God is not meant to cause us to be more independent of our Father. It is meant to cause us to bow our knees as Paul does and depend on him more. Let us pray regularly and in our dark moments that God will strengthen us through the power and self-control of his Spirit and his Son living in and through us. Let us pray also that we might know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge. Only then can we be filled with the fullness of God. Notice what our strengthening, grounding, and maturing leads to in 3:20-21.

### **God's Power in Us and God's Glory (3:20-21)**

Being filled with the fullness of God leads to two things. First, when God fills us with his fullness, God can do all we ask through his power at work in us. But notice how Paul does not say God can do all we ask, more than we ask, or far more abundantly than all we ask. God can do far more abundantly than all we ask *or think*. This power is at work in us! At times our circumstances can become so dark that we simply shake our heads. We see no way out. Next time we feel weakness and powerlessness, let's ask for God to use his great power to bring a solution. Then let's make a game of it. Look forward with hope saying, "I wonder how God will work it out this time!" He can change any situation, transform any person, and do far more abundantly than we can imagine.

Second, when God grows us to maturity, he is glorified. This has been God's aim in saving his church and this is to be the aim of our lives. The Father chose us and predetermined our destiny to be adopted by him. God redeemed us from sin by Christ's blood and told us his secret plan in Christ. God set us aside as his inheritance and marked us with his Spirit until he obtains us. We were dead, now we are alive. We had no part in the promises for God's people, but now we are in God's family. We were ignorant, but the gospel hidden for ages has been revealed to us. Put all your trust in the Father. When he empowers, indwells, perfects, and does the unthinkable in us, give him all glory.

## Maintain Unity in Attitude (Ephesians 4:1-3)

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Those with a mature perspective recognize we will find no lasting security when our trust and sense of worth is in health, wealth, career, hobbies, friends, or family. But Paul has reminded us that God has poured out every spiritual blessing of heaven for those who make Christ their Lord. The Father chose us before the creation of the world to be holy. The Father predetermined our destiny to be adopted by him. Christ redeemed us from sin by his blood. By faith, the Holy Spirit transforms and seals with God's very image to remind us that we are God's heritage. We were dead, but we have been made alive so that in the coming ages God can show us the immeasurable riches of his grace toward us. The Law separated us from the covenants of promise given to God's people, but Christ abolished the Law and brought us into God's household to build us together as God's temple. Satan seeks to weaken us, but God has given us his Spirit and made Christ's love known to us to strengthen and ground us so we can be filled with all the fullness of God. We knew nothing of God's plan or love, but he has revealed to us the mystery of his plan to unite all under Christ as head. Sons of disobedience have been given life, hope, and purpose. The Father is uniting us under the Son so his manifold wisdom and glory can be displayed to all beings in all places through us, Christ's church.

### Walk Worthy in Unity (4:1-3)

Therefore, since the Creator of all has called us to be his children for his glory, Paul urges us to walk in a manner worthy of this calling. This is not to say we will earn the sonship God calls us to; rather, there is a worthy, fitting way to walk for those who are to be God's children. If our walk is not becoming of God's children, God's wisdom will not be displayed in us. Though our walk will not be perfect, if we are fueled by the grace and power in Christ and walk by faith, God can make his glory and wisdom known through us. Paul describes what this worthy walk looks like in Ephesians 4-6.

If you had to identify the first and most important way to walk worthy of this calling to sonship, what would you say it is? Notice Paul's answer in **4:1-3**. We might naturally say a discussion on idolatry, purity, or anger should come first, but Paul first instructs us to eagerly maintain the unity of the Spirit. If we consider what the Father's plan for Christ is in Ephesians 1-3, it becomes clear why Paul instructs us to maintain our unity first. Paul has written of how God's mystery and plan has been to unite us in one body under Christ. **Ephesians 1:9-10**, "... making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth." **Ephesians 1:22-23**, "And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all." **Ephesians 2:14-16**, "For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one... that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility." **Ephesians 3:6**, "This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body,

*and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.”* God’s plan was a mystery, but the gospel reveals his plan to unite all his children into one body under Christ. This united body is how God manifests his wisdom to all beings.

Paul first instructs us to maintain our unity because if our unity is compromised, God’s very plan and project for Christ is not fulfilled in us. In a world that de-emphasizes community for individualistic expressions of “faith,” it should impact us to see the importance God puts on our unity as Christ’s body. Paul says we are the fullness of Christ. If we fail to maintain unity, we do not contribute to the growth and activity of Christ’s body. If unity is so important, how we can maintain it? There is a third way to maintain unity in verses 4-6 which we will consider later, but we will consider the first two means of maintaining unity from verses 1-3 today.

### **How to Maintain Unity (4:2-3)**

**1. We must know what unity looks like (4:3).** Paul will describe more specifically what unity looks like in action in verses 7-16, but the theoretical concept of unity in verse 3 is a good start. We must “*maintain the **unity** of the Spirit in the **bond** of peace.*” It sounds simplistic, but individualism, separation, disunity, and being without a bond is not unity. A pile of chain links is not unified. The pieces must be linked together to form a unified chain. Unfortunately, the former is a very common view of unity. Often, the perception is that if a bunch of people who have their pictures on a wall gather each week to listen to a lecture and do not fight, we have unity. Our gatherings are richer than this and are a good start and vital part of our unity; but, alone, these gatherings are not unity. If unity consists of far more than gathering, it should alarm us if we see that we are often not with the body when the body meets - especially if we do not participate in Bible classes. Bible classes are where the bonds of our community really form. This is where we discuss Scripture and bounce ideas off each other so that the body can actually move from theory to community action for Christ.

We should examine our lives and see whether we are unified with this body. A great place to test our unity and our participation in it is to read Acts 2:42-47 and ask if this is a familiar picture to us. Our examples in Scripture constantly show that walking worthy in unity requires participation together. We serve together. We serve one another. We study with each other. We teach the world together. We teach each other. We encourage each other. We correct each other. We pray together. We pray for each other. We share life together and bring others in as we grow to more perfectly follow our head - Christ. So, are you and I a solitary link, a link on a pile of chains, or are we a link connected to the chain? We will build on this picture of unity in further lessons, but we must see that unity is not just gathering and not fighting, it requires a connection and participation together. But how can we maintain and grow in this unified connection and participation once it begins to exist?

**2. We must have attitudes which maintain unity (4:2-3).** Paul says we must walk worthy “*with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit.*” Many believe unity will be maintained if we will all be in complete agreement on what Christ tells us to think and do. Though we will see how important agreement is, the very command to have these attitudes assumes that we will not always agree and therefore cannot maintain unity by having perfect agreement in everything. When do we need gentleness and patience except for when we wrong one another and disagree on what Christ says we should do? Paul will write that one of our goals is to attain to the unity of the faith. If complete unity in every aspect of the faith is what we are attaining to, we do not currently have it. It would be nice if we had already attained the goal, but this is not yet the case. I love Paul’s command to have these attitudes because it shows that God is realistic: he knows that on the road to the goal we will sometimes disagree and do the wrong thing. The question is not whether or not we will mess up and have differences, the question is whether we will act with humility, gentleness, patience, and love and maintain our unity.

Though we may not like it, bearing with one another in love when we disagree and wrong one another is something we have to get used to because these things happen in healthy families. Healthy families always have new people coming in who often say and do the wrong thing at first. We were once in their shoes! We must gently correct them, urge them on, and help them grow, remembering that we still commit errors too. We would rather not have differences, but what is so great is that Paul never says disagreements are a sign of disunity. Disagreement actually provides opportunity for us to put humility, gentleness, patience, and love to the test. If we succeed, not only will we more easily solve our disagreement, we will maintain our unity so that one day we can attain perfect unity.

It is only fitting that God calls us to have these humble, selfless attitudes toward one another. After God has been so merciful and long-suffering toward us, how could we act any differently? If we do not patiently bear with, tolerate, and accept one another in love, we are missing the gospel altogether. Those who miss these attitudes have avoided the fact that God’s entire plan was to unite us under Christ. God did not send his Son to die on a cross so that you or me and those who think like me could be redeemed. God sent his Son to die so that all his diverse children - though they would otherwise be enemies - would be reconciled to one another and reconciled to him in one body.

Christ perfectly models these attitudes. Christ’s disciples said and did many foolish things that did not match with what he desired; yet, Christ stayed with them, worked with them, and corrected them without ever resorting to ugliness. When one of us says or does something wrong and we feel the frustration building, remember Christ. Gentleness does not humiliate others into agreement with us or push others into activities they believe to be sinful. Humility does not boast of nonessential beliefs or liberties that may shock or hurt others. Patience and bearing with one another in love

does not break fellowship when we disagree on how to interpret and apply texts or when the church is not acting how we want. These situations only give us the right to bear with one another in love, gentleness, and patience. We must correct with truth and urge one another on in growth, but let us not forget the truth revealed to us here in the process. If we see fit to act without these attitudes in the name of truth, we will have denied the very truth of the gospel we think we are defending. We must allow that we may not be right when we think we are. Even if we are right, others may not be at “our level” of maturity. When we speak and act without humility and patience, we can make others want to give up. Without humility, others will never be as smart or mature as we think we are.

## **Conclusion**

It is imperative that as God’s children we employ these attitudes to maintain our unity because God is the one who has unified us. Uniting all things in heaven and earth under Christ is God’s plan for the fullness of times and is one way he reveals his wisdom and glory before all. Consider why the success of this plan to unite us all reveals his manifold wisdom and glory. No other grouping is like Christ’s body when it is united. Other bodies - families, businesses, political parties, and religious bodies - are scattered and without unity like this. When they disagree, they fight and they slander each other. When they do not get what they want, they leave. There is no patience or love. There are power plays filled with selfish motives. Even when some of these groups are able to form some sort of unity, the unity is always temporary because they are all flawed. No group is built on the eternal foundation that Christ’s body is built on. We will look at the truths which serve as our foundation and third means of maintaining unity next time. Today, focus on two things. First, consider how you and your family can grow to be more unified with this family. Second, consider how you can better exude the attitudes which maintain this unity. Let us remain united under Christ - growing and building one another up for the glory of the Father.

## Maintain the Basis for Unity (Ephesians 4:4-6)

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We were following Satan with the world, but God has called us to be his children. Now Paul is instructing us to walk worthy of this calling by maintaining the unity of the Spirit. Sadly, Christians often gravitate toward extremes in seeking to maintain unity. Many think Christ's body only maintains unity if we all agree in everything. Scripture clearly shows that God does not expect this of us. We will disagree - the question is whether we will obey God and maintain unity by acting with humility, gentleness, patience, and love. Unfortunately, many land on another extreme by thinking that unity is maintained by putting less emphasis on truth and by accepting each other in *everything*. Supposedly, differences of any sort do not matter "as long as we stick together." We must be patient with each other as we differ in opinions, but Paul's teaching in Ephesians 4:4-6 proves that tolerance can be taken too far. Paul writes here of how God builds our unity on a specific foundation. As the basis for our unity, Paul presents seven unalterable truths. When these seven truths truly serve as the foundation of our unity and for all we do, these truths not only tell us what unifies us, they also serve as seven common beliefs and realities which motivate us to maintain our unity. Notice **verses 4-6**.

### The Basis for Our Unity (4:4-6)

Every unified group acts together because the members share specific commonalities with each other. A baseball team is joined together because each player paid registration fees, wears the same uniform, follows the same coach and rules, and can play the same game. If we remove any of these commonalities, the foundation which unites the team is gone. The team will play poorly or cease to exist. The same is true for Christ's body. These seven unchangeable truths are the basis for our unity - we have no foundation without them. Consider how an incomplete knowledge of these seven truths hurts us, but this may not be today's greatest problem; we know the one Lord, but not perfectly (cf. 4:13). Often, the problem is that few accept that there truly is only one body, Spirit, hope, Lord, faith, baptism, and Father. This relativism is pervasive today, but it leads to ignorance. Relativism takes the easy way out through a false humility which says we cannot be certain of the truths God has revealed. Let us flee relativity by understanding these seven ones and how they hold us together.

There is one **body** of Christ followers. Since there is "one body," Paul is most specifically referring, not to local bodies, but to all Christians in all places. However, in a sense, the unity of a local church can represent the unity of Christ's one body. Paul often writes about Christ's one body, but it is often in local bodies that the unity of Christ's body is most visible (O'Brien, 281). Are we remembering in all our words and actions that there are not two bodies in this family? There is not an American body and a Nigerian body. There are not two bodies for those who prefer Arkansan traditions and Texan traditions. There are not two bodies for those who share my opinions and your opinions. We are one

body. Sometimes we act like there are two bodies when we have these differences, don't we? The body consists of diverse members, but we must not overemphasize differences. We will have more in common with some, but God's children do not segregate by opinion, race, or economic status. Zooming out beyond our local church is important too. Even though we are an autonomous local body, we can become so autonomous that we fail to have concern for the welfare and growth of Christ's body elsewhere. Furthermore, though we must call people out of false religion, we must not compete with other true Christ-followers near us. We are one with disciples outside of this church.

There is one body because there is one Holy **Spirit** in each of us. Our unity is "of the Spirit" because Paul has emphasized in Ephesians 1-3 how crucial the Spirit is to our unity. It is great when brothers and sisters are able to discuss and praise God for saving us from a variety of pasts. However, even though we come from different sins and situations, it unites us to consider how the Spirit brings a lot of sameness to our stories. Each one of us was deaf, but we all came to faith when we heard the same Spirit-given gospel and were convicted of sin. We were dead, but we all drank of the same life-giving Spirit. We are all being sealed with the image of the same Spirit of Holiness. We all have access to God and are all being built together as a temple through the one Spirit. We are not sealed with different images of God. There is not one Spirit directing me and another directing you. We have the same word, same life, same access, and the same fruit. How could we treat each other differently?

The only way we should ever treat each other differently is if one of us is truly following a different spirit. If one is following a different source of knowledge, life, and transformation, this one is not listening to the one Spirit. Those who refuse to keep in step with the Spirit, must not be accepted. The Spirit does not speak opposing words, nor does he give life through any other gospel. We have to be really careful that we do not slip into acting like the unchangeable words of the Spirit are relative. This can be difficult to avoid. We would say we agree with the Spirit now, but when his word contradicts our opinions, politics, parenting styles, practices in marriage, wallets, and habits in the body of Christ, isn't it scary how quickly we can turn off our ears and follow our own spirit? There is one Spirit who reveals truth and gives life to us all. Let us follow his singular leading together!

We all share the same calling, so there is one **hope** that belongs to this calling. You may feel as I have in the past that this is a less important aspect of our foundation. I have often thought of our hope as very simple and very personal. Our ultimate hope is to be rid of our bodies and so we can enjoy a disembodied heaven with God, right? I am preparing a short series for April which may challenge this view by asking, "What does Scripture say the one hope of believers is?" We may not come to perfectly understand our one hope in this study, but there is only one hope that belongs to our call and it is not less important than the other six truths. This is because if we were to put our hope in what God's word says our hope is, it would change everything about how we live collectively

today. Our hope is so life-changing because it brings our future concretely into view for our living now. When we have certainty about God's plan for the fullness of time and for our future, this security not only strengthens us personally, it holds us together because our hope is collective, not personal.

To give you a taste of what I hope to share with you this spring, consider a question. How has Paul described the hope of our calling - God's plan for the fullness of time? Now, we have a first fruits - a downpayment of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit gives us confidence as we wait for God to adopt us and obtain us as his possession when he unites all things in Christ - things in heaven and things on earth. We will see how God's plan and our hope is very closely tied to Jesus' resurrection and our resurrection. You have a couple of months to begin digging into our one hope before our study, so I encourage you to start studying Romans 8, 1 Corinthians 15, 1 Thessalonians 4-5, 2 Peter 3, and Revelation 20-22. As you study these passages, challenge your perceptions with Scripture.

There is one **Lord**, Jesus Christ the Son of God. This may seem easy to say, but it can be difficult to accept for those who have not been taught this from youth. Many who hear of Jesus for the first time often say they think he is similar to Moses, Buddha, Muhammad, etc. But Scripture clearly teaches that Jesus is different from others. He is no prophet, he is the one Lord. This may sound arrogant to others, but this can change when we consider how Christ exerts his lordship. Lords usually rule ruthlessly because they live separate from commoners. But Christ did not stay in Heaven - he became one of us to empathize with our weaknesses. All things were created through him, but he let his creation kill him. Death is mankind's greatest enemy and unknown; yet, God demonstrated his power toward Christ's disciples when he resurrected Christ's body as the firstfruits of incorruptible bodily living. Compassion, forgiveness of sins, resurrection after death - who would not want to submit to Jesus as Lord? He rules with grace, mercy, justice, and power. He is unlike any other.

Therefore, let's treat Christ like he is the only Lord. We must put all our thoughts and actions in subjection to him. The moment we follow our opinion and ignore Christ's command, there are two lords in our life! Fortunately, Christ is not a slave-master who micromanages every bite of food, dollar of expenditure, or minute of free time. We must submit to Christ, but his commands are not burdensome, they are liberating. When we submit to Christ's commands, he frees us from fear, sin, and death. Let us give him absolute rule over our lives and accept no other lord, including ourselves!

Because there is one Lord, there is one **faith**. "One faith" is short hand for the one body of teaching, truth, and reality proclaimed by Christ and his apostles in the gospel. This is contrary to the liberal relativism which says, "It does not matter what faith you believe in, as long as you have faith." No, there is only one revealed faith for us to put all our faith in and to walk by. It does not help us to trust the Qu'ran, the teachings of Buddhism, or the morality of Dr. Phil. Furthermore, it is not humble to "be flexible" and accept many faiths. This is just as ignorant as saying 2+2 could equal 5.

There is one common action of faith all of God's children submit to in order to receive salvation - **baptism**. Baptism is immersion in water. Despite attempts to minimize the God-given meaning of this immersion, scripture is clear about its significance. If baptism is not an essential part of God's work to join one to Christ, why does Paul include it here? Scripture clearly teaches that when we put faith in the powerful working of God, baptism is God's means of saving us, forgiving us, burying our old man of sin, raising us with Christ, and regenerating us with the gift of God's Spirit (cf. Acts 2:38; Rom. 6; Col. 2:11-14; Tit. 3:5; 1 Pet. 3:21). "One baptism" does not mean all forms of baptism are the same. If we cannot alter the one Lord and maintain unity, we cannot alter the one baptism.

There is one **God and Father** of all. Just as many struggle to see Jesus as the one Lord, many also struggle with this reality. It has become popular to say there is one God, but he has many names and manifests himself in different ways at different times and places. However, the one God of Scripture mocks other gods and has an unchangeable nature. Conveniently, "anything goes" for the gods many trust. Even if a "faith" is monotheistic, its "god" is not like YHWH. If we do not submit to the one God of Scripture, it does not help to acknowledge "mother nature," a "greater power," or a "big man upstairs." YHWH is the Great I AM and he is the one God and Father of us all.

### **We Must Not Shift from Our Basis for Unity**

We cannot overemphasize how important it is to maintain unity in our understanding and practice of these truths. Paul writes of how important this is in **2 Corinthians 11:1-4**. We must make room for each other's faults and be willing to change our understandings of God's truths as we grow. However, we must not be like the Corinthians who tolerated clear deviations from truth. We must correct those who deviate and we must not maintain unity with those who reject correction.

It is difficult to know when "*tolerance for one another in love*" or firmness is needed in a disagreement. Consider how it is not necessarily wrong to disagree on how to interpret and apply a text (Rom. 14-15:12; 1 Cor. 8:1-11:1). When disagreements happen, we must pursue the unity of the faith **and** bear with one another in humility, gentleness, patience, and love. But when one refuses to accept and conform with plain statements in Scripture, we cannot tolerate this (note: reasonable people can disagree over how plain a statement is; however, reasonableness does not imply truth). To accept this in even "small" ways undermines our entire basis for unity and completely disrespects God's authority. If we reject one "small" statement of Scripture, anything could be rejected! God has united us under Christ as part of his plan to unite all things in heaven and earth. Let us eagerly maintain this unity by displaying Christ-like attitudes and by standing firm on our Spirit-given basis for unity.

## Gifts and Equipping Saints (Ephesians 4:7-16)

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Ashley and I were speaking with a guest a couple months ago when he began talking about what he was looking for in a church. “The biggest thing for me is that I leave church feeling good. I mean, if church doesn’t make you feel good, what’s the point?” What is Christ looking for in a church? Paul has taught us to walk worthy of the calling to be God’s children by first eagerly maintaining our unity. We are to do this by being patient and loving with each other and by standing firm on the seven unalterable truths which unite us. However, Christ did not only pray in John 17 that his followers would be one - he prayed that we would be *perfectly* one and that we would be able to one day be with Christ where he is. It is very sad to see followers of Christ and whole churches who have forgotten what the direction and goal of Christ’s body is. Many only regularly attend services because their goal is to “go to church.” Others think beyond this, wanting to “go to church so they feel good” or “so their kids can have friends.” Church is not something we can go to. Let’s stop *going to church* and thinking of what Christ is looking for. To reach the goals Christ prayed for and the goals in Ephesians 4, we must be the church and grow together in this body. But how does Christ make the body grow and what are the goals of our growth? No passage has helped me like Ephesians 4:7-16 has in showing me how Christ makes the body grow and what our goals are. Notice **verses 7-10**.

### **(How?) Christ Gives Each of Us a Special Gift (4:7-10)**

It may sound odd for Paul say, “**But** grace was given to each one of us...” Consider how Paul has been emphasizing oneness - there is one body, one Lord, etc. Now, Paul is showing the importance of diversity in the body. There is one body, but, as the NLT translates it, “*he has given each one of us a special gift through the generosity of Christ.*” Paul refers to Psalm 68:18 in verses 8-10 to explain the source of Christ’s gift to each of us. Psalm 68 depicts God as a conquerer who leaves his habitation to conquer his enemies and rescue his people. Paul applies this picture to Christ. To inaugurate a kingdom, a general must leave Rome to conquer foreign lands and establish colonies of citizens loyal to Rome there. But to claim the title of king and deliver on the benefits he promised the new colonies, he must return to rule his kingdom from Rome, leading a host of captives behind him. Similarly, Christ descended to the earth, conquered, ascended above the heavens leading a host of captives behind him, took his throne, and now distributes gifts for his loyal subjects on earth.

Therefore, Christ has generously given each of us different gifts. Verse 10 explains why. Christ ascended and gave gifts “*that he might fill all things.*” This is similar to the goal in **3:19**, “*that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.*” Christ gives gifts for the same reason a king distributes the spoils of war among the colonies - to build up the kingdom. Just as a kingdom cannot grow if its colonies do not have walls, weapons, roads, seed, granaries, medicines, and education, we as a body cannot function and grow if Christ does not gift each part. Christ generously gave you a special gift so you can build up his

body. What gift(s) did he give you? Many say, "I don't have a gift." If this is the case, Christ did not give us grace at all. Another might say, "My gift is not important." Would Christ descend to conquer and ascend to give unimportant gifts? Certainly not! Imagine if you had no big toes and no thumbs. You would hardly be able to walk or perform basic tasks. Consider what gift(s) Christ has given you and how this gift can be used to build up the body. We will return to this in verse 16. Notice how Paul focuses on a few specific gifts Christ gave for the church in **verses 11-12**.

### **(How?) Christ Gives Leaders to Equip the Saints (4:11-12)**

I have always found it odd that Paul did not list other gifts here as he does in other places. Why does he only speak of how Christ gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers? Each of these describe unique roles, but notice a common function in each of these gifts in verse 12. Christ gave many different gifts to saints to **do** the work of ministry and build up the body of Christ; however, Christ gave the apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers to **equip** the saints for ministry and for building up the body of Christ. In reality, there are hundreds of different ways the saints can serve and build up the body of Christ. Paul wants to focus on **how** the saints are to be led, trained, and equipped to do their part in serving and building up.

Why does Paul do this? Let me propose two benefits to this. First, it is good for all saints to know why God gave evangelists, shepherds, and teachers. Christ did not primarily give these leaders to do *all* the work of serving and building up the body - he gifted all the saints for this work. The leaders are here equip the saints in using their gifts. I cannot put into words how encouraged Ashley and I have been by the many saints here who do various parts to keep the body together, served, and growing. Paul's words are helpful for us saints so we know to keep doing our part and growing in it or to start doing our part in serving and building up the body. Paul's words are also helpful so we understand that when evangelists, shepherds, and teachers try to get us involved, help us do our part better, or encourage us to keep doing what we are doing, this is what Christ has told them to do!

Second, it is good for evangelists, shepherds, and teachers to be reminded that Christ gave each and every saint unique gifts, and a key reason Christ gave us our gifts is to equip the saints to serve and build up the body of Christ. Are we fulfilling our roles? Shepherds, are you shepherding the flock? Evangelists, are we preaching the good news? Teachers, are we teaching God's word and how to live it? Are we giving ourselves to prayer and to God's word, and then to leading, training, and equipping the saints from God's word and from experience to use their gifts? There are long, never-ending lists of urgent needs we can be distracted by, but there are only so many leaders and each leader has limited time. We may never perfectly stay on task and we must do our part to serve; but, when we as equippers become distracted by things unrelated to our gift, we need to ask, "What area of the work Christ gifted us to do will suffer?" Will Bible class be less

prepared? Will the sermon less effectively dig into and apply God’s word? Will a saint lose their opportunity to be equipped? Will a lost soul be overlooked? Will a wayward brother or sister be forgotten? I hope we see that a handful of evangelists, shepherds, and teachers is not enough. Not all should be equippers, but more equippers are needed. And so, Christ builds up his body and causes it to grow by giving each member unique gifts and by giving leaders to equip in these gifts. But what end is this growth moving toward? We will consider goals of growth next time. But notice one of the goals in **verses 15-16**.

**Each Part Is Equipped and Working Properly (4:15-16).**

Whatever the other goals are, one goal Christ has is for the body to *build itself up* in love; however, this does not happen unless each part is working properly. We do not only need to ask what our gift is, we need to ask - are we a part which is working properly? As we consider both of these questions, consider **Romans 12:3-8** alongside our current passage. I have prepared a limited list of examples of how one could use the gifts listed in Romans 12 (see next page). Consider your strengths. Consider what you enjoy doing for the Lord. Consider the strengths others have seen in you. Where do you see yourself? Do you need to make changes to ensure you are using your gift(s) to build up the body of Christ? Are you making commitments and following through on them? Christ’s goal for the body to build itself up in love depends on every single one of us. Let us no longer seek what we want from “church,” but instead seek what Christ wants for and from us in his body.

**Some Examples of Using Gifts from Romans 12**

<u>Serving</u>	<u>Teaching</u>	<u>Exhorting</u>	<u>Contributing</u>	<u>Leading</u>	<u>Showing Mercy</u>
Babysit and care for children	Teaching Bible studies for children	Encouraging guests of our congregation	Generous weekly contributions	Shepherding (teach, guide, correct)	Constantly make peace in church
Care for elderly (cleaning, cooking, rides)	Teaching Bible studies for adults	Connect to new Christians (meals, studies)	Personally giving to needy saints	Servants [deacons] (lead serving church)	Pursue and encourage weak Christians
Upkeep of worship facilities	Evangelism (teaching non-Christians)	Cards, calls, visits to weak/sick Christians	Fund Christian adoptions	Evangelist (preach, teach non-Christians)	Befriend/help overlooked people
Cook food for busy/needy families	Teaching personal Bible studies	Praising and sharpening hard workers	Clothing/sheltering needy	Lead worship, talks, classes, various projects	Ask non-Christians for Bible studies

## Goals for the Body's Growth (Ephesians 4:13-16)

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Christ has reconciled us to God in one body through the cross. If we will be built together by the Spirit as a dwelling place for God, we must grow together. We must not only maintain our unity, we must also attain to the goals Christ has given us in his body. The problem is that individuals and churches often leave behind Christ's goals for the body to pursue personal goals and desires. Many turn the body of Christ into something we "go to" to get something they want. We might "go to church" to feel religious, to feel good, or to help our kids grow up "in church" and have good friends. Sadly, these goals are often reflected in what we do, discuss, and prioritize in our assemblies, small groups, and personal lives. "Unity" and "soundness" end up being judged by a few external identifiers and whether we can gather for a couple hours without fighting. We must carefully judge where our thinking is so we can mold our goals for the body to match Christ's. Only then can we grow towards the end Christ planned for us. We will consider Ephesians 4:13-16 where Paul gives four goals for Christ's body to grow toward. These goals will give us practical direction and purpose in our activities together. We are to serve and build up the body of Christ until we all ... what? Notice **verse 13**.

### 1. Attain to Unity of the Faith and of the Knowledge of God's Son (13).

We must *maintain* the unity created by the Spirit through the attitudes and truths which unite us, but there is also unity which must be *attained*. We must agree that God has revealed one faith and one Lord, but we do not yet have a perfect, unified understanding of the one faith and the one Lord. We are to attain to perfect unity in the knowledge of *what* we are to believe and *who* we are to believe in - the faith and the Son of God. This can only happen through regular encounters with God's word which reveal the faith and the Son. Individually encountering God's word is also indispensable, but how does Scripture teach us to encounter God's word in the body?

**a) Preaching God's Word.** Preaching is one way God commands us to appropriate his word (Rom. 10:15; 2 Tim. 4:2). Jesus, Moses, apostles, prophets, and other disciples preached. However, preaching is ineffective if God's goals for preaching are not met. Paul told Timothy to "*preach the word*" and to "*rightly*" handle "*the word of truth*" (2 Tim. 2:15; 4:2). This should be common, but preaching often becomes a stage to proclaim novel ideas, moralism, opinions, psychology, and comedy with Scriptures sprinkled in. The intent and message of Scripture is neglected. **Nehemiah 8:8** describes the beautiful simplicity of real preaching when it says Ezra and others, "*... read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.*" This is the essence of preaching God's word. Sadly, preachers who do this and listeners who demand this can be uncommon. One person told me they fall asleep when sermons center on exposing the message of a text. If my preaching ever makes Scripture a mix-in topping and ceases to expose, explain, and apply Scripture's intended message, please

correct me. Otherwise, my preaching will not help us attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowing the Son.

**b) Teaching God's Word.** Scripture has many examples of coming to unity in understanding through discussions centered on study and application of God's word. Our classes can be excellent representations of this, but it can be difficult to find classes which effectively use discussion to help us all attain to unity in knowing God's truths. We have all probably been in Bible classes which became lectures. We have all probably been in classes filled with discussion which did not truly focus on understanding and applying Scripture. Teachers of all ages - let us give saints the best opportunity to discover, discuss, and ask questions from God's word. We cannot come to unity in understanding God's truths without these focused discussions; instead, we are simply assimilating.

**c) Singing God's Word.** From the beginning, God has also instructed his people to learn and communicate his truths through song. Colossians 3:16 teaches us to sing so the word of Christ can dwell in us. When God wanted future generations in Israel to remember his covenant, what did God have Moses do in Deuteronomy 32? Moses taught Israel a song. When we want our kids to know there is nothing God cannot do, we teach them a song. The Psalter is a testament to the importance of song in learning. I appreciate you who work hard in leading song worship - keep striving to excel in teaching God's word through song. Go further than making sure songs are not unscriptural. As you select songs, ask if each song truly helps us come to a deeper understanding of Scripture. Teach us new songs which do this. Consider how each song can tell a story or flesh out a theme. Let us strive to come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of God's son through preaching, teaching, and singing. Notice a second goal for our growth in **verse 13**.

## **2. Mature Manhood Which Measures up to Christ's Stature (13).**

Paul's use of the image of a full-grown man teaches us that maturity is to be attained to in the *body* of Christ. This goal is not met "*until we all attain*" to maturity. This can be a daunting goal since maturity is measured by the full stature of Christ. However, this can be a motivating thought to consider. Full maturity will not be realized until the end, but God can cause us to attain to full Christ-likeness. But how can our activities in the body truly move us toward completing this goal?

**a) Sermons, Classes, and Songs Must Apply Scripture.** We who preach, teach, and lead in song must not only use our gifts to appropriate God's word, we must help people see how God's truths affect the way we think and live. When God's word is heard and not applied, it dies in our ears.

**b) We Must Individually Assess Our Growth.** Consider yourself. Are you growing to match the full stature of Christ? Are you more Christ-like today than you were a year

ago? When babies stop growing and learning, we know there is a serious problem. The same is true for the spiritual growth of disciples. We will always need to grow in this life. Let's regularly check ourselves and ask where we need to grow in Christ-likeness.

**c) We Must All Attain to Mature, Christ-likeness.** We must grow to be more Christ-like as individuals, but Christ made this a goal for his church. We should not rudely pry into people's lives, but we should also avoid individualism which says, "I have no patience to help others, so I'll just focus on me." Our gifts all differ, but all the gifts Christ gave us are for the building up of the body until we have all attained to Christ-likeness. We are not there. Notice a third goal from **verses 14-15**.

### **3. Not Children Tossed by Every Wind, Speaking Truth in Love (14-15).**

A child's innocence, trust, and excitement about learning and growth is great; however, this strength can also be a weakness. If we tell a child, "That is false, but this is true," they readily believe whatever we say. If they recognize they believe differently from what we tell them, their best defense is, "Mom and Dad told me so." One of Christ's goals is for us all to no longer be children tossed by the waves of life and winds of teaching, but instead to be able to speak the truth in love. Many say this is easy, but is it? If I asked you why you trust Jesus since "he is just like others who claimed similar things," how would you respond? If I asked you many questions about your belief in God and in Christ's resurrection, could you lovingly respond with truth? Can you imagine answering the teachings and questions of your co-workers, neighbors, and family? We do not have to speak before large crowds, but the goal is for us all to be able to speak the truth in love. Know that you can do this. The Holy Spirit would not give us this goal if it were impossible. It simply takes practice and growth.

Practice begins with using this goal to motivate us to fervently study God's word. God has revealed many sacred truths for us, but many of these truths are still hidden to us and we might be currently tricked by false teaching. Make a fun challenge of constantly correcting your worldview with God's truth. Then, write and speak about what you discover. Bible class is a great way to learn to speak the truth in love. If this is uncomfortable for you now, begin by lovingly speaking the truths you discover to your family at home and in the car (cf. Deut. 6:6-25). All this may be very uncomfortable at first, but it will be no less difficult when our faith is put to the test by every wave of life and wind of teaching. You can do this. Learn, practice, and grow. Consider a fourth goal for the body in **verse 16**.

### **4. Each Part Is Equipped and Working Properly (15-16).**

Last time we saw how Christ gifted each of us and gave leaders to equip us to use our gifts. This is so important because we will not reach the other goals unless we also work toward the goal of every part being equipped and working properly. When we work together like this, we are a body which glorifies Christ our head before all beings on earth

and in heaven. When someone needs food or shelter, Christ is glorified since - by his design - we have contributors, servants, and merciful people gifted and equipped to fill the need. When someone needs counseling, we have people for that. When someone is falling away, we have exhorters who notice and do something about it. When children, high schoolers, or adults need to be taught, uniquely gifted teachers are ready. When a home study is needed to gather in, servants and contributors jump in. When sin, dissension, and discouragement come, merciful people are gifted and equipped to handle it. When false teachings and temptations threaten and confuse us, leaders who stand for truth and righteousness step up. When a one needs be equipped to fill needs like these, the evangelists, shepherds, and teachers start leading and equipping. All the parts are to work together. What a beautiful goal Christ has given us!

Are you equipped to use your gift for your part? Are you a part which is working properly? If not, consider how to change that. Ask what needs exist and which ones you are gifted to fill. Seek out an evangelist, shepherd, or teacher who can equip you through their counsel and example. Glorify Christ by using your gift well. Let us all do our share.

## **Conclusion**

Many “go to church” for a variety of reasons. Let’s make our goals in this church match with Christ’s goals. Let’s equip, serve, and build up until we all attain to unity in knowing God’s truths, until we all attain to Christ-like maturity, until we are all able to stand against every wind and speak the truth in love, and until each part is working properly. Let us grow to be the perfect dwelling place for God.

## Be Renewed (Ephesians 4:17-24)

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Even when it came to children's movies, my parents had to limit what I watched. I always found new ways to terrorize my brothers by imitating the villains from each movie. I never imitated the good guys. Watching "Land Before Time" was the worst since this resulted in me acting like a Tyrannosaurus Rex for the rest of the day. We had a similar problem before Christ. We were dead from imitating the sons of disobedience. In Christ, we are now alive and in the family of God. As Paul instructs us to walk worthy of our calling, he turns in Ephesians 4:17-24 to begin to warn us of specific worldly behaviors which we must not imitate. Notice **verse 17**. "*Now this I testify and say in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do...*" Feel the impact of this charge. Paul is telling Gentiles to not walk like Gentiles. This is like telling Americans to not walk like Americans. We have been forgiven and set apart, but Paul tells us to not walk like Gentiles because we were Gentiles and the Gentile-living we followed still surrounds us. How easy can it be to mindlessly return to thinking and walking like everyone else? But, "*we must no longer walk as the Gentiles do...*" In Ephesians 4:17-24 Paul describes the mindset and walk of Gentiles before reminding us of how, when we learned Christ, we were taught a very simple path to being re-created after the likeness of God. Notice the walk and mindset of Gentiles in **verses 17-19**.

### **No Longer Walk As the Gentiles Do (4:17-19)**

The walk of Gentiles is directed by a futile mindset and a darkened understanding. As those who were originally created in God's likeness, we are different from the animals - especially with respect to our minds. God created our minds to think according to his purposes. God created our minds to engage in enlightened reasoning processes so we can direct our steps in a way which results in eternal fruitfulness. The sad situation of the Gentiles is that their understanding is darkened. They are not mindful of the goals God created them for. Their minds are filled with futility. They are alienated from the life God gives. Ignorance is in them.

This is not difficult to observe in the world. I recently asked some unbelievers, "Why do you want to be good people?" I was shocked at how void their answers were of lasting meaning. One man said, "Oh wow! I have never thought about that before. That is hard. I would take you to the airport, but is that good? I do not know. If it is good, why is it good? Why do I want to be good?" He was very troubled. What is worse is how he seemed to forget what troubled him within two hours. You know people like this. They are goal-oriented people whose walk is ultimately futile and vain since they walk without God's direction and purposes in mind. The emptiness and lack of understanding is obvious to us, but they are used to it.

Ignorance is not bliss. But how do Gentiles come to this futility and ignorance? Paul says it is "due to their hardness of heart." This shows us God's perspective on ignorance:

ignorance is not innocent because it is due to a hardened rejection of truth. Romans 1 similarly says the unrighteous “suppress the truth.” This makes sense when we consider how people often speak. If we say, “I don’t know and I don’t care,” then we know something could help us not walk in ignorance and futility, but we are choosing to harden our hearts against it. None of us want to abandon our calling to live in vain futility. Since this springs from a hard-hearted choice to be ignorant of God’s truths, let’s study the path to hardened ignorance in **verse 19**.

Hardened ignorance begins when we become callous. To be callous is to cease feeling. I played the guitar for a short time in my second year of college. To play the guitar well, you must precisely press the metal strings all the down. At first, my fingers would sting badly after only a couple minutes of playing. My friend told me to just keep playing for a couple weeks and ignore the pain until my fingertips became callous. He probably regretted telling me that. After a couple weeks, I had no pain and no reason to stop butchering his favorite songs. This happens with sin too. Sin offers fleeting pleasure, but shame and regret with it. Feeling shame is *good* because it warns us that we have done the wrong thing, but nobody *enjoys* feeling shame. So, we have two choices: we can either stop following our fleshly, sinful desires, or we can follow them and ignore the pain and shame. When we continue sinning and ignore the pain, we start becoming callous and eventually, we cease feeling anything when we sin.

Not only does sin cease to make us feel shame, we increasingly cease to even feel the fleeting pleasure of sin. As we become frustrated by our lack of feeling any satisfaction from what we are doing, we can become deceived and think that satisfaction will come if we push deeper into sin. So, we actively silence our conscience and give ourselves up to sensuality - hoping to find any satisfaction. Our minds quickly become dominated with the practice of anything that could potentially satisfy us. We are greedy for more and more impurity. We no longer feel pain or pleasure, but we greedily and stubbornly grasp for the pleasure anyhow. “I don’t care. It doesn’t matter. Get out of my way. I just want to be happy.” This is how to develop a hardened, ignorant mind set on futility. Notice what Paul says about this in **verses 20-21**.

### **Remember the Way You Learned Christ (4:20-24)**

Paul implores us: if we were taught Christ and this calloused, hardened, and greedy-for-impurity mind is where we currently are, this not the way we learned Christ. If this is where we are - let’s wake up. We are alienated from the life of God and this path will only end in emptiness. We will not find the happiness, purpose, and satisfaction we are looking for. We need go back to the start and remember how we learned Christ. Notice **verse 22**.

**First, we learned to put off our old self (vs. 22).** I love how simple God’s word is. Do you have a problem with sin? Just stop sinning! Stop doing what your old self did. Take off

your old self like an old pair of jeans. I always love hearing of people who, when they came to Christ, they made a decision to stop x, y, and z, and they stuck with that commitment and never went back. The cost and consequences did not matter. We really need this kind of simplicity sometimes. Sometimes we need to stop “struggling” with sin for decades and just do whatever it takes - gouge that eyeball out - and stop sinning.

Why is this so difficult sometimes? Paul says our old self “*is corrupt through deceitful desires.*” This is the problem: sinful desires are deceitful. They keep tricking us. They have hooks in our hearts and every time we try to put off our old self, they tug on one of those hooks. “You don’t understand what you are missing.” “This is actually for the better.” “It will cause you more pain to not do this.” “Does it even matter?” “Resistance is futile.” Satan comes up with new deceit every time we try to resist. Sometimes we see through the lies and flee sin with ease. Other times this is more difficult. Sinful desires are *very deceitful*. Let’s remember this: Satan will make sin sound very right, very reasonable, and very rewarding every time - but he is lying every single time. Has sin ever given you the permanent satisfaction it promised? No! Remember that! Resistance is **not** futile - following deceit **is**. Every single time sin promises, let’s remember we will not find what we are looking for and we will not get what is promised. This shows we cannot just put off sin, our minds have to change. Notice this in **verse 23**.

**Second, we learned to be renewed in the spirit of our minds (vs. 23).** Of the three steps Paul writes of here, this is probably the most overlooked one. We have all probably said it, “Put off and put on!” As we have already seen, it is usually not this easy. This is because our problem was not just our walk, our walk was wicked because our ignorant hearts were hardened, our understanding was darkened, and minds were directing our steps in futility. We should not overcomplicate putting off sin, but we also shouldn’t be deceived into thinking we won’t go back to our old ways if our minds haven’t actually changed. Without a change inside, the same deceit will trick us. Without a change inside, we will not be motivated to put on the new self. Therefore, we must be renewed in the spirit of our minds.

This is why we should never leave behind the regular, deep, intimate study and reflection of God’s word. The world is constantly pressing against our minds to conform. God’s word is not teaching us a bunch of facts - it renews our minds. But mind renewal is not easy. This may be a major reason so many fail to regularly and intimately study and reflect on God’s word. Deep study and reflection does not only require time, and it can hurt too! It takes humility to continue returning to the word when every single time it is tweaking our thinking and living. But this is what we were taught when we learned Christ. So, let’s read God’s word to be renewed in the spirit of our minds. Let God’s word renew our perception of God. Let God’s word renew the way we think about relationships, sex, conversations, work, money, property, time, entertainment - everything. It will hurt at times, but the reward will be great. When we are constantly being renewed in the spirit of our minds, it is no longer as difficult to put off our old

selves, it becomes more difficult for sinful desires to deceive us, and it is easier to put on the new self. Notice this final step in **verse 24**.

**Third, we learned to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God (vs. 24).**

When we learned Christ, we were not taught to simply put off sin. This is one of the results of recent generations failing to teach Christians to actually be renewed in the spirit of our minds. Followers of Jesus do not simply cease yelling, cussing, getting drunk, fornicating, and loving money. Butch Martin recently preached a good lesson from Matthew 25 to remind us of what followers of Jesus do. There is a completely new self and life to put on and it is created after the likeness of God. We were created in the likeness of God, but our minds and our walks have been corrupted by deceitful desires. The goal of putting off and being renewed is so that we can return to what we were created to be. We are becoming a new creation.

**Conclusion**

This is what we were taught when we learned Christ. In our coming studies we will look at how Paul applies this process of transformation to specific aspects of our walk. If we have become callous, are giving ourselves up to sensuality, and finding ourselves greedy for impurity - let's stop. Do we want to abandon our calling and God's purposes for our life to live in vain futility? We will not find what we are looking for. We will not get what sin promises. Put off the old self, be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self.

## Speak the Truth (Ephesians 4:25)

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We were dead from imitating the walk of the Gentiles, but we have been made alive and joined to God's family. Now, Paul insists - we must no longer walk as the Gentiles do. Their walk is futile, directionless, and empty. They have hardened their hearts and become ignorant. When we walk like everyone else, we will not be able to take hold of what sin promises us and we will alienate ourselves from the life of God. This is not what we learned in Christ. When we were taught Christ, we learned to put off the old self, to be renewed in the spirit of our minds, and to put on the new self. In Ephesians 4:25-32, Paul gives five exhortations which each follow this pattern of transformation we learned in Christ. Paul will teach us what to put off, what to put on, and give us a mind-renewing motivator to help us succeed in putting off and putting on. Today, we will focus on Paul's first exhortation in **Ephesians 4:25**.

### **PUT OFF: Falsehood**

Paul says falsehood is something Christians must have put away. To practice falsehood is to speak lies, deceit, or anything untrue. The practice of falsehood is so dangerous because it is so easy to practice and can begin very early in life. What is most frightening is how much deceit surrounds the actual practice of falsehood. Whether we are children or adults, it seems like we are always looking for loopholes. We want to find a way to cause someone to believe something different than the naked truth without actually lying. Let's expose those "loopholes": if we think we might be deceiving someone, we are. If we think we have found a loophole to deceive people or a person "without lying," we are still lying. Whether it happens by our words, implications, or actions, when we intentionally try to cause someone to have a perception of reality which is not the truth, this is falsehood.

Let's pretend we spent the evening drinking at the bar, but we want to hide that and cause people to believe we were at the library. If we say, "I went to the library," this is a lie. If we stopped by the library for twenty minutes before going to the bar and we say, "I went to the library," this is a lie. If we walk out the door with a backpack to cause them to believe we are going to study, this is falsehood. If we walk in the door with library books to cause them to believe we were studying, this is falsehood. If we cover up the scent of alcohol with cologne and mints so they don't know, this is falsehood. Saying, "I never said I didn't go to the bar," or, "I said my *plan* was to go to the library, but my plans changed," does not make us less guilty.

We know lying is wrong, so why do we do it? **Ephesians 4:22** says our old self "*is corrupt through deceitful desires.*" We lie when a desire deceives us. There is a battle. God says truth is best, but deceitful desires say the lie is best. We are deceived by the desire to be esteemed by others, so we give impressions of false positives to have a better reputation of trustworthiness and praiseworthiness. We might be deceived by the desire for safety,

so we cover up some truth which would implicate us or another and result in discipline. We might be deceived by the desire for gain, so we deceive to get a raise, secure someone's business, or experience financial gain. Essentially, falsehood springs from being deceived by either the desire for something or the fear of something that is not God. We are deceived into thinking it is best in this moment to follow a fleshly desire, not our desire for God. We are deceived into thinking it is best in this moment to follow our fear of something or someone, not our fear of God.

Jesus' interaction with the chief priests and elders in **Matthew 21:25-27** perfectly illustrates this thought process behind falsehood. They asked Jesus a question, so Jesus followed up with a question to test their hearts. " *'The baptism of John, from where did it come? From heaven or from man?'* And they discussed it among themselves, saying, *'If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?' But if we say, 'From man,' we are afraid of the crowd, for they all hold that John was a prophet.'* So they answered Jesus, *'We do not know.'* " Notice the problem. Since these men do not fear God, they do not even think about what the truth is. "Never mind the truth, what answer will help us avoid the most loss of shame?" Another situation might have caused them to say, "Never mind the truth, what answer will keep us safe from harm?" Or, "Never mind the truth, what answer will result in the most profit?" Saying "never mind" to truth may be the practice of the world, but Paul insists: we must no longer walk like Gentiles. This is not how we learned Christ. Falsehood belongs to the old self and we must put it off.

### **PUT ON: Speak the Truth**

Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of us speak truth with our neighbor. These words are a quotation from Zechariah 8:6. Much like Paul, Zechariah is reminding the remnant of Israel and Judah that they used to be a byword of cursing among the nations, but now the LORD has purposed to make them a blessing and to bring good to them. Therefore, they must not commit the deceit and injustices their fathers committed, but they must now speak the truth to one another and render true judgments in their gates.

This exhortation to replace falsehood with speaking the truth is simple, but quite helpful. When we put off falsehood, one of the biggest struggles we can have is to still think and speak like politicians. Like politicians and the religious leaders in Jesus' day, we are used to asking, "What can I do or say which will give others *this* impression?" So, if we only focus on putting off falsehood, we will probably start thinking, "How can I say this in a way which is not dishonest?" But this is not what God commands of us. Thinking like this will only get us in trouble. We will easily return to picking and choosing truths which paint a distorted, but favorable picture of reality.

To speak truth, sometimes we need to stop overthinking how to say everything. Unless we are conversing over some deep truths which need to careful thought, truth in our

everyday conversations does not require much thought. Sometimes we need a moment to remember something or get our facts straight, but when desires tempt us to lie, let's make our actions and words focus on two simple things. First, what is the truth? Second, how can I speak this truth in a way which is loving, kind, and wise? Let's be slow to speak and quick to listen because of anger, but we do not need time to craft a distorted reality which is favorable to us.

Let's make speaking truth a habit - whether or not it gives a good, neutral, or bad impression. If someone asks what our plans are, speak the truth without reference to the consequences. "I am going home to make a salad and read a book"; or, "I am going home to eat pizza and watch The Middle"; or, "I have been planning to go to the bar, but I am now realizing that this is a bad idea." Someone might ask us what we did last night. Speak the truth. "Ashley and I went to see the Jungle Book"; or, "I watched xyz movie and I shouldn't have done that." Unless we truly do not know, let's avoid responding with, "Nothing." "Nothing" can be innocent, but it can also hide evil in a cloak of deceit. Most importantly, we should speak the truth of God's word. When we speak God's truth, falsehood and darkness will be exposed by the light.

### **BE RENEWED: For We Are Members of One Another**

As we put on the open statement of truth to one another, we may start to wonder, "Why would I do that? People's perceptions are the one thing I can control. Lying only hurts me. How is that anyone else's business?" This passage certainly does not encourage us to be busy-bodies, but we are members of one another. When we committed to Christ, we were grafted into his body. In the body, we never only hurt ourselves.

Imagine what would happen if I rested my hand on a hot burner and my hand decided to lie to the rest of the body about what it was feeling? One person might say, "Perfect! Then I won't feel pain and the rest of my body won't be bothered." Yes, but the brain wouldn't tell the arm to lift the hand off the burner, the feet wouldn't run to the freezer, the other hand wouldn't grab the ice, our mouth wouldn't shriek for help, and we would completely lose our hand. The body is designed to be able to assist the rest of the members, but now the body will be worse off because it will be minus one hand.

Deceit and falsehood will only cause us more pain than the truth. We only make life easier for ourselves and for everyone else if we speak the truth - even when the truth is embarrassing. This is because we are members of one another. We might be deceived into thinking our pursuit of esteem, safety, and gain by falsehood does not affect the body, but we are wrong every time. If there is any place we should be able to be open and not deceitful with one another, it is in the body. Let's conclude with three reasons Paul addresses falsehood first.

## **Conclusion**

**1. God hates lying.** If there is one thing we learn from other Scriptures regarding lying, it is this. When **Proverbs 6:16–19** lists the seven things God hates, lying is listed twice. *“There are six things that the LORD hates, seven that are an abomination to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that make haste to run to evil, a false witness who breathes out lies, and one who sows discord among brothers.”* People often think falsehood is a joke. It is often seen as funny to “stretch the truth.” It is often seen as a “silly mistake.” Lying is not a joke. As Revelation 21:8 says, the lot of liars is in the lake that burns with fire.

**2. Lying will not satisfy us.** Remember, Gentiles walk *“in the futility of their minds.”* Falsehood will not satisfy us with the personal esteem, safety, and gain we grasp after with it. **Proverbs 21:6**, *“The getting of treasures by a lying tongue is a fleeting vapor and a snare of death.”* **Proverbs 20:17**, *“Bread gained by deceit is sweet to a man, but afterward his mouth will be full of gravel.”*

**3. Falsehood is the cornerstone supporting the life of the hardened sinner.** Falsehood has a way of entrenching us deeper in sin. When we lie, it is the point in time when truth could be revealed and deceitful desires can be exposed as lies; instead, falsehood compounds our sin and builds a home for our darkness to live in. This is why we lie. Desires are attacking and deceiving us and if we lie, we can continue grasping after these desires as we hide in the dark. If we put off falsehood and instead speak the truth, the darkness can finally be exposed by light. Satan often says, “Nobody will realize what you did, but if anyone asks, you can just deny it.” When we decide to put off falsehood, Satan’s way out will be gone.

## **Be Angry and Do Not Sin; Do Honest Work (Ephesians 4:26-28)**

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Few things renew my awe for God and my zeal for righteous living more than remembering the emptiness God through Christ redeemed us from. We used to let Satan put his hooks in our hearts, deceive us, and every time it ruined our lives. We used to only be concerned with what our flesh wanted for ourselves, but this only made us feel miserable and without purpose. God has forgiven us of our sins, released us from Satan, and put on a path with eternal purpose and hope! Because of this, Paul is instructing us how to walk worthy of our calling. In Ephesians 4:26-28, Paul uses Satan's past control over us and our past purposeless life to motivate us to put on more of the new self God created us to be. Paul addresses stealing in verse 29, but we will address anger first in **verses 26-27**.

### **Be Angry and Do Not Sin (4:26-27)**

Though our ultimate aim is God's glory, our aim in transformation is to put on the new self created after God's likeness (4:24). With each sinful behavior, we must consider how we can become like God. When it comes to anger, Scripture presents God as one with complex emotions. He is not unjustly indignant like man, but he is not a robot without emotions. In Psalm 7:11, David says God is a righteous judge who feels indignation every day. In Psalm 103:8-9, David says the Lord does not keep his anger forever - he is merciful, gracious, and slow to anger. God is judging and wrathful, but he is also patient and merciful. He patiently longs for us to repent, he kindles his anger when we do not repent, but his anger does not last long when we repent. God is never enslaved by his anger - he is always in control. Since we are God's children and we are to grow to be like him, it should not surprise us to find that God's teaching on anger is as balanced and complex as God is.

***PUT ON: Be angry and do not sin.*** Paul starts with putting on before putting off for this behavior. These words can be unexpected. Paul does not say, "Do not be angry or else you will sin"; rather, he says, "*Be angry and do not sin.*" These words come from Psalm 4:4. Psalm 4 is set at night. People have spread empty words and lies about David, so David and his men are rightfully angry. Yet, instead of letting their anger seethe and acting on their anger, David calls on God to bring relief because he knows God alone can make him dwell in safety. **Psalm 4:4**, "*Be angry and do not sin; ponder in your own hearts on your beds and be silent.*"

These passages show that God knows there will be times when we are angry. Isn't it great that God does not deny this? He knows we are not robots who are impervious to every feeling. This does not mean every kind of anger is acceptable. Jesus says in **Matthew 5:22** that "*everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment.*" There is a tension. Anger can make us liable to God's judgment, but we can have certain anger and not sin with it.

Paul's use of Psalm 4 helps us see how to put on anger without sinning. First, David and his men are angry in Psalm 4 because others have sinned against them. Often times we are angry because people do things we do not like or do not do things we want them to do. When we are angry, we need to maturely ask if there is even sin present. Second, David says in **Psalm 4:4**, "*Ponder in your own hearts on your beds and be silent.*" Whether or not someone has sinned against us, anger is never an excuse for acting sinfully or getting revenge; yet, many use anger as an excuse for their actions and words. "I wouldn't have done this, but you make me so angry!" Someone's sin and our anger is not an excuse for yelling, being mean, or making threats. The world says, "It is unhealthy to bottle up your anger." God says, "It is sin if you unleash anger."

**James 1:19–20** shows us why. "*Let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.*" Our anger is rarely righteous. God is angry against sin, but he is slow to anger. When he acts on his anger, it is just, not ruthless, because it is for our good. When God acts on his anger, it is for the glory of his name. The anger of man is usually kindled in an instant, it results in harsh, mean, and loud reactions, and it is usually motivated by selfishness. If we are acting on fiery anger that is kindled in an instant without thought for God's glory or how this will help the target of our anger, this is not like God's anger. When hot emotion controls our actions and words, this is sin. Next time we are angry, let us put on anger that does not sin. Let's breathe, close our mouths, quietly step away, lay down, and silently ponder in our hearts how to handle the situation righteously.

**PUT OFF: Do not let the sun go down on your anger.** Quietly pondering in our own hearts is not an opportunity to soak on our anger; rather, this gives us the time we need to not act in our anger and sin. Just because we avoid a blow up in the moment does not mean we have avoided all sin and done all God has commanded. We know this because - how many of us are angry about something someone did years, months, or weeks ago? Paul commands us to not be angry about something from yesterday! We must put off the habit of letting the sun go down on our anger. After we have silently considered how to righteously handle our anger for God's glory and for the good of others, it is time to settle the matter. If we sinned, we need to give a real apology. If someone else sinned, we need to humbly, gently show them and help them. If they did not actually sin against us, we need to do whatever it takes to righteously put the anger away, pursue reconciliation, and avoid the situation in the future. Anger and its sinful effects rarely go away passively. It takes work to put it away, but there is no excuse for being angry about something from yesterday or ten years ago. This is sin.

**BE RENEWED: Give no opportunity to the devil.** This is the mind-renewing motivation for transformation. When we let anger have its way and we let anger remain, we are giving the devil a foothold. We know this from experience too. Just imagine what our marriages, families, and churches would look like if we actually did not act in our anger and never let the sun go down without settling a matter? This is so dangerous because, not only

does unresolved anger lead us to other sins, it also becomes habitual. If we let the sun go down on our anger once, we will let it go down a hundred times. This results in marriages, families, and churches being filled with sin. Satan wants us to believe the battle is over when we do not blow up in the moment, but the majority of division and damage comes from how we handle the minutes and hours after the moment. Let us not underestimate what the devil can do with one opportunity. Let us stop giving the devil an opportunity.

### **Do Honest Work (4:28)**

***PUT OFF: Let the thief no longer steal.*** Satan wants us to think we are not in danger of stealing. We usually only think of stealing as breaking into a home or pocketing something in a store. Think about all the other ways we could steal. If we lie on our taxes, we are stealing. If we drink soda at a restaurant when we did not pay for it or take things from our company, we are stealing. I could not believe how a show recently depicted a family laughing about how much their daughter could steal food from the restaurant she worked at without the boss knowing. If we give our employer's things or services to a friend for free, we are stealing. The world says, "Finders keepers," but, if we find something that can be returned, Deuteronomy 22:1-3 commands us to give it back. Just because a store clerk gives us too much change, it does not make it right to keep it.

One of the biggest forms of stealing today happens digitally. We could spend hours talking about all the ways digital theft can happen. To put it simply, just because we *can* watch a movie, listen to music, download a file, or use someone else's service, does not make it right. Just because I can import your CD onto my computer doesn't make it right. Brothers and sisters, let us put off all stealing. If we have something or are using something was not openly given to us or rightly paid for, give it back. Do we want to save \$1 or \$100 and lose our soul?

***PUT ON: Let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands.*** Instead of thinking about everything we can get for ourselves and thinking about how we can cheat the system to get more, let's do honest work with our own hands. Our work should be honest. I have forgotten this in the past when I have been overzealous about capitalism. Just because we can overcharge for something does not make it right. Just because we can take advantage of someone's situation and quote them \$1000 for a car fix when a more reasonable price is \$300-\$400 doesn't make it right. We wouldn't want someone do to that to us. Christians do honest work for honest compensation. Furthermore, Christians do not lazily leach from others, they work. As Paul says in **2 Thessalonians 3:10**, "*If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.*"

***BE RENEWED: So that he may have something to share with anyone in need.*** This is a fantastic motivation to keep in mind. When we are thinking about how to cheat the system and get everything in life for free, we are thinking about ourselves. You would

think we would happily give away what is not rightfully ours, but the opposite results. Our mindset has been on accumulating more and that does not stop when someone suddenly has needs. Let us stop stealing and start working so we can honestly pay for the things we need, but even more, let us work so we have something to share with others in need. Let's think about work from God's perspective. Work is how we eat, but work is not given to us so we can selfishly accumulate more. The church in Jerusalem is a great example. **Acts 4:32-35**. *"No one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common... There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need."*

This can give us great purpose in our work. Before Christ, we made decisions based on whatever our flesh wanted. The mentality of the world is, "If you can afford it, buy it." This selfishness only makes us miserable, and this is not why God blesses us. But for us, it can now be "fun" to work and find ways to not spend it all so we can help people in need. Isn't it great when orphans, widows, the hungry, and the sick can give God glory because we helped give them water, food, clothes, a home, or parents? Let us multiply this generosity!

## **Conclusion**

Satan once had control over our lives. Let us no longer give him opportunities by not handling our anger correctly. We used to live selfish lives of futility that did nothing but stuff our own gullets. Let us do honest work so we can have something to share with anyone in need.

## Give Grace to Hearers; Be Kind and Forgiving (Ephesians 4:29-32)

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**James 1:26**, “If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person’s religion is worthless.” **Matthew 12:36–37**, “I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.” Studying Ephesians this week has reminded me of how serious words are to God. It is easy to think words are insignificant. Because of this, when we discern our heads to consider whether our walk is pleasing to the Lord, it is easy to forget to seriously judge the content of our words. Yet, as we hear from Jesus’ mouth, what we say can either justify or condemn us. We have already seen the seriousness of our words with the command to put away falsehood. As Paul reminds us of what we were taught when we learned Christ, Paul concludes this paragraph by focusing on how we use our mouths. He teaches us to put off two sinful habits, to put on two new ways of speaking and acting, and to adopt two mind-renewing motivations. Let’s first consider how to give grace to those who hear us in **Ephesians 4:29-30**.

### **Give Grace to Hearers (4:29-30)**

**PUT OFF: Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths.** Referring to talk as “corrupting” or “rotten” is a figurative way of referring to harmful or unwholesome speech (Louw and Nida). We normally use these words to refer to food or to a corpse. The sight of rotten fruit or a decaying body is repulsive. They reek of uncleanness and death. We don’t even want to touch these things. This figurative language gives us a vivid picture of what God does not want to hear from our mouths. Though there are corrupt and rotten words, the point is not to make sure we don’t repeat something from an arbitrary list of bad words. I misunderstood this as a child. I thought failure or success was determined by whether or not I cursed or used the Lord’s name in vain. Putting off “corrupting talk” certainly includes putting off that type of talk, but our speech can be rotten, unclean, harmful, and unwholesome without these words.

There are some things we should not talk about because they lend to rottenness by their very nature, but it more often depends on *how* we talk about something. We know conversations about the same thing can either be pure and helpful or corrupt and harmful. There are foul, unholy ways we can talk about sexual intimacy. There are rotten, harmful ways we can talk about the 2016 presidential race. There are unhelpful ways to talk about God and the Bible. There are careless, unwholesome ways of talking about other people or about a disagreement we have. There are unwholesome ways of texting or talking on Facebook. It is easy to Pharisaically avoid certain words and phrases but miss the heart behind Paul’s command. Let’s not converse the way the world does. Let’s put off all rotten talk.

***PUT ON: Only talk that builds up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.*** We are not to simply focus on not talking in corrupt ways, but to focus on talking like we are being renewed into the God's image. As James 3 says, our tongues are small, but they are powerful for both good and bad. It is easy to judge the goodness of our mouths based on whether or not they entertain and keep attention. It is not wrong for our conversations to do this, but a lot of foolish talk will result if this is the purpose statement for our mouths.

So let's bend our minds to a proper way of thinking about our mouths. Let's not think of them as instruments to blabber comedy and entertainment. They can be used for this in righteous ways, but let's think of the *purpose* Paul gives our mouths. This can be so difficult, but let's pause, consider what to say, and be slow to speak. Whether we are before the church, in Bible class, with our family, at work, or on the phone, we can use this passage to shape our speaking. "Can I say this in a way that builds others up? If so, how?" "Does it fit the occasion? When is the right time?" "How can I ensure that this will give grace to those who hear me?" Even if these questions only prevent us from saying rotten things, that would be a great start. As **Proverbs 17:28** says, "*Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise; when he closes his lips, he is deemed intelligent.*" However, let's ask these questions to move us toward being the people who - when we talk - it is refreshing, helpful, timely, and wise. Let us aim to even be the people who speak as the oracles of God do (1 Peter 4:11).

***BE RENEWED: And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.*** This motivation to not grieve the Holy Spirit alludes to Isaiah 63:10. In the context, Isaiah is recounting God's goodness to Israel in the past. He became their savior, set the angel of his presence among them, redeemed them, and carried them all the days of old. Though God dwelled among and protected Israel, they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit. Consequently, the one who gave them rest and security became their enemy. Paul alludes to this passage to compare us to Israel ("typological correspondence"). Paul addresses us in Ephesians as those who have been redeemed from sin through Christ's blood (1:7) and as those in whom God himself dwells through the Spirit (2:21-22). Paul molds Isaiah's words into a solemn warning: do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God as Israel did.

We should ensure we do not grieve the Holy Spirit even more, because, as Paul says, the Holy Spirit is the one by whom we were sealed for the day of redemption. This harkens back to Ephesians 1:13-14. God has stamped us with his own character through the Spirit as a sign of his ownership of us and guarantee to protect us until the day when he finally redeems us as his possession. How ungrateful would it be for us to speak in ways which grieve the very one who marks us as God's possession? God shows us through Israel that rebellion in the face of grace is unacceptable. All the arguments about how the Spirit indwells believers must not cause us to overlook this fact: God's presence is with us through his Holy Spirit and speech which does not accord with his holiness *grieves* him.

In an unholy world filled with rotten talk, this should remind us to carefully consider our words. Let us not grieve God's Holy Spirit with our words but instead give the him reason to rejoice at the fruit he is bearing in us. (O'Brien, 346-349)

### **Be Kind and Forgiving (4:31-32)**

***PUT OFF: Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.*** Paul's message is simple: anything we think, say, or do with malice, ill-will, or evil thoughts toward another must be put away. Sometimes we can trick ourselves into thinking there is a way we can hold onto or vent malice or hate for someone without sinning, but Paul says to put it all away. We might think, "I'll just soak on my anger and not talk to them," but bitterness must be put away. We might say, "Sometimes we just blow up in our family to clear the air," but wrath and anger must be put away. We might say, "When I'm angry I just need to slam doors, throw stuff, and yell," but clamor must be put away. We might think, "I just go to a friend or family member or social media and vent about them so I don't blow up in anyone's face," but slander must also be put away.

Consider how it does not matter who we are having trouble with or who has sinned against us, it is not right to speak and act in this way. This behavior is sinful when directed against the frustrating customer service agent on the phone or an annoying co-worker. Couples, it does not matter what our spouse did or how much they don't understand you, responding with bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, or slander is still sinful. Parents, yelling is still wrong when directed at our children. Children, it is not right to yell at brothers and sisters or parents, even if they really annoy you. Spiritual leaders, some leaders in churches make exceptions for these behaviors behind closed doors, but even when we have difficult conversations, these sins must be put away. There are no free passes for these behaviors anywhere at any time.

When we are angry, Satan wants us to think we deserve to be bitter, yell, throw something, or slander those we are angry with. But we can put off these behaviors because we have all done it before for special circumstances. When someone calls in the middle of the argument, we are somehow able to change a nasty tone into a cordial one. When our anger boils over something someone did, let's remember there are righteous ways of handling anger. We can quietly lay down on our beds, breath, let our emotions cool down, and ponder how to settle the matter.

***PUT ON: Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another.*** Let's be nice. Let's be compassionate. It is amazing how hard it can be to not only put off bitterness and wrath, but to actually be kind and tenderhearted. Satan can trick us into justifying a lack of kindness when we have been sinned against. We think, "They do not deserve kindness. They need to pay for what they have done." We withhold forgiveness. We want them to suffer and feel dumb for some wrong they have done or some good thing they have failed

to do. Yet, when Scripture describes how God treats sinners, consider how the words “kind” and “forgiving” are constantly used of God when referring to how he treats sinners. Jesus says in **Luke 6:35** that the Most High is “*kind to the ungrateful and the evil.*” If this is said of our Father, we need to aim for it to be said of us in how we treat the ungrateful and evil.

***BE RENEWED: Forgive one another as God in Christ forgave you.*** We can do this because God has treated us in this way. While we struggle with wanting to be the ones who pay people back for what they have done, God has the right to pay us back and doesn’t want to do so. God doesn’t want to pay us back for our sins so much that he sent his Son to die for us. We struggle with wanting others to answer to us, yet the one who everyone will answer to came into the world, not to judge us, but to be judged for us. Christ died for us and God offered to forgive us while we were his enemies. Can’t we absorb the blows of others, seek their repentance, and forgive them just as we have been forgiven? Think of all the good the love of Christ and the forgiveness of God has affected in our lives. We can bring that good to others simply by the way we speak to them and handle their wrongs against us. That being said, as Paul talks instructs us in Romans 12, we are to pursue peace as long as it depends on us. Sometimes people will refuse kindness and refuse to repent. This is not our fault.

## **Conclusion**

**Matthew 12:34–37**, “*Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.*” Let’s remember to take our words seriously. We will be either justified or condemned by our words because our words reflect the contents of our heart. The second greatest command is to “*love your neighbor as yourself.*” If we love our neighbor, let’s speak like it. Let’s build them up and not tear them down. Let’s give grace to their ears. Let’s be kind and tenderhearted, forgiving them just as God in Christ forgave us.

## Imitate God (Ephesians 5:1-5)

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It is helpful from time to time to return to asking the basic question, “What does a child of God look like? How does a child of God behave?” Our study today will probably not be new to you, but that does not make it unimportant. In fact, I regularly return to a couple verses in this section because their direct message keeps me on track and reminds me of how a child of God does and does not behave. Notice what children of God do in **Ephesians 5:1-2**.

### **What Children of God Do (5:1-2)**

I have heard that one of the more frustrating things about parenthood is that your children imitate you. Children imitate the good and the bad in their parents. That’s what it means to be someone’s child. Children of God are supposed to imitate God. This can be disconcerting initially because God has many attributes we cannot imitate. We cannot be all-powerful, all-present, all-seeing, or all-knowing. However, Paul has already told us one way we can imitate God. In 4:32 Paul instructed us to forgive one another as God forgave us through Christ. Paul digs more into this in 5:2 by showing us a fuller picture of how we can imitate God: *“walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”*

In John 14 the apostle Philip said to Jesus, *“Show us the Father...”* Jesus’ replied that when you know Jesus, you know the Father. Consider what our picture of God would be like if we did not know Jesus! It would be very confusing to try to imitate God without knowing Jesus. If we want to know what God is like and how to do what God does, all we need to do is to look to Jesus. The essence of everything Jesus did is love. If we walk in love as he walked in love, we will be doing alright.

But this may feel vague to you. *How* can we walk in love as Christ did? Paul says in verse 2 that Christ gave himself up for us. This is the reason we know Jesus loves us - he gave *himself* for us. There are many good ways we can show love and concern for others. We can send a note to someone, saying something nice, help them with money, or give them a gift. These are important ways we can love others, but they fall short of Christ’s love if we do not give *ourselves* up for others. The gifts I give Ashley would mean little to her if I did not also give her my time, my heart, and my very self.

So let us ingrain this in our minds: love gives gifts and offers kind words, but above all, love gives self. To be frank, giving ourselves is not always easy. Giving ourselves up for others requires energy, emotion, time, thoughtfulness, attention. It requires patience and genuine care. Sometimes it is easy to commit ourselves to people it is easy to give ourselves up for - people we want to need us or people who have easy needs. We are to *walk* in this love and give up ourselves for others as Jesus did, we are to give ourselves up for our family, our brothers and sisters, for discouraged new Christians, for the elderly,

and for our neighbor who needs a friend to serve them and point them to Christ. Why is that so difficult? Our obstacles may be different. Sometimes we are afraid our love won't be reciprocated or even appreciated. Sometimes we don't give ourselves because we are too busy or because we don't want more friends. Sometimes we don't give ourselves because we simply don't care. In reality, most of our obstacles all center around *us* and something that affects *us* in a negative way.

Sometimes we are legitimately committed to loving enough people and we simply cannot handle more commitments. If this is so for you, keep walking in love. The rest of us have to overcome our own busyness, our own selfishness, and our own fears to truly give ourselves to others in order to love them properly. Fortunately, Paul gives us good motivations here to help us get over ourselves and sacrifice our time, energy, and emotion to love others.

The first motivation is that this is the way Christ loved us. If anyone in the world has ever had anything better to do than to love us, it was Jesus. He has a whole world to run. If anyone in the world ever had anything to fear in giving himself, it was Jesus. He gave his life and most people hardly care. And yet, *he sacrificed his life* and he changed our lives forever. That's the power of giving ourselves up for others. Gifts and notes and money do good, but when we also give people our time, energy, emotion, attention, and genuine concern, we really can make a difference in people's lives just as Jesus has in ours.

The second motivation is the same motivation Christ had for giving himself up for us - it was to be a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. It has come to my attention recently that in my interactions I can be too serious and hurry along too much. God expects me to use my time for his work, so it is easy to think, "I have studying to do, I am supposed to be sacrificing myself to God and I don't have time for dilly-dallying." Christ's example has helped me see something this week - if we will more genuinely love, serve, help, and give ourselves up to each other, we will be giving ourselves as fragrant offerings and sacrifices to God! When it comes doing what children of God do, the question is not "how can we sacrifice ourselves for God when so many people need our time and energy?" The question is whether or not we will give ourselves as sacrifice ourselves for God *by* giving ourselves up in love for each other. If we will love God, we will love those he has created in his image. Let's use Jesus' life-changing love for us and our desire to sacrifice for God to motivate us to love others as he loves us. Let's see what children of God don't do in **verses 3-4**.

### **What Children of God Don't Do (5:3-4)**

Paul lists three overall vices here that he says are out of place and must not be named among saints. **First, Paul says sexual immorality and all impurity must not be named among us.** The word for sexual immorality is "porneia" and it refers to all sinful illicit sexual activity. Let's be clear, *any* sexual activity with someone who is not our God-

approved spouse is sexual immorality. Sex before marriage and sex with someone else besides your spouse is sexual immorality. If we divorce our first spouse and marry another, unless our divorce was due to sexual immorality, we are committing sexual immorality. Allow me to make a note here. We probably all know personally or have at least seen it in others that Satan is really good at blurring the lines and causing God's children to think there are acceptable ways to be sexually active outside with a girlfriend, boyfriend, or fiancé outside of marriage. Paul helps us with that by saying "all impurity" must not be named among us. I have always wanted to know, "Where do you draw the line?" The line is drawn at sexual immorality and all impurity. Instead of asking if something is "impure" I find that it is helpful to just ask if it is pure. With whatever you are wondering about, ask - is it pure? That should eliminate a lot of things. Allow me to give a situation. Groping your girlfriend, boyfriend, or fiancé on the legs and stomach, making out, and laying on top of each other - is that pure?

It is neither my point nor the point of Scripture that sex is dirty or gross or bad. It is very good. God does not create bad things. God did not see Adam and Eve in the garden and say, "Well, I didn't expect that to happen!" That is exactly what God planned. The problem, as always, is when we use what God created outside of his design. Let sexual immorality and all impurity not be named among us. If you have questions, talk to a mother or father here.

**Second, Paul says covetousness must not be named among us.** We do not use this word often, that's why I like the translations which say "*greed*." Greed is an intense desire for money or possessions. Greed is something we can have a hard time understanding because people typically accuse the rich of greed. Greed *could* be reflected by what we possess, but greed is **not** the ownership of great wealth or possessions; rather, greed is the intense desire for wealth and possessions. Since greed is a desire, greed can affect any of us - the poorest of the poor and the richest of the rich. Brothers and sisters, we need to be terribly careful of this desire. When we are young, our parents usually warn us about the dangers of sexual desire, drugs, and alcohol, but we warn just as strongly about the sinfulness of the strong desire to accumulate more and more. The reason this is such a problem is because, as Paul says in verse 5, greed is idolatry. When we are strongly desiring more money and more stuff, we are worshipping, trusting, and loving another god.

This is not to say that money or possessions are bad. This is not to say that it is wrong for us to pray that God would bless us and take care of us. Possessions are one thing we can be stewards of to God's glory. We can enjoy God's blessings and praise God for them. We can use God's blessings to serve others and they can praise God for it. The problem is when money and possessions become what we crave and selfishly, habitually accumulate. Christians, when Israel stood by Mount Sinai they did not see God, they simply heard his voice. Let us not worship whatever we see with our eyes - let it be said that what we as God's children intensely love and desire is the voice of God.

**Third, Paul says that there must be no filthiness, foolish talk, nor crude joking.** I have mentioned before that I enjoy humor. I like being funny. Humor is a good thing. Humor can draw us closer together. Humor can be used to cheer us when we are discouraged. It can make light of a situation to help us see past its difficulty. Humor can disarm us. It can even be used, as Christ used it, to show us an error in our way. But even when humor is used for these purposes, it has to be used so, so carefully - or else it can cause serious damage. For some reason, whenever it comes to humor, it is so easy for our speech to slip into filthiness, foolish talk, or crude joking. It is the easiest way to get a laugh because this kind of humor takes something forbidden or private or holy and makes light of it in a sort of shocking way. This can happen when talking about other people, about God, about politics, and sex. Paul says this filthiness, foolish talk, and crude joking is out of place.

The sad thing is that, in the right situation with the right person at the right time and in the right manner, it can be fruitful to talk about other people, about God, politics, and about sex. Unfortunately, Satan twists good things into unclean and wicked things so that it can be difficult to talk about any of these things without speaking in foolish or filthy ways. Our work places are filled with this talk. It happens at parties, on our phones, and certainly on tv. For the past few years I have had to take a hard look at the things I watch and ask what they are doing to my mind. For me, it has been easy to recognize that I should never watch anything with nudity in it. But what about the way people talk in the movie or show? To qualify this, when Jesus spoke about clean and unclean laws, he said that it is not what goes into the body that defiles a person. Just because we hear a foolish joke does not mean we have become unclean. However, we are lying if we say hearing these things repeatedly has no affect on us at all. I used to watch Family Guy when I was in college. I stopped five years ago when I mindlessly quoted an inappropriate joke from the show - curse word and all! I had become desensitized. There were already other ways that shows like this had altered the way I spoke, but in that moment I shocked myself into realizing that I had to stop watching that show.

You may wonder why Paul writes of all these things in this context. We were talking about imitating God and walking in love like Christ, why are we talking about sexual immorality, greed, and crude joking? It is because all these behaviors are antithetical to imitating God and walking in love. These behaviors do not accord with God's holiness and they certainly do not accord with walking in love. Sexual immorality is often excused because of the love people have for each other, but it is not love to enjoy someone's body without committing your life to that person. Greed is often excused because it is innocent and unrelated to our relationships with others, but it actually steals our attention away from serving others to serving ourselves. Foolish talk and crude joking is often excused because "we were just talking!", but this is unloving in that it fails to account for how powerfully our words affect others' souls.

## **A Warning for God's Children (5:5)**

It may seem like all of this is so picky and pointless to talk about. What is the big deal? Paul tells us why in **verse 5**. Do you remember those blessings we talked about in chapter 1? Do you remember the blessing that is supposed to give us hope in the most difficult of days? Remember where God said that he has set us aside as his inheritance and that one day he will not only obtain us, one day he will give us our inheritance. If we refuse to repent and instead willfully walk in sexual immorality, greed, and filthiness - we have no part in the inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. We will not be part of God's wonderful kingdom now, and we will not enjoy its blessings when the day comes that God rules every heart and every part of his creation. Let us not miss out on that blessing for fleeting pleasures here.

Lord willing, in a month we will return to Ephesians and consider practical ways that we can ensure that we walk in light and avoid the darkness. Until then, let us take Paul's warning seriously. Let us wake up and take sin seriously. Let's repent and make necessary changes.

## Walk As Children of Light (Ephesians 5:5-21)

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Last time in our study of Ephesians Paul instructed us to imitate God. We studied what children of God do and what children of God do not do. Children of God walk in love by giving themselves up for others as Christ did. Sexual immorality, greed, and filthy talk must not even be named among us. Paul strongly warns us here - anyone who is sexually immoral, impure, or greedy has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Those words should ring loudly in our ears. Isn't it scary to think about the brothers and sisters who have been lost along the way in darkness? Satan seized them and did not let go. We don't want that to be us. We want the inheritance awaiting us when Christ returns. We want to be with our God forever. In Ephesians 5:5-21, Paul seizes on these desires and shows us practical ways we can stay on the right path. We will not examine every inch of this text; instead, we will consider it from this high level. Notice the first way to stay in the light in **Ephesians 5:5-6**.

### **1) Let No One Deceive You (5:5-6)**

In recent years this warning has stood out to me more. Paul issues a strong warning that no sexually immoral or greedy person will have an inheritance in the kingdom, then he issues another strong warning: let no one deceive you about what I just said. This warning is so relevant because our world tries to deceive us about these very sins! Through tv, music, our friends, nominal Christians, or our own minds saying its okay, Satan tries to cause us to believe that impurity and greed are really not that harmful. I have known more people than I can count who both believed in God and told me God wouldn't condemn me if I slept with my girlfriend. I have to believe Satan works in the same way with greed - deceiving us into thinking it isn't a big deal to hope that happiness is just another credit card swipe away.

Sin is a problem, but deceit about sin is even more dangerous. Repentant people who trust Jesus can be forgiven. But if we are deceived into thinking that wrath will not come upon the disobedient, we have no hope. Let's see the people who try to deceive us with empty words for who they are. Let's see Satan for who he is. We are in a garden. God has blessed us richly, but he has told us, "Do not eat from the fruit of *that* tree or you will die." Day by day and week by week Satan will test our faith in God's word, "You know, you really won't die. It's actually really great. Take a bite." If we want to keep walking in the light as God's children, let us allow no one to deceive us with these empty words. For these sins, the wrath of God does come upon the sons of disobedience. Notice a second way to stay in the light in **verses 7-9**.

### **2) Do Not Become Partners with Them (5:7-9)**

It has amazed me in recent years to see how much a person's lifestyle changes based on the people they are with. Recently, I have thought about how much Ashley and I have grown in the past couple years. We believe one of the biggest reasons for that is our

partnership with you all. You are a needed example in our lives. We would be different people today if we had committed our lives to people who willfully disobey God. I like to think that I am a rock on an island (“try to move me, but I won’t budge!”), but no one is. Paul is imploring us to think differently. Part of learning how to walk as a child of light is accepting that who we partner with matters. At one time we were in darkness, but now we are light, so we need to walk like it. We simply cannot make best friends with the same people we used to be best friends with. If we are attached at the hip with people of darkness, they will drag us with them into condemnation. *“Bad company ruins good morals,” (1 Corinthians 15:33).*

There is a difference between partnering with the sons of disobedience and showing mercy to weak, sinful people. Jesus ate with sinners because they were spiritually sick and he knew he could impact them with love and mercy. He instructed the apostles to leave towns filled with stubborn people who refused to listen or change. We have no business shunning sinners who are hungry for mercy, but we also have no business snuggling up to people who refuse devise anything but evil. It takes wisdom to see the difference. *“Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers,” (Psalm 1:1).* Our problem is when we walk in a sinners’ counsel, stand on their road, and sit in their seats. Consider your life, are you partnered up with people who are dragging you into sin? Run! Do not be partners with them. Notice a third admonition in **verse 10** and **verse 17**.

### **3) Discern What is Pleasing to the Lord (5:10, 17)**

Paul admonishes us to try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord and to understand what the will of the Lord is. Initially, this seemed like the biggest “duh” in the passage. But, as I thought about it, I realized how helpful this is to keep in mind. For me, I end up doing the most foolish and sinful things when I don’t pause and open up to seriously ask the question: what would be pleasing to the Lord? What is the will of the Lord here? These questions can really keep us out of a lot of sinful blunders *if we will only have the courage to ask them*. Unfortunately, we may often fail to ask these questions because we don’t want to be wrong or feel guilty. We want to do what we do boldly and without concern for what God does or does not want.

But this is what we must do if we want to stay in the light. If we want to enjoy an inheritance in God’s kingdom, we can’t shoot from the hip with the decisions we make in life. So before we say those words to someone, let’s ask, “What would please the Lord?” Before we post something on social media, let’s ask, “Will it please the Lord for me to write this?” Before we go to that place, click on that link, drink that drink, take that job, meet up with that person, and before we do anything when that little voice is warning us - let’s ask, “What would please the Lord?” This simple question has probably saved countless souls and it can save yours. Notice now a fourth way to ensure we continue in the light in **verses 11-14**.

#### **4) Expose the Unfruitful Works of Darkness (5:11-14)**

God distinguishes light from dark throughout Scripture. When God created light, he separated it from dark. God plagued Egypt with darkness during the ten plagues and during the crossing of the Red Sea, but he continuously gave light to Israel. In the tabernacle, God instructed Israel to keep the candlesticks lit. The prophets foretold that Christ and his people would be a light to the world in darkness. God's distinction between light and dark is important. Without light, we don't see sin for what it is. Without light, we can comfortably hide shameful works. Knowing this, Paul instructs us to expose unfruitful works. What is exposed by the light becomes visible, and what is made visible becomes light. The worst thing sin can have is darkness.

We recently installed "daylight" bulbs in our house. Ashley commented recently that these bulbs keep us awake and alert late at night. The same thing is true with having Christ - the true light - in our life. When we read his words and his examples, he shines a light and exposes our hearts. We are more alert to sin around us. But secrets breed sins. We sin, but we think, "It is just a *small* sin. Everyone has done this. It isn't worth making it a big deal." There is sin in the church, "But if I address this, they will leave." But a little leaven leavens the whole lump. Leaven loves a quiet, warm, dark environment. Is your heart, is this church, a comfortable place for sin?

This is why it is so important to regularly read God's word with a heart ready for discomfort. Its examples and teachings and songs make our lives visible. When Christ makes our sinful shortcomings visible, let's not grab fig leaves and cover it up in our minds. If we need to talk to close companions for help, let's do that. We don't want guilt, but if we ignore the light now, we will end up with no inheritance and ashamed eternally. Notice a fifth way in **verses 15-16**.

#### **5) Make the Best Use of the Time (5:15-16)**

Money is often a person's most valued resource, but a far more valuable resource we often forget about is time. In each day we all have the same amount of this resource. We don't have to work for it - time is a gift from God. Time is probably the most precious resource *everyone* has. Paul instructs us here to be careful and wise, "*making the best use of the time because the days are evil.*" Would we say that we always make the best use of our time? Honestly, I'd love to let time just happen - do what feels right in each moment. But Paul says "*the days are evil.*" Unless we seek to make the best use of our time, the evil days we live in will pilot us to using our time to pursue sinful desires. I have found this to be very true in my life. We can see this in the world - crime rates go up on school holidays. If we passively let life happen, not only will we often fail to be useful with our time, we will often make foolish, sinful decisions it.

Making the best use of our time means we need to watch out for laziness. I'm not sure that frequent Netflix binge periods are the best use of our time. But making the best use

of our time also means we need to watch out for incessant busyness. Busyness is the new way to appear righteous. We feel good about ourselves if we are very busy. Let's remember the parable of the sower - the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches prevent us from bearing fruit. Incessant busyness can actually prevent us from bearing real fruit. If we are not bearing fruit and instead repeatedly returning to foolish, sinful decisions, ask if how we spend our time is the problem. If it is, let's take Paul's admonition for ourselves. Let's be more intentional with our time. If we are normally tempted to sin on Friday and Saturday nights, let's decide today how to make better use of that time. Give that time to God and his people. If we are so busy that we are neglecting the assembly or do not have time to for God's word or for serving his people, let's decide today to make better use of your time. I doubt God would agree that Sundays are the best time for second jobs and catching up on sleep. Let's prioritize the assembly, God's word and prayer, and serving the weak. If we are too tired for that, let's cut some things out of our schedules and get sleep so we can make better use of our time.

## **6) Do Not Get Drunk, But Be Filled with the Spirit (5:18-21)**

If our minds keep going back to thinking of ways to get more money and stuff, greed is living in us. If our minds keep returning to thinking of how to enjoy more illicit sexual pleasure, lust is living in us. And if our minds keep going back to how we need and want more alcohol, foolishness is living in us. These vices are addicting and they control us. God's desire is for his Spirit live in, control, and put God's identifying seal on us. Are you addicted to and drunk on alcohol, lust, or greed? There is a way out of darkness. Be filled with God's Spirit.

How? Fill your heart and your life with the things of the Spirit: teach God's people through song, sing and make melody in your heart to God, give thanks for everything, and submit your life to be used for the service of your brothers and sisters in Christ. I recognize that addictions are mental and chemical. But when we are filled with song, thanksgiving, and service to our brothers and sisters, God's Spirit living through us leaves less room for other desires. It is harder to be dissatisfied with our possessions and become greedy when we are giving thanks for everything. It is harder to be dissatisfied with our spouse or to crave the comfort of alcohol when we are praising God for the hope and life he gives us.

Fill your life with God's Spirit. Fill your heart with songs that teach you and songs that express your praise to God. When you are getting ready in the morning, when you are in the car, when you are discouraged and cravings for sin are screaming in your soul, make music in your heart to God, give thanks to him, and plan how to serve and submit yourself to others.

## **Conclusion**

Christians are always wanting to know how God expects them to be able to resist the temptations of Satan and stay on the right path. Many wise people have written a lot of literature to help us kick habits of darkness. Let's put the Spirit's admonitions through Paul at the top of the list. God's "how to's" are the best - let's use them.

## God's Purpose for Marriage (Ephesians 5:21-33)

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Paul instructs us all to submit to one another in Ephesians 5:21. In verses 22-33, Paul uses the example of the church to show wives how to respect and submit to their husbands and the example of Christ to show husbands how to love and sacrifice for their wives. This text is fantastic because, as the example of Christ and the church teaches us about marriage, marriage helps us better understand the marriage between Christ and the church. We will end up seeing purpose in other relationships, but we want to spend the majority of our time talking about God's purpose for marriage.

### **Radical Love and Respect in Marriage**

We will only understand the outcome God seeks from marriage when we see how God commands us to behave within marriage. In verse 22, Paul commands wives to *"submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord."* In verse 25, Paul commands husbands to *"love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her..."* Singles and newlyweds may not feel this, but there is not one of us who has been married very long who does not recognize the extreme difficulty of obeying these commands.

Consider how radical this love and respect is supposed to be. Wives are to submit to husbands like they submit to the Lord. The call is not to follow your husbands' lead when you like him and agree. That is not like the church's submission to Christ. Wives are commanded to submit in everything (vs. 24). Husbands are to love their wives like Christ loved the church. We are not told to buy some roses and take her on some dates here and there. Christ gave his life for the people who killed him. Husbands are to lead and love their wives by sacrificing themselves like Christ did for the church. Submitting and loving like this forces us to constantly consider how our decisions affect our spouse. These commands are meant to alter everything we think about marriage.

Obedience here is so difficult because we are called to respect and submit and love and sacrifice no matter how our spouse behaves. We might obey God in this, but that does not mean our spouse will! We could love in all things, but we cannot control our spouse. Furthermore, God created marriage so that once we commit, it does not matter if we no longer want to be married, there is no biblical escape. We are stuck with our spouse - like them or not. When times get tough, we have a choice: radically love our spouse like Christ no matter what they do, or give up and destroy the marriage.

Making the right decision here is completely unnatural to us. Following the curse from Genesis 3:16 is natural. God said to Eve, *"You will want to control your husband, but he will dominate you"* (Genesis 3:16, NET). This is a sad picture of hostility. Adam was thrilled when he first saw Eve. *"This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh."* Their marriage was initially the prime example of unity. Two became spiritually, mentally and physically one. Yet, God says their relationship would become a battle for control. It was

all an outgrowth of their sin. Adam was supposed to lovingly lead and protect Eve, but he failed when Satan came and he blamed Eve for his sin. Eve was created as a helper fit for Adam, so she was supposed to respectfully follow his lead. But Eve took control and led her husband into sin. They were joined to love each other, but they only thought of themselves. How can we be one with our spouse and love them when we naturally think of ourselves? Through Christ and the church God is reversing the curse and solving the mystery of how two can become one.

### **Improving Our Marital Love and Respect**

Let's look at Christ and the church and consider how God helps us love like this. Upon doing this, we should see a clear picture of what purposes God does and does not give marriage.

**First**, Paul began in Ephesians 5:21 by telling us to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Paul speaks similarly in Colossians 3:23-24. *"Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ."* Whatever we do, we are supposed to do it as if we were doing it for the Lord. We talked about this recently in our class on Deuteronomy 6. The command is to love God with *all* our heart, *all* our soul, and *all* our might. This may seem impossible because we have relationships and responsibilities that are not with God. But we demonstrate this love for God when, despite obstacles, because we love God with all our heart, we live out these relationships and responsibilities how God commands us to. Our love for Christ is demonstrated in how we work, how we treat our spouse, how we interact with our kids, parents, church, and the lost. The parable in Matthew 25:31-46 teaches this principle also. If we do not show love to the least of other people, we do not love Jesus. In as much as we love the least of other people, we love Jesus.

This principle is very present in marriage. But in the thick of marital sins, struggles, and disagreements, it is very difficult to remember this. We only think of the treatment we deserve and how they deserve nothing. We just want out. How are we supposed to love our spouse when our spouse treats us poorly? We might be right in our estimation of them. They might be the least of all people - but God does not command us to love or respect our spouse based on their worthiness. Next time we show kindness, make a sacrifice, take spiritual leadership, speak kindly, submit our will, serve our spouse or surprise them with a gift - let us not make it about what they deserve. When we love our spouses, let us make it a statement about our reverence and love for Christ. If we only love those who love us, what reward do we have? We have a great reward and show we truly love God when we love, sacrifice, respect, and submit to our spouse when we believe they deserve it the least.

**Second**, using Christ as an example, Paul speaks in verses 25-33 of how Christ sacrificed himself and cleansed the church. The reason Christ did this is because we - the church -

are his body. Do we typically hate our body and refuse to care for it? No! We try to take care of our body, even if we do it poorly. We will do anything to feed our body when it is hungry and clean our body when it is dirty. Even though we were hungry, in danger, and dirty, Christ sacrificed himself to change this because we are his body. Christ actually show his greatest love for us when we are not well because it only hurts him if he watches us perish. How a marriage can unify two people peacefully may be a mystery to the world, but following this example is the only way two can successfully become one. It is only beneficial for two to become one when they actually treat each other like they treat their own body.

The application is in Ephesians 5:28. *“In the same way, husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.”* Paul applies this to husbands, but wives can also learn from this. If we are married, we are one flesh with our spouse! If we are treated poorly by our spouse, for some reason we want to make a great statement about it by treating them poorly in return. While we should communicate our hurt to our spouse, we are only hurting ourselves if we hurt them. If we instead love and serve them, we are actually helping ourselves. When we are discouraged with our spouse and with marriage, let’s use this as motivation. If we think our spouse is acting like dirt and we in turn treat them like dirt, we are not only destroying a marriage - we are destroying ourselves. When we actively love them no matter what, we are at least preventing ourselves from being destroyed. Let us adopt a new perspective. When we see our spouse, let us see them as our own body.

**Third**, consider how God does not tell us to make sure we find happiness and fulfillment in marriage. Wisdom literature instructs us to take joy in our spouse to ensure we are not unfaithful. Aside from this, God’s instruction is always to love, sacrifice, respect, submit ourselves, and be faithful toward our spouse unconditionally. These commands are given without respect to our fulfillment. This is because our happiness and fulfillment is not the goal God intended for marriage. It was Christ’s joy to go to the cross for us, but joy was not his intention. His intention was to save us and to love us. Our submission to Christ should bring joy and it is a motivator, but joy is not our aim. Our aim is to love and please Christ by following his lead. In the same way, fulfillment can certainly be outcomes of marriage when we are selfless, but God never promises this to us.

This can be eye-opening. If our fulfillment was not God’s prime goal in creating marriage, this means we have already uncovered what God’s intention is for marriage through our previous points. God has put us in a relationship which becomes a battle when we are selfish and we have to learn and grow to preserve the marriage. It is like this so we will grow to more perfectly have what we do not have: real, self-less, Christ-like love. This is a level of love that is very tough to learn outside of marriage. This is because marriage is so unique. Unless we were extremely mature, our perception of love before marriage is completely unlike what it is like to love your spouse in real life. Few marry thinking of how great it will be to learn to sacrifice, love, and submit to this person when they seem

unlovable. Marriage can force growth like no other relationship because there is truly no way out of it. We must change our expectations and love without reciprocation to save the relationship.

People want to know why marriage is so important. "It is not so bad to have relations and live together before we marry!" People want to know why divorce is so bad. "I am so unhappy - do not make divorce a bigger deal than it is." Marriage is so important because it is more than "just a relationship." God created this relationship so we could learn to love like him - so we could love someone like we love our own flesh. When we selfishly seize marital benefits without the marriage or when we divorce since the marriage is not going well, we are skipping everything God intended. The point is not to get what we want, the goal is to love like Christ. God is teaching us to love and sacrifice ourselves for someone even if they never love and respect us as they are commanded to.

When marriage is tough, we must remember these things. Let us love our spouse, not based on how they love us, but because we love Christ. Let us look at, serve, and love our spouse like they are our own flesh. Finally, let us remember that Christ-like love, not fulfillment, is God's aim for our marriage. Joy may result, but the best part is that when we love without others loving us, we show true love for God. Before we finish, let's make some important conclusions that relate to our study.

### **Resulting Conclusions**

1. **Singles: marry, but do not marry with fulfillment as your goal.** Subtract what you think your spouse will do to fulfill you. Then, consider if you are willing to love or respect this person.
2. **Marrieds: through marriage, God teaches us how to love others.** Paul commands husbands to "*love their wives as their own bodies.*" Marriage helps us understand how to show this love to others. This is key, for God commands us to "*love your neighbor as yourself.*" Our relationship with our neighbor is different, but we are called to the same love. Asking, "What do I get out of this?" is irrelevant. Our love for others is to be based, not on their love for us, but on Christ's love for us. **Philippians 2:3-5**, "*3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.*"
3. **All: we do not deserve each other's love, but we are one body - members of one another.** Let us not keep each other at a distance, for we are to be unified as one. Let us not seek our fulfillment from the body or break fellowship with one another, because this is not loving like Christ. Christ did not leave us when we were at our worst - let us not do this to each other! Let's love our neighbor as ourselves because Christ has loved us and we love Christ.

## **Wives, Submit to Your Own Husbands (Ephesians 5:21-24)**

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God has called us out of darkness to live as his children for his glory. Paul is instructing us how to walk worthy of this calling. In verse 21 we saw that a major part of what it means to be filled with the Spirit is for us to be submitting to one another out of our fear for Christ. In the coming sections, Paul will expound on this instruction by showing us how husbands and wives, fathers and children, and masters and slaves must interact.

This section of Scripture is immensely practical for our day to day lives. Sadly, of all the commands we are given in scripture, there are few commands like these which are viewed as so optional by Christian communities today. Here, we sing hundreds of songs where we proclaim that we believe in Jesus and we trust him. But so many Christians walk out of doors like these and “do” marriage, family, and work with no faith in Jesus whatsoever. It is private. What happens in marriage, family, and work seems to be nobody else’s business. This is often times the case with generational sins. When the failure to obey certain commands in Scripture becomes commonplace, Satan begins to deceive us about how real these commands are. Many Christians view these commands as ideals that can make marriages, families, and workplaces better. It is true that obeying these commands would redeem our relationships, but that is because keeping these commands causes marriages, families, and work relationships to no longer be sinful. We were children of disobedience, we used to follow our desires and do whatever we wanted, we used to “wing it” when it came to our relationships, but God has rescued from our sins and now Christ is directing our lives. It is paramount that we respect the authority of the Son of God, even when it is difficult. Today, we will specifically study Paul’s instructions to wives and then to husbands. Notice **verses 22-24**.

### **Wives, Submit to Your Own Husbands (5:22-24)**

Paul instructs wives to submit to their own husbands. To submit means to yield to the authority or will of another person. The Greek word *hupotasso* refers to a person placing themselves under another. When we read the Bible instructing wives to submit to their husbands the immediate accusation is that this means wives have some sort of inferior value or intelligence. The problem is that when we think of submission we immediately associate it with bondage and oppression. This is not the Bible’s picture of submission, especially since submission is by definition a voluntary act, not forced. We should not think of inferiority when we think of yielding to the authority of another because this is exactly what Christ did when he died for us. This is emphasized throughout the New Testament. Was Christ inferior by submitting to and obeying the Father (John 6:38; John 14:31; Matthew 26:39; 1 Corinthians 11:3)? Neither are wives inferior when they submit to their husbands. In fact, we see great strength in Christ’s submission to the Father - and we see the same thing in wives. Husbands are commanded to love their wives as their own bodies as Christ loved the church. God’s word places a very high value on women.

But the command to submit here is a weighty one. The strength of verse 22 must not be overlooked. *“Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.”* Why would God instruct wives to do this? Paul draws a parallel here to help us. Just like Christ is the head of the church and is himself its savior, the husband is the head of the wife. Wives are, in a sense, supposed to view their husband’s headship as they do Christ’s headship. The church submits to Christ in everything, so wives must submit to their husbands in everything.

In some ways, this passage is hard to preach because the words are quite simple and yet radical. Most wives understand this command, but still find it difficult to obey. Because of this, let’s consider ways Satan can deceive wives into knowing this instruction, but rejecting it.

### **Objections to Submission in Everything**

**1. “OK. Fine. I will submit. Don’t expect me to be happy about it though.”** Submitting to your husband may not always be an easy or delightful thing to do. At times I am completely ashamed at my behavior when I think of how Ashley is commanded to submit to me. But don’t forget that God instructs wives here to submit to their husbands “as to the Lord” and “as the church submits to Christ.” Do we submit to the headship of Christ in a disgruntled way? Certainly not! We do this because we love him. Furthermore, even when we do not understand Christ’s commands or the way of the cross, we still try to trust Christ and submit to him, knowing that he commands us in a particular direction for our joy. All of God’s commands are given for our joy; wives, submitting to your husband is no different.

**2. “OK, but only when I agree.”** God commands that wives are to submit “as to the Lord.” Paul also concludes this paragraph in verse 24 by saying, *“So also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.”* The tough thing about submission is that it is not selective about what it submits in. It is not submission if you only yield to your husband’s headship when you agree with him. This is not to say that you cannot respectfully express why you disagree with him. We do this with God when we are confused. Unless he is leading you into sin, submission means you will follow him in everything. And wives, please understand that husbands are not commanded to make you submit. When they gently implore you to follow them in some difficult decision, respect them and respect their meekness. Don’t take advantage of their Christlike meekness in tenderly imploring you to follow their lead.

**3. “Actually, our family is different. He is happy for me to act as more of a head.”** Each of these commands about marriage flows from God-given roles within marriage. The husband is said to be the Christ figure and the wife is said to be the church figure. These are not suggestions about roles. The very first sin in the world happened because Eve was more than happy to examine the situation and tell Adam what to do and Adam was more

than happy to quietly obey her voice. It is okay for us to not have traditional societal roles in marriage, but we must not abandon the God-given design for our roles.

**4. “OK, I’ll submit, but only if he is respectable.”** It is the classic female hero moment in many modern novels and movies: she is sick of being shackled to a lousy man, so she triumphantly declares, “how can you expect me to respect the unrespectable?” Remember, Paul does not qualify his words and say wives only have to submit to their husbands when they are perfectly respectable. If this was the case with wives and husbands, there would never be any love or respect. Certainly, I want to emphasize that if there is ever abuse or adultery, these are completely different matters which must be handled in a different way.

Wives, when you want to complain, remember that you picked him. Nobody forced you to marry him. When you chose to marry him you were saying, “I place myself under you as the head of my life.” We may not know why you picked *him*, but you did. So, stop complaining. Submission is not nagging your husband. Submission is not complaining about how he never leads. Submission is not speaking ill of him to your kids or friends. **Proverbs 21:9** is very true. *“It is better to live in a corner of the housetop than in a house shared with a quarrelsome wife.”*

### **Even if Some Do Not Obey the Word**

Appropriately, the question often becomes at this point, “What do I do if, outside of abuse and adultery, he is not behaving as he ought to?” Many wives have found 1 Peter 3 to be very instructive and very helpful in knowing the will of the Lord when their husbands are not obedient. **1 Peter 3:1-2**, *“Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct.”* Whether your husband is not a Christian or he is simply not obeying God’s word in a particular way, the admonition is simple: still be subject to them. Peter says you have an excellent opportunity to win your husband back into obedience without a word by doing this. Be quiet. Don’t nag him. Pray for him. Don’t stop praying for him. Then pray for yourself that you will still respect him and submit to him - even when his behavior isn’t right.

I experienced how powerful this behavior is recently with Ashley. I did not like a decision she made, so I let her know in a pretty immature way and I tried to make her feel guilty. I behaved sinfully. She responded in a way I did not expect. “Okay, Scott. If that’s what you think is best, I will do it. By the way, I don’t appreciate it when you talk to me like that.” Her response caused my sinful behavior to hit me like a ton of bricks. She was willing to follow my direction even though I was acting like a clod - and it melted my heart.

Bill and Kitty Hotaling are an older couple I had the opportunity to see a couple weeks ago when I was in Arkansas. While I lived in Arkansas for ten years, Kitty was a Christian,

but Bill never followed the Lord. He would come to the potlucks. Every once in a while he would come to services just for Kitty. But his priority in life was Arkansas Razorback Baseball. He loved cooking BBQ for the team. If God was going to get in the way of baseball, then he was not going to follow God. They have been married many years, and she was as faithful as any of us, but she never nagged him about following the Lord. Because she never nagged him, God's people didn't put a bad taste in his mouth. Bill finally decided to follow the Lord about five years ago. The ones who spent a decade teaching him are not the only ones who get credit for that. Kitty gets even more credit for living with him in a submissive way all those years.

### **Submitting to One Another out of Reverence for Christ (5:21)**

Why submit to your husband even when he is a clod? Go back to **verse 21**. Do you revere, respect, and fear Christ? We don't show this only in abstract ways. We do not show this only by praising and bowing before him. We show we reverence Christ when we walk how he tells us to walk. Wives, show you fear Christ by submitting to your husband. Change your motivation for respecting your husband. Do not respect, submit to, and serve your husband because he is respectable. Do it because you fear and love your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. When you respect your husband no matter how he is behaving, you are respecting Christ.

**Matthew 25:34-40** is a fitting conclusion. *"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'" Even if your husband is "the least of these," when you respect him, you are fearing the Lord.*

## Husbands, Love Your Wives (Ephesians 5:25-33)

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As Paul instructs us to walk worthy of our calling, we are looking at how we must behave in our relationships. It is not up to us to decide how we want to be wives, husbands, parents, children, slaves, or masters. Christ is both our Savior and Lord. If we want to really show that we trust him, we will submit to how he tells us to live in marriage, family, and work. Last time, we considered Paul's instructions for wives to submit to their husbands. Today we will consider Paul's instructions to husbands. Read **Ephesians 5:25** with me.

### Husbands, Love Your Wives (5:25)

Husbands are instructed to love their wives as Christ loved the church. Husbands, think about the power of that statement for a moment. For wives to submit to their husbands as to the Lord is huge, but to love your wife as Christ loved the church is an equally weighty command. Husbands, however you think you are doing in this, the command to love like Christ means that there is never a time when you can say you have arrived.

Consider what Christ did for the church. He was in the form of God, but he became a man. He was at the throne of God, but he came to the earth. He should have been served, but he washed feet. He should have been worshipped, but he was reviled and treated as a criminal. He is light and life, but he became sin and death. He had the authority to have all things, but he emptied himself. What did he do to deserve people beating him, stripping him, crucifying him, and spitting on him? Why would he endure so much? Because he loved us.

To love our wives as Christ loved the church we must give ourselves up for our them as Christ gave himself up. This means we should be willing to die for her as Christ did - no matter how she is behaving. But Rick said it well in his Lord's Supper talk last week when he said that giving our life up for someone else is just the beginning. The commitment to give our life for her in death means very little if we do not give ourselves up for her in our day-to-day living. Giving ourselves up for her means that we give up our free time, our cellphone, our TV, our attention to listen to her, our minds to think about her, and our bodies and strength to serve and protect her each day. In everything, we must consider her best interest. It is no longer about us. It is no longer about our hobbies, our friends, our ambitions, our success, our comfort, or our pride. It is all about how we can give our lives up for her best interest.

This can be really, really tough. Some days this is difficult because we are mentally exhausted and ready to sit down and read, play a game, watch tv, and not talk. Or we are just ready to sleep. But she wants to talk. She has had a tough day too. She asks for your help with the kids, with dinner, or with the laundry. Or she just asks for you and your attention and to spend time with her. Some days this is tough because she has not been

respecting us as she is commanded to do. That's when it is the most difficult. Maybe she maligned your motives. Maybe she disregarded something you requested. Maybe she nagged you again. The command to us is no different. Love your wife like Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. The problem is that, just like wives submitting to their husbands, sometimes loving your wife in this way and especially in these circumstances feels completely contrary to everything that is natural, comfortable, and easy for us.

How can we do better and overcome these obstacles? Let's look at this passage a little more so we can get into the mind of Christ and see what motivated him to love us and give himself up for us even when he deserved better, even was tired, and even when we sinned against him. Read **5:26-32** with me.

### **Christ's Motivation for Giving Himself Up (5:26-32)**

Let's walk through this and see the mind of Christ. The first thing we see in verse 26 is that Christ loved and gave himself up for the church so that he could sanctify and cleanse her. We were sinful. We were evil. We were rebellious. We did not want to follow God so much that we killed him when we had the opportunity. The only one who could change our hearts, help us, and clean us up was Christ.

But why did he want to sanctify and cleanse us? Paul says in verse 27 that Christ wanted to do this so he could present the church to himself without any spot or wrinkle. The mystery we find in verses 29-32 is that Christ wants to have "one flesh" relationship with us. Just as God dwelled with man in the garden and in the tabernacle and in the temple and through Jesus, God's goal is to dwell with us. But that one-flesh relationship with us is impossible when we have made ourselves God's enemies. So, he gave himself up for us to sanctify us and he entered into a covenant with us. Now he is our head and we are his body. The problem is that now we still do the wrong thing and we get ourselves dirtied up. And yet, when we fail to follow him and be the body, the spouse he died for us to be, does he stop cleaning us up? No! We are his body. Paul says no one ever hates their own flesh. You nourish it and cherish it.

Think of how Christ could have unsuccessfully tried to draw us in, cleanse us, and forge a relationship with us. He could have come into the world, knocked us over the head, dragged us to his home, given us a list of rules, and bossed us around until we were everything he designed us to be. How well do you think that would have worked?

Husbands, we can learn a lot from Christ. We want this great woman who is just everything we ever dreamed a wife would be. We want her to be only for us. We want her to follow our lead. We want her to love everything about us. We want to have a great one-flesh - body, mind, and soul - relationship with our wives. We want her to respect us. If we want to obey God and to ever have a hope of that, we have to treat her like she really is

our body. Christ gave himself up for his body and we have to do the same for our wives. What do you do when you have a cut on your arm? You certainly don't just cut it off. You gently clean it up - even if you are tired or it hurts a lot.

Men, we need to look at our wives and treat our wives like she is our body. If we can change our perspective on this, it can change everything about how we do marriage. She is your body. When they need us and we ignore them, we are hurting ourselves. When they mistreat or disrespect us and we treat them in the same way, we are hurting ourselves. When they respect us and treat us kindly and we respond in kind, we are no better than the tax collectors who do the same. When they treat us poorly and we love them and give ourselves up for them in return, we become more like our Father, more like Jesus, and we help ourselves because we are loving our own body. When we love our wives no matter what, we love ourselves. When we mistreat and refuse to give ourselves up for our wives, we hate ourselves.

### **Concluding Applications**

**1. Avoid Adam's failure and pursue Christ's success.** Think back to the Garden of Eden. Who led whom into sin? Eve led Adam into sin because she was deceived by the snake. Though God knew that Eve led Adam into sin, who did God first call to and who did God first punish in the garden - the man or the woman? God called for out to the man because Adam was always meant to be the leader in their marriage. Adam was the one who was originally given the command and he was responsible for teaching this command. Brothers, this is our position. We are called to bring home the bacon, but we are also called to be spiritual leaders. Adam watched his wife do what God commanded them not to do. Then, Adam joined in sin with his wife. It is so much easier to quietly and passively let them lead us down a path of passivity towards God's commands. Christ didn't take that path. He lovingly and gently exposed the condition of the world. But the world responded with hostility. Brothers, sometimes she will respond with hostility when you try to lead in the direction of righteousness. Maintain the humility Christ had and the righteous shepherding that Christ engaged in while he endured poor treatment from those whom he was trying to lead as well.

**2. Single women, be careful who you marry.** Because husbands are to be spiritual leaders as Christ is toward the church, you need to carefully consider who you date and ultimately marry. He does not have to be perfect, but just because you find a young man who sits in a pew every Sunday does not mean he is up for the great challenge of leading you and your children in paths of righteousness.

**3. Single men, prepare to be a Christ-like husband.** One big thing single men often forget as they consider marriage is that life is no longer going to be all about them. When we are single, we can sometimes be conditioned to live life for only ourselves. We get up when we want, go to bed when we want, eat when we want, play when we want, go out

when we want, and spend however much we want on what we want. That freedom is nice, but it is a dangerous mindset to bring into marriage. This is not how married life works. Young men, prepare for marriage by thinking about how you can give yourself up for the church. It is not all about you, your job, your success, and your happiness.

**4. Husband, love your wife; wife, respect your husband.** It is great for wives to love their husbands and for husbands to respect their wives, but that is not the command here. What wives really need is to be loved and cherished. What husbands really need is to be respected and honored. If your spouse is unhappy, consider that you might not be treating them in the specific way God commanded you to treat them.

## Walk Worthy in Family (Ephesians 6:1-4)

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We are half-way through the Apostle Paul's instructions to us regarding how to walk worthy in our relationships. The problem we can often have with this section is that, due to its difficulty to apply, it is often ignored or seen as optional. Satan has deceived the minds of so many believers into thinking obedience to these commands is only necessary as long as it is easy. The moment difficulty and hostility enters a husband-wife relationship, a parent-child relationship, or a boss-employee relationship, these commands are often cast aside as impossible ideals. We have said we believe in Jesus Christ as our Lord. These commands are where the rubber meets the road. Faith and obedience are a growth process - there is no denying that. But these commands regarding marriage, family, and work relationships are so often the test to see whether or not we truly trust Jesus as Lord.

Today, we will focus on the family. As a whole, families are one of the most broken aspects of our culture. Sometimes, godly families are God's tools for fruitfulness in the world. Other times, families are just breeding grounds for the spread of anarchy and selfishness. We want it to be said in Jesus' body that our families, though imperfect, are sources of light in this dark world. Let's consider Paul's commands to children in **Ephesians 6:1-3**.

### **Children, Obey and Honor (6:1-3)**

Listen up, children. It was not too long ago that I was a child and a teenager. Life is fun as a kid. You have lots of energy and new experiences. You have few responsibilities. Life is exciting - except when mom and dad get in the way with their rules. You were playing video games, but your parents told you to clean your room. You were having fun with your friends, but your parents said it was time for them to go home. You wanted to eat ice cream, but your parents said "no." You wanted to just have 24/7 fun in high school, but your parents told you to get a job and save for college. You wanted to stay out till 2am, but your parents told you to be home by 11pm. Life seems like it would be so much fun as a kid if it weren't for parents telling us what to do.

Do you fear God? Paul has two commands for you. First, obey your parents. I know that can be difficult. Sometimes parents just do not understand what is going on in your mind. Sometimes they aren't patient with you. Sometimes they might even make a mistake or make rules you think are too strict. You wish they would understand you and the things you are going through. You wish you could just grow up and make decisions for yourself. Some of your friends may even encourage you to just do whatever you want. But this is not right. God says the right thing for you is to obey your parents. The only time you can ever disobey your parents is if they try to stop you from serving Jesus (cf. Matt. 10:37).

Paul's second command is to honor your parents. That takes it to the next level. If we honor our parents, then we will certainly obey them. But honoring our parents also means we will treat them with respect. It means we will speak kindly and politely to them. It means we will not make fun of them. It means we will accept that they are over us and that we will submit to them. The Bible even says in other passages that honoring our parents means we will take care of them (cf. Matt. 15:1-9; 1 Tim. 5:4, 8). Your parents cared for you when you were young, so honoring your parents means you will take care of them when they are old.

One of the hardest things I faced when I was a teenager was what to do when I disagreed with my parents. You must always honor and obey your parents, but this does not mean you will always agree with them. But what should you do when you disagree with them? One of the biggest mistakes I have made is to yell at my parents and act like they are dumb. That never helps. If you disagree with a decision they make or you think there is something they are not understanding, respectfully ask them if you can say something. If they don't let you explain how you feel, accept it. If they allow it, calmly explain to them why you disagree with their decision. They might change their mind and they might not.

Regardless, honor them. Paul tells us why in verse 3 - life will go much better for you and you will live longer. Understand, your parents will make mistakes and sometimes you will disagree with them, but they are trying to do what is best for you. You will not always understand the decisions they make or the reasons they give, but if you will obey and honor your parents even when you do not understand, life will be much, much better for you. I always thought my parents didn't really know much, but I remember I was 20 when I finally realized how smart they actually were. Ashley and I had just started dating and we were having trouble. I did not understand what the problem was. I called my dad and he immediately explained everything to me. He told me Ashley just needed some space and that we were moving too fast. I didn't tell him, but I thought he was totally crazy. It turned out that he was exactly right. You will have to have your own experiences to realize how right your parents are, but try to logically accept now that your parents are right and the decisions they make will help you have a better and longer life. **Proverbs 30:17**, *"The eye that mocks a father and despises a mother's instructions will be plucked out by ravens of the valley and eaten by vultures."*

Adults, Paul's message is for us too. Some of us have parents that make foolish decisions. Either way, we all know that our parents still make mistakes and have flaws. Sometimes we think when we get older that everyone deserves our patience and understanding except our parents. Sometimes we will be tempted to speak evil of them. God still commands us to honor them. Honor them. Speak kindly to them and speak kindly of them. Your children are learning how to treat you from how you treat your parents. Furthermore, take care of your parents. That is your job. It might take a lot of time and sacrifices, but you won't regret the sacrifices you made to honor for them.

## **Fathers, Bring Them Up (Ephesians 6:4)**

Before we consider Paul's instructions to fathers, I want to make some caveats and lay out some things we can all agree on.

1. I am young and I have not even started to raise children.
2. ~~Since I have not had kids, I know everything about how to raise them.~~
3. Lord willing, one day I will have failures and regrets of my own. One day, I will realize how hard it is to obey this passage from experience.
4. Paul had no children and was not married, yet God still directed him to write this.
5. There are a lot of opinions about parenting. Some opinions make us feel unnecessarily guilty. Some opinions unnecessarily comfort us. Some opinions make us trust man's ideas and not God's commands.
6. No work of ours is before the world to see like parenting is. Because of this, parents can be really defensive. This never helps with anything in any part of our lives.
7. If we trust the Lord, we will strive to obey his instructions.
8. Nobody will be a perfect parent; thank God, his grace will cover our imperfections.

Notice how Paul's instructions are to fathers. This is not because mothers are not part of the raising process. They are every bit part of it - and often times more. However, Paul addresses fathers because fathers are the ones who are ultimately responsible for the family. Because of this, parents should absolutely work together, but fathers are the ultimate authority. Fathers, one day you will have to answer for how you raised your children. The question will be whether or not you relied on the Lord's wisdom or your wisdom and whether and obeyed his teachings or whether you tossed in the towel. The fact that fathers are given the ultimate responsibility is a bit troubling since many fathers in society leave the majority of parenting and discipline to moms. Fathers, don't do that to your wife. Play with your kids. Cuddle with your kids. Instruct your kids. Discipline your kids. Pray with your kids. Bring them up.

\*One day I will realize how hard it is to be a father and have failures of my own.\*

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger. This means fathers should discipline, but discipline must not be excessive. Do not take your anger out on your children. Unless there is some danger you are protecting them from, yelling is not right. Hitting your children because you are angry is not right. Discipline for the good of your child, not because you are angry. Try to remember what your parents did that unnecessarily provoked you to anger. Consistency is important. If you only punish your kids for a disobedience 25% of the time, it is confusing and frustrating. Punishing the wrong kid is also frustrating. Parents will mess up, but try to actually punish the right kid. Not apologizing will also provoke your children to anger. When you mess up, apologize. Don't try to brush it off by playing a game or telling a joke. Apologize. One of the biggest things that provokes anger in children is a lack of explanation for rules and punishments. When your kid is 6 months or 2 years old, you can't explain things. But explain your judgments

and rules when they get older. They want to stay out until 2am, you say they have to be back by 10:00 or 12:00. Explain why. "Nothing good ever happens after 10:00 or 12:00." They will often not understand. But treating them like a human and at least giving an explanation helps. Remember - kids are humans. They have independent thoughts and feelings. They are not to be manipulated.

\*One day I will realize how hard it is to be a father and have failures of my own.\*

Fathers, bring your children up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Fathers, this means you are not raising your children to become straight-A students and brilliant engineers. That is not the goal of parenting. Raise them with the Lord's instructions. Teach them to fear God. Raise them to love him. Tell them the story of how God saved Israel from slavery. Tell them the story of how God saved you. Tell them about Jesus. Tell them why we obey God. They are souls. You are responsible for them. One day they will be accountable to God. Prepare them for that. Always remember that the goal is to bring them up to have a relationship with God. That is why you spend time with them. That is why you physically discipline and spank them. That is why you instruct them. It is so difficult. It rips your heart out. You are exhausted. Remember that it is their job to test the lines, and it is your goal to point them to God and to his lines. **Deuteronomy 6:6-7**, *"And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise."*

Fathers, bringing up your children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord means you are not to raise your children after the ideals of popular psychology. Popular psychology and society will give you opinions about discipline. In particular, society will quote studies and tell you not to discipline your child. Be diligent in your discipline, remember that your children are learning about God as our Father from how you father.

**Proverbs 22:15**, *"Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him."* **Proverbs 23:13-14**, *"Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you strike him with a rod, he will not die. If you strike him with the rod, you will save his soul from Sheol."* **Proverbs 29:17**, *"Discipline your son, and he will give you rest; he will give delight to your heart."* **Proverbs 13:24**, *"Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him."*

Fathers, remember **Proverbs 29:15**. *"The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother."* I really appreciated Scott Smelser's instruction from this passage in February. The temptation of many parents is to only use the rod or to only give reproof. If we only using the rod on our children and do not teach them with our mouth, we are not doing our job. If we only tell our child "Stop! Don't! No! Be quiet!" and we do not use the rod on our children, we are not doing our job.

Fathers, consider how Paul tells fathers - not churches - to bring them up in the discipline and admonition of the Lord. Sometimes when children grow up, they wander off. This is what scares me the most about being a father one day. Sometimes, parents share the blame for their child's demise, sometimes they do not. Whoever's fault it is is not the point. But the thing Christian parents often say is, "I don't know what went wrong. I always brought them to church." It is good to bring kids here. You should. Bring them to Bible class. Train them to pay attention in the assembly. But, fathers, if you simply bring them here, you are not bringing them up in the Lord's teaching. You are their teacher. If God's word is not opened and taught in the home, "church" will seem like a hypocritical side-hobby. It is tough because you are tired, but it will be worth it. I loved it when my dad would pull out the marker board and tell us a Bible story. Even as a little boy, those stories gave me direction.

Wherever you are in this - children or fathers - do not leave here discouraged. If you see that you are not obeying Paul's commands here, realize that God's grace is for your sin too. It is not too late. That's the beautiful thing about God's grace. When we see our sin, it is not the end of the world for us if we will humble ourselves and repent. Fathers and children, repent! Children, obey and honor your parents. Fathers, take responsibility for the upbringing of your children into the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

## Walk Worthy in Work (Ephesians 6:5-9)

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We are in the final paragraph of Paul's instructions on how to behave in our relationships. God's instructions for our relationships are so difficult because we have the opportunity to fail and succeed every day. The positive is that we have small opportunities every single day to show our God and Father that we trust him and love his ways. If we take those opportunities, we will be lights. Consider, what is so different about the people who stand out to you as being very different in a good way? Often, it is how they behave in their marriage, their family, and in their work that stands out to us so much. When it comes to being a light to the nations, many of you have your greatest opportunities to be a light by obeying the Lord's commands in how you work. Every day, we show who our master is by how we work.

Paul's instructions in Ephesians 6:5-9 are directed to bondservants and masters. Some translations use the term "slaves" and "servants." This is a difficult subject because of the brutal slavery that existed in the United States in the 18th and 19th centuries. Let me be clear: kidnapping people from their homes and selling them into slavery is condemned in Scripture. Beating, threatening, raping, and denying justice to a slave is also condemned in a variety of places. The slavery that existed in the United States was wicked and wrong. Slavery seems to have been a mixed bag in the Roman Empire. There were good masters and there were wicked masters. Some entered slavery voluntarily to repay a debt and some were enslaved against their will because their nation was conquered. Some were able to gain their freedom, and some had no ability to gain their freedom. It was often a bad situation. Because of this, it is fascinating that this section of Scripture even exists. Paul does not bemoan the terrible slavery and stealing of human rights and liberties that was taking place in the Roman world. Paul did not call for Christian slaves to overthrow the Roman government and take back their rights. Instead, Paul gives instructions for how to glorify God in this less than desirable situation. This reminds us of a principle that is often repeated in Scripture: the gospel may not change our earthly circumstances, but it must change how we live in those circumstances.

Though these instructions are given to slaves and masters, this passage still applies to our work situations. If these principles apply to people who are forced to work, how much more should these principles apply to people who choose to work. The principles here apply to both servant-master relationships and to employee-employer relationships. Notice **6:5-8**.

### **Bondservants, Obey Your Earthy Masters (6:5-8)**

I see four overall messages here to bondservants which we can apply as employees and those who are under others. **First, we are to obey our masters or bosses with fear and trembling.** When the boss tells us what to do, we need to do what he or she says and we should not be thinking of a way out of it. Drawing from my experience with work, this

fear and trembling was not always very common. The boss was a common enemy for the employees to unite against and make fun of. Instead of having a fearful obedience for the boss, employees typically tried to think of how much they could get away with not doing. You only obey what you want to obey. Test the boss's limits. It is clear from what Paul says that this behavior is the opposite of what God wants from us. Unless our boss is telling us to do something illegal or something that compromises our devotion to God, the boss's word needs to be law to us.

**Second, we must serve sincerely, not giving eye service or being a people-pleaser.** If there was one thing that was consistent about the employees I worked with, it was that everyone was expected to work differently when the boss was around. The higher up the supervisor, the higher the expectations for how you worked at that moment. This especially stood out to me when I worked at Applebee's. It was amazing how busy everyone *appeared* to be when the quality control woman was around. The moment she walked out the door, the cellphones came out, the brooms were put away, and people sat down to eat. One day was especially eye-opening when she walked out the door and then returned within a minute or two to find nobody working. Brothers and sisters, when we are on the job, let us not be people-pleasers. Work the same regardless of who is watching. Trust me, I know what that is like. I have nobody looking over my shoulder to see if I am doing my job. The only real way to test a part of what I do during the week is to judge my preaching and teaching to see whether or not I really prepared as I was supposed to. To work the same regardless of who is watching, you have to set personal goals and work because of your personal motivations and what you believe. Determine to not care who is watching and continue to be motivated internally.

**Third, work as if you are working for the Lord, and not for man.** This is the internal motivation that makes it easier to work no matter who is watching. We will fail to work as the Lord wants us to if we think of ourselves as people who are simply working for other people. When we think we are working for people, we know they do not always see us and we know the cracks they will fail to find in our work. Furthermore, when we work like we are working for people, we will not show those people the respect God wants us to show them. We have all probably had a supervisor who did not know what they were doing. It is easy to start thinking of how we should actually be in their position. It is easy to disrespect them and think it is okay to do a poor job for them since we do not like how they are treating us. Those are tough situations - especially when we are being mistreated. Whether you like who you are working for or not, change your motivation. Do not work like you are working for people. Do not try to please people with your work. Work like you are working for the Lord.

**Fourth, work for a reward from the Lord.** This is why we should work as if we are working for the Lord, because whatever good we do we will receive it back from the Lord. This helps a lot, because when we work this hard - as if we are working for the Lord, no matter who is watching - it can feel pointless if we don't have the right motivation. If we

do not work like people-pleasers, then we will do a lot of things that the boss will never notice or praise us for. We will do a lot of things our boss will not reward us for in this life and that is okay because - remember - it is not our boss that we are working for. If the Lord is the one who will really be rewarding the good we do on the job, we truly are working for the Lord, not just acting like it.

If we will work in these ways - obeying with fear and trembling, not just working when the boss is watching, working as for the Lord and for his reward, we will stand out. Not only that, we will glorify God. One thing I learned from my six years in restaurants and in my two years at an office is that it is rare to find a trustworthy worker. Let us work like Daniel - people who the boss wants to hand everything over to.

### **Masters, Stop Your Threatening (6:9)**

Even if we are under other people, there are often times when we will be over others. Sometimes we will be in charge of a project or sometimes we will have authority over a whole division. Wherever our authority is, we are instructed to behave in the same way as employees. Even if we have authority or are in charge, how we work still matters to the Lord. Whether we are working for a boss or we are the boss directly answering to the clients, we must work with integrity and realize that our work is still for the Lord.

Being in charge does not give us the license to mistreat those underneath us. We do not have the license to threaten or speak angrily to them. This threatening was so common in the Roman Empire with slaves and masters. Masters would threaten their slaves in order to get them to do whatever they wanted. Unfortunately, bosses still resort to this type of behavior today. This is what is so great about Boaz's example in the book of Ruth. When he greeted his workers, he said, "May the Lord be with you!" In a wicked world when nobody would have faulted Boaz for mistreating his workers, Boaz recognized that they all had a higher master who watched them. It can be easy to forget that when we have authority. Some people love having power over others. The love of power is a dangerous. When God gives us power, let us recognize that he is our master and he will repay us for the good we do with our authority.

### **Conclusion**

**1. Don't make working for bread your goal in life. John 6:27, "Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you."** We must work. Work is important. God wants us to work. But if we make the sole aim of our life the success in our job, the most we will have at the end of our lives are cushy retirements and the admiration of fellow workers. Good work is not our only responsibility. We have family we need to spend time with. Even more, we must work for the food that endures to eternal life. Make God's word your greatest passion, not the thing that supplies physical bread.

**2. Work and school are not a waste of your time. Colossians 3:23–24,** *“Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.”* I used to think that work had no greater purpose than to simply supply our needs. This is one of the reasons why I chose to preach. I always worked very hard in my secular jobs, but I did not feel like there was any reason to excel in work or school. A Christian friend at school, Lyndsey, and I always talked about how school was a waste of our lives. It is true that there are more important things in life than school and work; however, when you do your work, you are doing it for the Lord and the Lord says you will receive a reward for the good you do - whether you are in forced labor (school) or paid labor (work). Furthermore, you glorify God by doing a great job at your work.

**3. You must work if you want to eat. 2 Thessalonians 3:10,** *“If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.”* Don’t be lazy and take from others.

**4. Kids, choose a path that will lead to a real job. Proverbs 12:11,** *“Whoever works his land will have plenty of bread, but he who follows worthless pursuits lacks sense.”* The HCSB says, *“But whoever chases fantasies lacks sense.”* I appreciated the good wisdom my parents gave me growing up. They always encouraged me to try to find work that I would enjoy. However, they also encouraged me to find a job that would actually support a family. Many millennials have always been told to follow their dreams when they choose a job. Ecclesiastes certainly does tell us that it is good to do work that we enjoy. However, Proverbs also tells us to not chase dreams and fantasies and worthless pursuits. I am not an advocate of the “college is the only path” theory, so I’m not here to tell you to go to college. Boys, you don’t have to have much, but plan to support your family. How we work matters. Let’s glorify God by how we work.

It is so easy to become complacent as we live day to day, but Paul shows us in Ephesians 6:10-13 that we are in a real spiritual battle for our lives. We are not battling a physical enemy who can be seen in obvious ways. There is a whole host of evil spiritual rulers and forces in the heavenly places that are working together with the devil to bring us down. This is a frightening picture, but God has battled wickedness before (cf. Isaiah 59). The only way we will be able to stand is if we take up the very armor that God uses when he goes into battle. In fact, Paul guarantees us through the Holy Spirit that we will be able to stand firm in the evil day if we do *take up the whole armor of God*.

The upcoming section in Ephesians 6:14-17 echoes of Scriptures in Isaiah (cf. Isaiah 11:5, 52:7, 59:17) which speaks of the very armor God and the Messiah and the Messiah's people wear. When Paul tells us to take up the whole armor of God, we are literally taking up the very nature and character of God that ensures his victory in every battle against his enemies. Today, we will look at the first two pieces of armor referenced in Ephesians 6:14 and why each piece of armor is important in spiritual warfare. We will also discuss how we can ensure that we take up this armor so we can withstand the evil day.

### **The Belt of Truth (6:14)**

Belts are considered as optional today, but they certainly weren't optional in Paul's day. Belts are how garments were tucked in so their wearers were ready for rigorous activity and action. Without a belt, your garments weren't contained. The phrase "gird up your loins" is often used in Scripture to instruct people to get ready for physical and spiritual. In fact, tells us here that we will be able to stand when we have "*girded [our] loins with truth*" (NAS95). Therefore, we need to fasten on truth as a belt.

Truth is a very elusive thing today, or at least it seems to be elusive. The majority of people in the world seem to view truth as relative - like a moving target. What is true for you may not be true for me. Truth and the path to truth can be found anywhere and is often whatever you want it to be.

It is in vogue to question truth, but we aren't the first generation on earth to seriously question the nature of truth. Notice Jesus' discussion with Pilate before his death in **John 18:37-38**, "*For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.*" Pilate said to him, "*What is truth?*" Pilate's question certainly is fair. Really, what is truth? We could sit and debate the answer to this question for hours. The good news for those in Christ is that - as Jesus says here - *we are of the truth* if we listen to Jesus' voice. Paul through the Holy Spirit reflects this same understanding in Ephesians 4:21 - the truth is in Jesus.

The sad thing is that Christians often look everywhere else to find truth. When we try to find what is right, wrong, reasonable, how to look at the world, how to think about God, or even how to make decisions, we often look to ourselves. We often consider our own experiences, our own brains, or own logic. We look to books written by the “pros.” When we are talking about trying to comprehend something as concrete as truth, going to our own different experiences and supposed “experts” presents a real problem. When it comes to discussions about solid truth, we often sound like we are wearing an ungirded dress into battle.

What is the big deal if we mess up truth? Jesus tells us in John 8:44. Deceit is a huge part of warfare and Satan is the father of the lies we believe. Lies are how Satan deceives and destroys people’s lives. The scary thing about the context of John 8-9 is that those who follow Satan are blind, but they think they see. Imagine waking up in the middle of the night and confidently walking in the dark as if you were walking in your own house, except you are walking on a field filled with landmines. What would the result be? So many people think they are in and of the truth and they are confidently walking in deception. Paul instructs *followers of Jesus* to gird their loins with truth. The Holy Spirit is concerned about the dangers that lurk for the very people in this room.

We are in a real battle against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places and if we want to be safe from deception and destruction, we need to put on truth like a belt and fasten it tight. We are **not** naturally wearing this belt. We naturally have false perceptions. We naturally are tricked into deceit, as Eve was tricked in the garden.

In John 9 Jesus tells those around him that if they were blind they would be able to see. This is really helpful. Often, our problem is that we assume that we see - we already understand everything and know all truth. This assumption makes us blind to our own ignorance. But if we will be blind - assume that we don’t know all truth yet and assume that we are wrong about important things - then we will come to Scripture diligently seeking to let God inform, tweak, and transform our understanding of truth, reality, life, death, God, wisdom, salvation, right, and wrong. My grandfather was a great example of this. He was 79 when he died and he had recently purchased a Bible in the last 5 to 7 years before he died. When I inspected his Bible after he died, it was clear that this Bible had been heavily, heavily worn and used in those few years. My grandpa saw very difficult days in the final two decades of his life, but he was ready for these evil days because he pursued truth with diligence. Put on truth as a belt so you too can withstand those evil days.

### **The Breastplate of Righteousness (6:14)**

Breastplates are hard shells protecting some of the most vulnerable and most important parts of our bodies. Paul instructs us to put on the breastplate of righteousness. The Bible speaks of righteousness belonging to people in two main ways. First, there is the

righteousness or justification declared of us through our faith in the faithfulness of Christ. Second, there is righteousness that refers to our personal holy living that strives to accord with God's likeness (cf. Ephesians 4:24). Since Paul is speaking to Christians who have already been declared righteous by faith, it seems more logical to interpret that Paul is telling us to put on righteous, holy living as a breastplate.

The problem with righteous living is that it is simply not easy. Killing sin doesn't just happen. Bearing the fruit of God's Spirit is not a breeze. Scripture continually testifies to us that our righteousness is simply not enough. Therefore, understand that this discussion is not meant to tell us to simply be righteous enough to be saved. That is not the image here. The image is of warfare. We have already been declared innocent, but we are now in a battle against the spiritual forces of wickedness. Evil days are coming and if we want to stand in those evil days, we need to put on righteous living as a breastplate.

So how can we do better at putting on righteousness as a breastplate? I found my brother Brent Kercheville's points from Scripture regarding the pursuit of righteous living to be very helpful, so I will borrow from his good work.

- 1. Righteous living is like a breastplate that protects us from unrighteous living.** Or, to put it another way, holy living helps us do better in holy living. Have you found this to be true in your life? We are very habit based people. It becomes easier and easier to choose righteousness the more we choose righteousness. It forms a protective barrier over our hearts. Knowing this helps us. In your next battle, remember that you are not just choosing righteousness one time. Your choice of righteousness in this battle will make it easier to choose righteousness in future battles.
- 2. Righteousness is a practice, not a perfection.** We see this in 1 John 1. When we walk in the light and confess our sins, we still need the blood of Jesus to cleanse us of the sins we commit while walking in the light. This is important to know because Satan wants us to become overly discouraged by our failures. Satan wants us to give up all fighting when we lose a couple battles in close succession and sin. Giving up is a foolish idea - does a soldier remove their armor and let the enemy pierce them just because they were injured? Of course not. They adjust their armor and seek healing. Certainly, if the rule of our lives has become making a practice of stubbornly walking in unrighteousness, that is a problem. But righteousness is a practice to make, not something we are perfect at. In fact, John says in 1 John 1 that we are lying if we say we have no sin. If this really is a battle that is worth fighting, it is worth fighting this battle imperfectly.
- 3. Righteousness is for our joy and protection.** Satan tempts us to think that righteous living is a pain. Does it feel good when you remove your breastplate in battle? Does it feel good after you sin? We see the clear answer from David in Psalms 32 and 51. Sin hurts us a lot because we don't just have Satan's arrows in us - we also feel like we

have the arrows of our Almighty Father in us too when we sin. Remember, when you choose righteousness, you are choosing the good life that protects you and your joy.

## **Conclusion**

Do not be deceived. We are in a fight for our lives. All around us there is a battlefield and the spiritual forces of wickedness are plotting to take you down. Will you withstand the evil day? We will only withstand if we have put on the very armor that enables God to win all his battles. Do not be deceived by the open view toward truth today. Be blind so you can see. Pursue truth in Christ. Do not give up when you fail. Righteous living is worth it. It is a breastplate that will protect you in your future high stakes battles.

## **Armor: Readiness of the Gospel (Ephesians 6:15)**

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We were children of wrath - hostile against God and hostile against God's people. But God was rich in mercy and saved us because of his purpose to glorify his name in all creation. Now we have been instructed to walk worthy of our calling to be his children. We are to grow more and more into Christ who is our head. We are to leave the futility of sinful thinking, be renewed in our minds, and be recreated in the righteous image of God. But the devil and all the spiritual forces of wickedness are plotting and scheming to bring us down. We are in a battle for our lives, but if we will put on the very armor of God, we will be able to withstand the evil day. Last time, we considered the need to put on truth as a belt and righteousness as a breastplate. Today, we will consider how to shod our feet with the readiness of the gospel of peace.

### **As Shoes: the Readiness of the Gospel of Peace (6:15)**

It was probably said in many homes this morning: "Are you ready? Then why aren't your shoes on?" We wear all kinds of different shoes for different occasions. We go tons of different places and participate in many different activities, but none of us is ever ready for anything unless we have put our shoes on.

Paul tells us our shoes for spiritual battle is the readiness of the gospel of peace. There is a question though about what Paul means by this. Does this mean that readiness is given by the gospel of peace (cf. ESV and NIV), does this mean that we need to be ready and prepared with the gospel of peace? Does the gospel give us readiness or do we need to be ready with the gospel? Both interpretations are legitimate and fair understandings of the Greek language. Interpreters are split as to what Paul means. Without seeking to make a complex argument, I will interpret this as the need to be ready and prepared with the gospel of peace. The key reason for this is the support that this interpretation has in the rest of Scripture.

We see this picture of the gospel of peace earlier in Ephesians. In Ephesians 2, Paul tells us that we were enemies of God and enemies of God's people. We were hostile towards everyone and we were alienated from any of the hopeful promises given to God's people. Have you ever seen kids at school who seem to fight with everyone? They are always challenging people. They don't know peace. Because of this they never share in the privileges the other kids and they don't have a crew of loyal friends. Do you know why they act like this? It is typically because they have some sort of hostile relationship with their parents that causes them to be insecure. You would never know it, but all these kids really want is peace with their parents and a crew of friends at school. They really want to be able to enjoy all the privileges the other kids enjoy. This is exactly who we were. We were enemies with God and enemies of God's people. We were alienated from any hope.

But, in Ephesians 2:17 and in the surrounding context we learn that Christ came to us and preached “peace.” He broke down the dividing wall of hostility that separated us from God, God’s people, and the covenants they enjoyed. In Ephesians 3 Paul declares that he was appointed as a messenger to bring this good news to light before all the nations. Christ preached peace, Paul brought it to light, and now in Ephesians 6:15 Paul tells us that we are in a battle and that we need to be ready and prepared with the good news of peace too.

This image of the Messiah’s people being ready with good news of peace originates in **Isaiah 52:7-10**. Because of Israel’s sin, God had departed his people and torn them up with the swords of other nations. But, one day there would be beautiful feet running on the mountains proclaiming: “good news!”, “peace!”, “happiness,” “salvation,” “your God reigns.” The broken city would break out into singing because YHWH has finally returned to Zion. The people who only knew hostility and unrest were had finally heard good news come to their city: peace.

Have you ever seen broken people get good news that God is making peace with them? Have you ever seen them sing? It is a beautiful sight. Do you know why they sing like this? It is because there were some beautiful feet who came to them one day and they were prepared to share with them the gospel of peace. That wouldn’t have happened unless those feet were ready.

Paul tells us in **Romans 10:13-15** that this passage in Isaiah is sending us out to preach the good news. *“For ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’ How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!’ ”* People cannot hear and believe and be saved unless we are sent out with the good news. Let’s add in Paul’s line of reasoning from Ephesians 6:15 - people cannot hear, believe, and be saved unless we are actually ready with the gospel of peace.

This concept of us being ready to speak before the world is repeated other ways in Scripture. **Colossians 4:6**, *“Let your speech be seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.”* **1 Peter 3:15**, *“Always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.”* Unless I am missing something in Scripture, I don’t believe the Holy Spirit ever tells us that he is concerned that we will want to tell people God’s good news of peace. By the way, that shows there is a big problem if we don’t want to tell people the good news. But my bet is that most everyone in this room cares about the broken people in the world and we want to give them good news. The Holy Spirit doesn’t say he is concerned that we will want to go out with the good news, but through these texts he does express concern that we will actually be ready to do what we so want to do.

There are so many people who are broken and hurting. You would never know it, but a lot of these people just want good news that they can be reconciled to God and that they can know the hope we know. I am so ashamed for the times I have not been ready or competent in the gospel so that I could give them this good news. Are you ready?

## **Concluding Action Steps**

**1. Don't fight a two-dimensional battle.** We are not simply in a personal battle for our personal faith and personal righteousness. Each of these commands are given as plural commands in the Greek. The command is for all of us to put on this armor. And now we are told that we all are to shod our feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace. God could have told us to simply wear defensive armor - a breastplate, shield, and helmet. But soldiers go on the offensive. They wear belts, shoes, and they carry swords. In the same way, we are to go on the offensive and go out with truth, the gospel of peace, and with the word of God. The gospel of peace is for the salvation of the world.

**2. Don't be insecure about good news of peace.** Picture a boy running up to a broken, hopeless city with good news. Listen to his shrill voice calling out, "Good news! Peace! Your God reigns!" Why isn't he ashamed of his message? He isn't ashamed because he knows that this good news is exactly what this broken city needs to hear. Sometimes we aren't ready with the good news because we are insecure about our message. We look at our message as bad news of condemnation. I used to think our message had little to no hope: you have sinned, but if you come to my church and do everything right then you have maybe a 30-50% chance of maybe being saved! I truly felt like I was bringing bad news of condemnation. That's how Moses felt. Moses couldn't be bold because he was proclaiming a message of death. But Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 3 that we can be very bold, not like Moses, because we are bringing a message of God's Spirit that gives life and transformation. If the gospel feels like bad news, we don't know the gospel.

**3. Prepare, be ready, and be competent to proclaim the good news of peace.** When I think of the broken and hurting people who have not been able to know the good news because I wasn't ready, I feel ashamed of myself. We are ambassadors sent to reconcile people to God. If we are ambassadors who don't know the interests of our king and the terms and content of the peace we are proclaiming, we aren't going to be good ambassadors. We aren't just sent with the message of "God loves you." There is more to it than that. If you aren't ready, get ready. Get prepared! The leadership here is ready to equip you to teach. There are Scripture-based lessons that have been written to help you share the big picture story, message, and good news given in Scripture. Or, one of the best ways to get ready with the good news is to know the good news as told by Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John. Personally, right now I am really enjoying sharing the good news as told by Mark. Mark's telling of the good news is quick, powerful, and filled with allusions to show

us how Jesus Christ is the God of Israel sent to bring God's awesome, saving power to earth. Just read the gospel as told by Mark with someone and explain it to them.

This might seem like a daunting task, but our sufficiency for this task does not come from ourselves. **2 Corinthians 3:4–6**, *“Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”*

## Armor: Faith and Salvation (Ephesians 6:16-17)

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Of all of God's creation, the Father has set up mankind as the ones to have dominion and authority over his good earth. He created us in his own image, gave us the whole world to use and live in, and commanded us to walk in ways that pleased him. But instead of following our Father's desires, we obeyed the cravings of our own flesh and followed the path of this world. God sought to give us eternal life, but we bowed the knee to the Adversary. If we will surrender our purpose, hope, innocence, God, and our very life, Satan offers us a moment of sinful pleasure. We obeyed Satan and became disobedient children estranged from any hope of knowing God, being part of his people, or inheriting the good promises he had stored up for those who know him.

But God, being rich in love and mercy, purposed to save us and seat us with him in the heavenly places. He chose us out of everyone else in the world. He predetermined that our destiny would be adoption by him. Through the blood sacrifice of Jesus Christ, he redeemed us from slavery to sin and death. He purposed that the end of his whole plan would culminate in the unification of all things - things in heaven and things on earth. Yet, though all creation is God's, he set us aside as his own special possession - his heritage - and stamped us with his Spirit until the time of our redemption. God has blessed us with *every* spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. This has all been done across all the nations so that all creation can see the manifold wisdom of God. We have been called out of darkness to be God's children and Christ's body for God's glory.

Who is worthy of such a calling? We cannot be worthy of this calling, but Paul has instructed us to engage in a walk that is worthy of such a calling. We are to unite as a body under Christ as our head. We are to leave the futility of sin, be renewed in the mind, and pursue the righteousness of God's own image. We are to submit to one another and live out our relationships as he instructs us to. However, every wicked spiritual adversary in the heavenly places wants to deceive us and drag us back into the dark evils of the world. We are in a battle with all our brothers and sisters for our lives and for the lives of those lost in the world. We would have no hope to endure such a battle, except that God has granted us to wear his own armor. We do not know when Satan and his forces will attack, but if we will put on the full armor of God, we will be able to withstand the evil day. Today, we will consider the shield of faith and the helmet of salvation.

### **Shield of Faith (Ephesians 6:16)**

Paul says that if we take up the shield of faith in all circumstances, we will be able to extinguish *all* the flaming darts of the evil one. Consider what a significant statement this is. All of Satan's flaming darts that he fires at you can be extinguished. What flaming darts is he firing at you now? Suffering? Temptation? Busyness? Discouragement? Guilt? We can feel so weighed down at times by the spiritual battle we are fighting. It seems like the attacks never stop coming from unexpected places. But we have a sure piece of armor - take up the shield of faith in all circumstances and you will be safe from however Satan and his forces are attacking you today.

Is that hard to believe? Consider how often it is that Scriptures point to faith as the key means by which God's children can survive and have victory. **1 John 5:4**, "*For everyone*

*who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.” 1 Peter 1:3–5, “According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope... who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” Habakkuk 2:4, “But the righteous shall live by his faith.”* Then, Habakkuk 2:4 is quoted three times in the New Testament to emphasize three more times that it is truly by faith that we can survive (cf. Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:37-38).

What is it about faith that extinguishes *all* the flaming darts of the evil one in all circumstances? Isn’t it true that unbelief - a lack of faith - is the way Satan prevails over us? Unbelief so often causes sin because we are failing to trust that God’s commands are for our good. Unbelief is so often the cause of giving up in suffering because we don’t trust that God can or will help us. Unbelief can be the cause of never-ending guilt because we are not trusting that God can forgive us and will forgive us of sin. The goal of these evil spiritual forces in every attack is to make us feel as though God cannot or will not help us. Their goal is to cause us to stop trusting and stop having faith. “Give up. You have asked him about this 50 times and nothing has changed.”

Therefore, if unbelief is the means by which Satan and his forces prevail over us, faith really can extinguish every flaming dart and ensure that we withstand the evil day. With faith being such an important piece of armor, consider how **Romans 8:31-39** can strengthen your trust in God through Jesus. After proving for eight chapters that God truly is with us - even after we have made him our enemy - Paul drives home the importance of that understanding. If God is with us, can anything that matters or anyone who matters actually come against us and harm us? God has not spared his Son, so he will give us all things. No thing, no person, and no power can separate us from God and his love. He is for us - period. What a great encouragement this passage brings us. If God has not spared his Son to save us, there is no reason why we should not trust him *in all circumstances*.

One more note. The world will tell you to “just have faith” and “just believe” so you can withstand the storms of life. This is foolishness. If we have faith in ourselves or in the cosmos that somehow everything will be alright, we are trusting in wind and we will be able to withstand nothing. Trust in God. Take up the shield of faith *in Jesus Christ*.

### **The Helmet of Salvation (6:17a)**

Helmets are essential to protect our heads. Salvation is to be a helmet that we put on so we can withstand the evil day. I like how Paul in 1 **Thessalonians 5:8-10** gives us a more detailed picture of what it looks like to put on salvation as a helmet. “*But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with*

*him.*" Putting on salvation as a helmet refers to a confident hope in our future resurrection and eternal life in the fullness of God's presence. However, having this confident hope in our future redemption is not easy for a couple of reasons.

First, many Christians often doubt God's forgiveness. We believe we are destined for wrath. Notice **Zechariah 3:1**. Do you ever feel like Joshua the high priest in this scene? Do you ever feel like you wearing filthy clothes and Satan is accusing you before the throne of God? This is the real picture of each one of us. But notice what the Lord does about Satan's accusations in **verses 2-5**. I love this picture. Satan is rebuked and Joshua is given clean garments. Joshua stood clean before the throne of God - not because he deserved it - but because God purposed it. God accomplishes our forgiveness and cleansing through the priesthood of another Joshua today - Yeshua, Jesus the Christ. We need to trust that God really does forgive us and that we are not destined for wrath, but salvation.

Second, many Christians struggle with confidence in salvation because it feels so far away. Do you ever feel like Abraham in Genesis 15? God has made great promises and years later it seems like God is doing nothing to fulfill those promises. He reminds us that he will redeem and save us, but we want to say, "How can I know?" Hope in salvation is difficult. Hope means we are confidently expecting a salvation that we have been promised but we do not yet see and may not see for some time. I love how the Hebrew writer describes Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob's states of mind in **Hebrews 11:13-16**. *"These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city."* These men and women of faith grew to understand that they would very possibly die without inheriting the promises God made to them. They understood that the time when they saw the heavenly country and city would not be in their lifetime. When we are waiting and becoming discouraged, it helps to know that this long, seemingly never-ending wait is what is expected of us. This is what our fathers have hoped in for thousands of years.

Fortunately, God bolsters our hope in salvation by giving us pictures of our future resurrection and salvation by interrupting history with acts of great salvation in our world today. Jesus' resurrection is the greatest act of salvation God has worked in our world. The only hope for this world is found in King Jesus, but the rulers of this world killed him. The rulers still rage against Yahweh today, but God revealed the power of his arm to save by raising Jesus from the dead on the third day. Jesus' cries did **not** go unanswered. The way we have been sealed with God's Holy Spirit is another evidence of God's power to save. We were completely rebellious. We were enemies with God and God's people. But God has removed our heart of stone and stamped us with his Holy Spirit. Now, we loathe sin. Brothers and sisters, people in the world do not feel this way

about sin unless God's Spirit has affected their heart. Our whole view toward God, his law, and his king has changed and is changing. We were dead and now we are alive.

We are like the people of Israel in the day of Joshua. We have journeyed out of Egypt and we sit in the desert looking over into the promised land, wondering if it really is a land flowing with milk and honey. But Joshua has gone into the land before us and brought back the delicious first fruits of the country God has promised to us. We do not yet see our heavenly country, but through Yeshua, Jesus the Christ, we can see and feel a glimpse of what that salvation looks like so our hope can be renewed another day.

### **Conclusion**

We are in a terrifying struggle against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. But when we put on the full armor of God, we have nothing to fear for God promises that we can withstand the evil day with his armor. Take up the shield of faith in all circumstances to quench all the fiery darts of Satan. Put on the helmet of salvation - stop doubting and start confidently hoping in our God and the salvation he has proved he will accomplish through his Son.

## Armor: Word of God, Prayer (Ephesians 6:17-24)

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If you feel like you are under attack, you are not alone. Whether we are aware of it or not, Satan and his host of evil spiritual forces are actively seeking to entrap us in darkness. We used to follow Satan because he offered freedom, but he really only enslaved us to an empty life. But God has now set us free and given us life, purpose, and hope. Satan and his forces are launching a full on attack to recapture you, me, our families, and communities. Think about how real that is in your life right now. Our battle today is not against flesh and blood. Our real battle is against rulers, authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. And yet, if we put on the armor of God, we can actually *stand* in the evil day.

So far we have seen how God's armor can help us defend against the attacks against us. But are we actually actively fighting this battle, or are we simply defending ourselves? Today we will finish out this section and Ephesians with Paul's admonitions to take up the word of God and to pray in the Spirit at all times.

### The Sword of the Spirit (6:17)

Towards the end of *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* Harry is attacked by a huge basilisk. The only way he is able to slay the basilisk is by using the sword that belonged to Godric Gryffindor, a great wizard of the past. In a similar way, we can only launch a proper attack against Satan and his forces by using the very sword that belongs to the Holy Spirit - the word of God. It stands out to me that the sword of the Spirit is the word of God for a couple of reasons. First, there are huge pressures against the importance of the word of God in our modern world, even among Christians. Even among people who claim to follow Jesus, some are not afraid to confidently state that they are bored by the Word. It is both frightening and shocking that this would be said among some of God's people with such confidence and indifference - especially since Paul attributes such importance to the Word. Second, there are enormous pressures in the religious world which say that harnessing the power of the Holy Spirit is far more mystic and complicated than having the word of God. This is not to say that we can sum up the work of the Holy Spirit in the word of God, but this trend is disturbing nonetheless.

Consider, how was Jesus able to overcome Satan when he came to tempt Jesus in the wilderness? Did Jesus speak in tongues or listen to the small voice of the Spirit in his mind? He quoted Scripture. With each temptation, Jesus response began with "*It is written...*"

From beginning to end, the Scripture continually point us back to the word of God as the means by which we wield the Spirit's power to defeat sin and survive. **Psalms 119:11**, "*I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.*" **Deuteronomy 32:46-47**, "*Take to heart all the words by which I am warning you today, that you may*

*command them to your children, that they may be careful to do all the words of this law. For it is no empty word for you, but your very life, and by this word you shall live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess.”* **2 Timothy 3:16–17**, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” **John 6:63**, “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.”

Imagine what would happen if an army ran into battle with all their defensive armor, but no sword. In the beginning, they might be able to withstand the attacks of the enemy, but they would never be able to last and win that battle. They would become exhausted as the enemy continued attacking. Saul in 1 Samuel 15 was content to leave the enemy alive. We must not have that lazy attitude. We do not want to just protect against temptations, suffering, and guilt from Satan - we need to slay him, his lies, and his attacks.

So many Christians are hurting, stuck, frustrated, exhausted, and unable to do much of anything in their fight against Satan. This is because there is hardly a fight. They keep trying to hold the faith and have confidence in their salvation. But they are ironically destroyed by Satan for the same reason God destroyed Israel. **Hosea 4:6**, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge...” We are not carrying the knowledge of the word of God about in our hearts as a sword in spiritual warfare. How can this be the case in the United States where the word of God is so widely available? This is what is so curious about our situation in the U.S. Because the Word is so widely available, there is this widespread contentment among Christians as if we know the Word. This satisfaction is among us. And yet, people who are called by the name of Jesus know very little of the Scriptures he said were all about him.

Are you storing up the word in your heart so you can withstand the evil day? I hope we see that reading the word of God is not a random habit or discipline to be mastered so we can check it off of a good works list. There are so many reasons to study the Word and hold it in our hearts. Using it as a sword in spiritual warfare is one reason. Read, study, and meditate to arm yourself for battle!

### **Praying at All Times in the Spirit (6:18-20)**

Jude gives the same instruction in Jude 20 to pray “in the Holy Spirit.” What does this mean? One thing that is key to understanding this instruction is to understand that prayer “in the Spirit” is not a different kind of prayer. Paul is not instructing us to pray at some times in the Spirit and at other times to pray “out of the Spirit.” We are to pray in the Spirit *at all times*. Paul is not reminding us to pray different kinds of prayers (in or out of the Spirit); rather, he is giving us a very needed reminder of the Spirit’s involvement in our prayers.

Think about prayer from the perspective of the temple in Jerusalem. We learn a lot about the intended purpose of the temple through Solomon's prayer in 2 Chronicles 6. In **2 Chronicles 6:18-21** Solomon asks that when the people of Israel prayed toward this temple, God would listen from his throne in heaven. The temple in Jerusalem was seen as an access point to heaven on earth. Though foreigners like us would not have been allowed in the Jerusalem temple, in **2 Chronicles 6:32-33** Solomon asks that when foreigners travel from distant lands and pray toward this temple, God would listen even to their prayer from his throne in heaven.

Now think about prayer from the perspective of the New Testament writers, especially as prayer relates to language about the temple. In **Ephesians 2:17-22** Paul reminds us that, as Gentiles, we were separated from God's people, the promises, and the access they had to God's throne. But Christ destroyed the dividing wall of hostility and now, through the Spirit, we are being built into the new temple and dwelling place for God on earth. We have access to the very throne of God because through the Spirit inside us our bodies are the very temple grounds and access points to the Father.

Paul tells us what an amazing blessing prayer through the Holy Spirit is in **Romans 8:26-27**. *"Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God."* When we text, e-mail, talk on the phone, or relay any message over distance, there is always something lacking in communication. There can be misunderstandings - things you want to convey, but cannot. There are things you don't know how to verbalize or communicate. This can even happen between people in a face to face conversation! Paul shows us here that since our prayers are possible through the Spirit, God is not distant. The Holy Spirit has made our hearts his home. There are no communications; instead, there are words, emotions, longings, and questions we don't even verbalize that are still communicated when we pray because the Holy Spirit dwells in our hearts to help us. The power to access the throne of God is in each one of us via the same Holy Spirit. How amazing is that?

Therefore, we should pray at all times in the Spirit, in all ways, about all things. Whether our prayer is praise or supplication, lament or thanksgiving, conversation or confusion, prayer truly needs to be a regular part of our everyday lives. We should pray for all the saints. We should pray for ourselves and for others as they have opportunities to proclaim the gospel.

Why? First, who wouldn't want to pray this much when prayer is through the Holy Spirit who intercedes in such an intimate way for us. Second, as Paul says in verse 18, prayer is a way that we become alert and are enabled to persevere. How often have you prayed only to find that there is a lot at stake that needs to be brought before the throne of God

(alertness)? How often have you prayed only to find that a huge weight has just been removed from your shoulders (perseverance)? Pray in the Spirit at all times!

### **He Will Tell You Everything (6:21-24)**

It is really easy to just read over the ends of each of Paul's letters, but we really can glean something important from these final personal notes. Interpersonal relationships really do matter in the body of Christ. We don't only need to communicate with God, we need to fully and openly communicate with one another. Each one of these commands regarding the armor of God has been given in the second person plural - meaning that Paul is not giving instructions to a mere individual among us, but to the whole "army" here. Paul has described us as a body and now the image of an army has come into place with the battle imagery. Body bodies and armies function both through communication to the head and through communication between each part.

Are we hiding ourselves? Is your battle carried out with the army here or is your battle personal and hidden? If you are battling alone, my guess is that you are losing. I lose alone. It takes energy to work with an army, but we cannot be lone wolves and try to do our own thing. If you are keeping the body here at a distance, ask yourself: do I really want to last through the evil day, or not?

### **Conclusion**

We are in a spiritual battle for the glory of God, for the eternal purposes of God, and for our very eternal lives. Are we aware of this battle? Are we fighting this battle? Do you know how to defend yourself? Are you ready with the gospel? Do you doubt your salvation? Are you able to destroy Satan's lies with the word of God? Are you praying in the Spirit and staying alert? Is the person next to you a battle partner, a stranger, or someone to swap recipes, sports scores, and movie reviews with?

This battle is insanely scary because the stakes are so high. Brothers and sisters, do we realize how much God has planned and prepared for us as his children? It is so hard to imagine what he has prepared for us in the resurrection and the age to come. I know this: I do not want to miss out on the opportunity to enter that rest and I want to share it with each one of you. Satan and his forces of wickedness are doing everything they can to ensure we do not enjoy God and his promises. But, with the full armor of God, the gates of hell will never prevail against this army.