

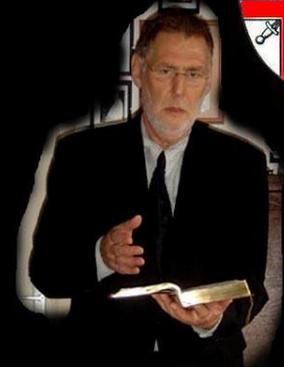


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**Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet
and a light unto my path.
Psalm 119: 105**



ds. Philippe L. De Coster, B.Th., D.D.

Evangelical House Churches

The Pauline Imprisonment Letters Acts 21:17 to 28:31



It was an amazing series of events that brought Paul to Rome, the great capital city of the empire. One archaeological source suggests that the population of the imperial city in the first century was in excess of four million people, about three times the size of a large, modern city (Unger 1962, 316).

When Paul wrote to the saints in Rome from Corinth (in Greece) during the course of his third missionary journey (cf. Acts 20:2; Romans 16:23), he had expressed an intense longing to visit these Christians (Romans 1:10-11; 15:22ff). What an evangelistic opportunity this could be! Little did he realize exactly how, in the providential scheme of things, his goal would be fulfilled.

The prison letters or epistles—Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon—are so named because they were written by the apostle Paul during his incarceration in Rome. The exact date of Paul's imprisonment, as well as the exact dates he wrote each of the prison epistles, is unknown, but the two-year period he spent under house arrest in Rome has been narrowed down to the years AD 60-62. Paul's imprisonment in Rome is verified by the Book of Acts, where we find references to his being guarded by soldiers (Acts 28:16), being

permitted to receive visitors (Acts 28:30) and having opportunities to share the gospel (Acts 28:31). His other two-year imprisonment, in Caesarea, afforded him no such luxuries. So it is generally accepted that Paul's Roman incarceration produced three great letters to the churches of Ephesus, Colosse, and Philippi, as well as a personal letter to his friend Philemon.

One of the more amazing circumstances reflected in the Book of Acts, the fifth book of the New Testament is the manner in which Paul endeared himself to a wide variety of Roman officials. Almost without exception, these dignitaries came to respect God's ambassador to the Gentiles. One really is not surprised, therefore, at the kindly treatment Paul received in the imperial city. Rather than being housed as a common criminal, the apostle was permitted to live in his own rented dwelling, though bound with a chain, and in the company of a guard (28:16, 30; cf. Ephesians 6:20).

The latter portion of Acts 28 summarizes two meetings that Paul had with Rome's leading Jews. And while some of them stubbornly disbelieved his message, others were persuaded by the things he proclaimed (v. 24). This hints of the commencement of a fruitful ministry in the city. Then, abruptly, the narrative ends: "And he abode two whole years in his own hired dwelling, and received all that went in unto him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness, none forbidding him" (vv. 30-31).

Three of the prison letters, also called the imprisonment or captivity letters, were bound for three of the churches he founded in Macedonia on his second missionary journey (Acts 20:1-3). Always concerned for the souls of those he continually prayed for in these churches, his letters reflect his pastor's heart and his love and concern for those he thought of as his spiritual children. Colossians was written explicitly to defeat the heresy that had arisen in Colosse which endangered the existence of the church. In his letter, Paul dealt with key areas of theology, including the deity of Christ (Colossians 1:15-20, 2:2-10), the error of adding circumcision and other Jewish rituals to salvation by faith (Colossians 2:11-23), and the conduct of God's people (chapter 3). The letter to the church at Ephesus also reflects Paul's concerns for the beloved, especially that they would understand the great doctrines of the faith (chapters 1-3) and the practical outworkings of that doctrine in Christian behavior (chapters 4-6). The epistle to the Philippians is Paul's most joyful letter and references to his joy abound within its pages (Philippians 1:4, 18, 25-26, 2:2, 28, 3:1, 4:1, 4, 10). He encourages the Philippian believers to rejoice in spite of suffering and anxiety, rejoice in service, and continue to look to Christ as the object of their faith and hope.

The fourth prison letter was written to Paul's "friend and fellow labourer," Philemon (Philemon 1:1) as a plea for forgiveness. Philemon's slave, Onesimus, had run away from Philemon's service to Rome, where he met the aging apostle and became a convert to Christ through him. Paul asks Philemon to receive him as a brother in Christ who is now "profitable" to both of them (Philemon 1:11). The theme of the Book of Philemon is forgiveness and the power of the gospel of Christ to undermine the evils of slavery by changing the hearts of both masters and slaves so that spiritual equality is achieved.

While the prison epistles reflect Paul's earthly position as a prisoner of Rome, he makes it clear that his captivity was first and foremost to Christ (Philemon 1:9; Ephesians 3:1; Colossians 4:18; Philippians 1:12-14). Paul's time in prison was for the purpose of the spreading of the gospel in the Gentile capital of Rome. The Lord Himself told Paul to "Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome" (Acts 23:11). Paul's time in captivity was no less profitable to us today than it was to the first-century churches he loved so well.

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Letter of Paul to the Ephesians

**Research Work and Bible Study by
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Background

The necessity for writing Philemon and sending a letter back to Asia afforded the opportunity to send others also. Ephesians, as a general encyclical to be distributed through the Ephesian Church, and Colossians, a direct communication to the church at Colosse, were composed at this time, probably in A.D. 60-61. The messenger was Tychicus, whom Onesimus accompanied (Eph.6:21; Col.4:7-9). With Apostle Paul at the time of writing were Aristarcus, who had been one of the delegates to Jerusalem (Acts 20:4), Epaphras, an Asian, Luke "the beloved physician," and Demas. Mark had rejoined Paul at this time and was evidently contemplating a journey to Asia (Col. 4:10), for Paul commended him to Colosse. Jesus Justus, a Jewish colleague, is otherwise unknown. The very fact that these men are mentioned both in Colossians and in Philemon indicates that the epistles were written about the same time.

Ephesians was written after many churches had been founded and after the apostle Paul had opportunity to contemplate the meaning of the new organisation that had come into being. It is the one writing in the New Testament in which the word “church” means the church universal rather than the local group. It was intended to inform the Gentiles of their new calling, and it disclosed the mystery of the body of Christ in which there is neither Jew nor Gentile, bond nor free, gay or straight.

“Who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings.”

- Ephesians 1:3 –

All the goodness of the past, the present and even the future, Christ bestows on His people. In the mysterious ages of the past the Lord Jesus was His Father’s first elect, and in His election He gave us an interest, for we were chosen in Him from before the foundation of the world. He had from eternity yje prerogatives of Sonship, as His Father’s only-begotten and well-beloved Son, and He has, in the riches of His grace, by adoption and regeneration, elevated us to sonship also, so that to us He has given “power to become the sons of God.” The eternal covenant, based on suretiship and confirmed by oath, is ours, for our strong consolation and security. In the everlasting settlements of predestinating wisdom and omnipotent decree, the eye of the Lord Jesus was ever fixed on us; and we may rest assured that in the whole role of destiny there is not a line which militates against the interests of His redeemed. The great betrothal of the Prince of Glory is ours, for it is to us that He is affianced, as the sacred nuptials shall ere long declare to an assembled universe. The marvelous incarnation of the God of heaven, with all the amazing condescension and humiliation which attended it, is ours. The bloody sweat, the scourge, the cross, are ours forever. Whatever blissful consequences flow from perfect obedience, accomplished atonement, resurrection, ascension, or intercession, all are ours by His own gift. On His breastplate he is now bearing our names; and in His authoritative pleadings at the throne He remembers our persons and pleads our cause. His dominion over principalities and powers, and His absolute majesty in heaven, He employs for the benefit of them who trust in Him. His high estate is as much at our service as was His condition of abasement. He who gave Himself for us in the depths of woe and death, doth not withdraw the grant now that He is enthroned in the highest heavens.

Date and author

This magnificent letter was evidently addressed to the church in Ephesus (Acts 19), but intended also as a circular letter to neighbouring churches. The omission of the phrase “in Ephesus” (1:1) in two of the oldest manuscripts suggest that

earlier copyists shied away from localising the letter when it was intended for reading in other churches as well in the vicinity. The apostle Paul had spent three years in the Ephesian metropolis (Acts 19:8-41). He wrote this letter, the first of his so-called prison letters or epistles, about A.D. 61 or 62 as already stated from the prison in Rome, and sent it to Asia together with Colossians and Philemon. There are significant words in this letter. Words stressing the truth of the believers' union with Christ in death, resurrection, ascension and present position. The fact of the believer's position "in Christ" tolerates the entire thought of the letter.

Grace

The word shows that the letter is an exposition of "the gospel of God's grace" (cf. Acts 20:24)

Spiritual (or Spirit) defines both the sphere of truth dealt with in the epistle and the realm of life in which believers are living.

Body is a metaphor describing our positional union with Christ.

Live

Refers to our behaviour within the Body of Christ, how we act in union with Him, the Head. This term is the heart of the practical appeal of the letter.

Heavenly realms

It sets forth the exalted sphere of the believer's position in Christ and the realm of his walk and warfare.

Mystery

The word does not denote something inscrutable, but a hidden truth held in secret till the announced time for its revelation in the divine plan.

Content

Chapters 1 - 3	Our position in Christ (What we are before God).
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6: 10-24

A worthy walk
A continual conflict

Salvation in Panorama
Work of the Triune God

Father	Son	Holy Spirit
Past		
Chose us in the Son	Purchased us with His blood	Persuades us to believe the gospel
Present		
Places us as sons	Reveals the Father's purpose and will	Seals us as God's own
Future		
Will fully accept us in Christ	Will inherit us as His own	Will claim us in final possession

Commentary

Ephesians 1: 1-23

Divine election

This is the sovereign act of God in grace by which from eternity certain are chosen from the human race for Himself (John 15:19; Ephesians 4:4). Election pertains only to God's people, not to the lost. Men are not elected to perdition. Christ is the Chosen of God par excellence (Isaiah 42: 1-7. God the Father chose us in eternity past in Him. All elect are selected to a holy life of separation to the Chooser (John 17:16; Ephesians 1:4), or individual (1 Peter 1:2), being based on divine decree and foreknowledge.

Foreordination

Foreordination is that exercise of the divine will by which that which has been determined by God from eternity past is brought to pass by Him in time. It is our guarantee that what He has predetermined for us shall not be nullified.

Foreordination and free will

Foreordination concerns only God's people. So far as the human race is concerned, every man not only may accept Christ as Saviour but is urged and invited to do so. The ground of this invitation is the work of the incarnate Son, which made the human race savable. (Hebrews 2:9: John 3:16). Free will concerns the man outside of Christ. Once he accepts the gospel and is "in Christ" his viewpoints changes, as God from His side shows him why the believer is accepted.

Divine foreordination and human free will are humanly irreconcilable, but like two parallel lines that meet infinity, they have their solution in God. Only when the sinner exercises personal faith in Christ and enters the portals of salvation does he discover emblazoned on the inside of the doorway, "Chosen in him before the foundation of the world" (Ephesians 1:4, KJV).

1: 1-6

Chosen in Christ by the Father

The apostle Paul identified himself as the writer of the letter (or epistle). His being an "apostle of Christ Jesus through God's will" indicates that his apostleship did not come from a human source or through any human agency. He was an apostle on the basis of God's gracious favour, his commission as one sent forth being to advance the cause of Christ. (1:1)

Believers are "holy ones," for they have a pure standing before God on the basis of their faith in Christ and the cleansing from sin that his sacrificial death made possible. The "holy ones" are either called "faithful ones in Christ Jesus" or "believers in Christ Jesus," for the Greek word *pistós* can designate either an individual who is faithful or one who believes. If the meaning is "faithful ones in Christ Jesus," this would indicate that they are such by reason of their being at one with God's Son. As believers, they are united to him as members of his body. (1:1; see the introductory comments about the words "in Ephesus.")

"Favour," unmerited or unearned kindness, or grace would include all the help and guidance that come from the Father and his Son. The peace of which God and Christ are the source denotes an inner tranquillity. It is the sense of well-being and security that believers enjoy because of knowing that, as beloved children of God and brothers of Christ, they would be sustained and strengthened in times of trial and distress. (1:2)

In the Greek text, no verb follows the word meaning "blessed" or "praised," and many translations have added "be" after "blessed." "The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" is the one to be praised. "In Christ," he has blessed believers

“with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.” By reason of their coming to be united to Christ as members of his body, believers experience no lack in the blessings they have been granted. These blessings include the guidance and aid they receive as God’s beloved children. Being in the “heavenly places,” the blessings relate to the heavenly estate into which they have been brought because of having been constituted children of God with a heavenly inheritance in prospect. Moreover, Jesus Christ is in heaven and, from the standpoint of their union with him, believers can also be spoken of as receiving “every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.” (1:3)

“Before the founding of the world,” the heavenly Father chose believers “in” his Son. The expression “before the founding of the world” may be understood to mean “from the beginning” or “from of old.” The quotation from Psalm 78:2 (77:2, LXX) in Matthew 13:35 supports this significance. Greek manuscripts either read “from [the] founding” or “from [the] founding of [the] world” in the quotation from Psalm 78:2 (77:2, LXX). In the Septuagint, the passage from the book of Psalms reads, “from [the] beginning.” (1:4)

God’s choosing “in Christ” finds a parallel in the choosing of the nation of Israel. Even before a single member of the nation came into existence, God, “in Abraham,” chose the nation to be his people as the one through whom his Son would come in the flesh. Likewise, the real Israel (God’s approved people) is considered as existing in Christ before any member thereof came into a relationship of oneness with him. This indicates that the choosing is totally independent of any merit on the part of the chosen ones, the choosing being solely an expression of God’s gracious favour. His will has always been for humans to be at one with his Son as part of his beloved family, and the purpose of his choosing is that those who come to be his children lead “holy” or pure and “blameless” lives “before him” or in his sight. (1:4)

“In love” could be understood to mean that those chosen were to live in love, their holiness or purity and blamelessness finding full expression in the love that would be evident in all their conduct. A number of translations are explicit in linking love to believers. (1:4) “Before the foundation of the world he chose us in Christ to be his people, to be without blemish in his sight, to be full of love.” (REB) “Before the world was created, God had Christ choose us to live with him and to be his holy and innocent and loving people.” (CEV)

There is a possibility, however, that the words “in love” apply to God, indicating that he is the one who, in his love, predetermined that believers would be adopted as his sons or children. (1:4, 5) Numerous translations convey this significance. “In love he destined us for adoption to himself through Jesus

Christ.” (NAB) “He planned, in his purpose of love, that we should be adopted as his own children through Jesus Christ.” (J. B. Phillips) “Because of his love, God had already decided to make us his own children through Jesus Christ.” (NCV)

It is “through Jesus Christ” that believers come to be sons or children of God, as his sacrificial death provided the basis for their being forgiven of sins and reconciled to his Father as approved members of his family. God’s granting sonship to them is “according to the good pleasure [*eudokía*] of his will.” This indicates that God wants to bring humans into his family of approved children, and it pleases him. (1:5; see the Notes section on verses 5 and 9 regarding *eudokía*.)

When, in his good pleasure, God willed to grant sonship to believers, he revealed the “glory,” splendour, or magnificence of his gracious favor or unmerited kindness. Nothing about the manner in which believers are adopted as sons is attributable to personal merit. God is the one who took the initiative in making sonship possible “in his beloved one,” or by what he effected through his unique Son Jesus Christ. The Father’s adopting believers as his children is the exclusive expression of his gracious favour. As a consequence of having been graciously granted the status of sons or children, believers praise the “glory” of the incomparable favour that has been extended to them. (1:6; see the Notes section.)

6 “Accepted in the Beloved”

What a privilege! It includes our *justification* before God, but the term “acceptance” in the Greek means more than that. It signifies that we are the objects of *divine complacency*, nay, even of *divine delight*. How marvellous that we, worms, mortals, sinners, should be the objects of divine love! But it is only “*in the beloved*.” Some Christians seem to be accepted in their own experience, at least, that is their apprehension. When their spirit is lively, and their hopes bright, they think God accepts them, for they feel so high, so heavenly-minded, so drawn above the earth! But when their souls cleave to the dust, they are the victims of the fear that they are no longer accepted. If they could but see that all their high joys do not exalt them, and all their low despondencies do not really depress them in their Father’s sight, but that they stand accepted in One who never alters, in One who is always the beloved of God, always perfect, always without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, how much happier they would be, and how much more they would honour the Saviour! Rejoice then, believer, in this: thou art accepted “*in the beloved*.” Thou lookest within, and thou sayest, “There is nothing acceptable *here!*” But look at Christ, and see if there is not

everything acceptable *there*. Thy sins trouble thee; but God has cast thy sins behind his back, and thou art accepted in the Righteous One. Thou hast to fight with corruption, and to wrestle with temptation, but thou art already accepted in him who has overcome the powers of evil. The devil tempts thee; be of good cheer, he cannot destroy thee, for thou art accepted in him who has broken Satan's head. Know by full assurance thy glorious standing. Even glorified souls are not more accepted than thou art. They are only accepted in heaven "in the beloved," and thou art even now accepted in Christ after the same manner.

1: 7-12

Redeemed by the Son

It is because of what God did through his Son that he brings believers into his family of approved children. "In Christ" (or by what Christ accomplished when laying down his life), believers are redeemed, or set free from sin, by his blood. According to God's purpose, his Son's blood is the precious price that secured the release of those who, in faith, accepted this payment for them to have their trespasses forgiven. Their being forgiven is "according to the riches of [God's] favour." It is an incomparably generous expression of his freely granted kindness. (1:7)

8-10 Enlightened by his grace

The phrase about "abounding" ("which he [caused] to abound in us") relates to God's lavish or bountiful bestowal of his gracious favor to believers, which favor embraces everything that has made it possible for them to be his sons and to share in the privileges and blessings that members of his approved family enjoy. It is not possible to be certain, however, about whether the words "wisdom" (*sophía*) and "insight" (*phrónesis*) relate to the action of God in causing his gracious favour to abound. (1:8)

The thought could be that God, "in all [his] wisdom and insight," lavished his gracious favour on believers. A number of translations take the words about wisdom and insight as introducing verse 9. "In all wisdom and insight, he has made known to us the mystery of his will." (NAB) "With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will." (NRSV) Another possibility is that God generously bestowed his favor on believers along with wisdom and insight. The *Revised English Bible* represents God, "in the richness of his grace," as lavishing on believers "all wisdom and insight." (1:8; see the Notes section.)

If the reference is to the wisdom and insight that God has imparted to believers, their coming to have this wisdom and insight would make it possible for them to know or understand the “mystery” of his will. It is called a mystery because, in past ages, God’s will respecting the deliverance of humans from sin had been concealed and did not become fully known until after his Son came to the earth. “According to,” or in keeping with “his” (not included in all manuscripts), “good pleasure” (*eudokía*) or his kindly resolve to benefit humans, which resolve “he purposed in him [or, in himself],” God made the mystery known. To benefit from the good that God had purposed for them, humans needed to understand the divine mystery, and he took delight both in his resolve that had long remained secret and then in his making it known. (1:9)

Many translators (in verse 9) have replaced the concluding Greek pronoun for “him” with the proper noun, Christ. They thus represent God’s kindly resolve respecting humans to have been determined beforehand in or through his Son, or to have been revealed through him. “He has let us know the mystery of his purpose, according to his good pleasure which he determined beforehand in Christ.” (NJB) “He has made known to us his secret purpose, in accordance with the plan which he determined beforehand in Christ.” (REB) “He has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ.” (NRSV)

If the pronoun “him” is to be understood as meaning “himself,” the thought would be that God, within himself and without any outside factors or influences, made the kindly resolve to benefit humans and found delight in doing so. (1:9)

God purposed to have a “stewardship [at] the fullness of the times,” to bring “all things in heaven and on earth” into union with Christ as head. This “stewardship” is God’s own arrangement for producing oneness with his Son and began functioning after his Son came to the earth at the “fullness of the times” or when the time proved to be just right to put into effect the predetermined arrangement for unifying everything in heaven and on earth. Sin had brought about an alienation between humans on earth and the holy ones who are in heaven. Only through an arrangement that could bring about forgiveness of and liberation from sin could harmony be restored. (1:10)

The significance of what God has done “in Christ” depends on the meaning of the Greek word *kleróo*. This term can either signify “to appoint by lot” or “to obtain by lot” (as an inheritance). In case the meaning is to “appoint by lot,” this could denote that God has chosen believers in Christ. Already in verse 4 the choosing in God’s Son is mentioned, and so it does not appear that “to appoint by lot” would be the preferable meaning. (1:11; see the Notes section.)

It is more likely that, in this context, “to obtain by lot” or “to inherit” conveys the intended sense. Jewish believers are assured of obtaining their heavenly inheritance on account of being “in” Christ or at one with him. God had predetermined that they would be heirs. He is the one who “according to his purpose” does everything “according to the counsel of his will.” God always acts in keeping with what he decides to be his will. (1:11)

The purpose for the divine predetermination respecting the Jews who would respond in faith is that they would serve to praise his glory. This glory would particularly relate to God’s action in bringing about a liberation from sin through his Son and reconciling Jewish believers to himself. Based on the sacred writings that God had committed to them as a people and which pointed forward to the coming of the Messiah or Christ, the Jews were the first to hope in Christ, and Jews were the first ones to put faith in him, were forgiven of their sins, and came to be reconciled to God as his beloved children. Having become part of God’s family of sons or children, they were also heirs, with a precious heavenly inheritance in prospect. (1:12)

The non-Jewish believers to whom the letter is addressed became sharers in the same benefits and blessings. When they heard “the word of truth, the evangel of [their (literally, ‘your,’ in the text of many Greek manuscripts)] salvation,” they recognized the message as revealing the truth about how they could be saved or freed from the condemnation of sin. Accordingly, they put faith in Christ, accepting the evangel or good news about the provision for forgiveness of their sins on the basis of his sacrificial death. Then, “in” Christ, or by reason of their union with him, they were sealed with the promised holy spirit. Through the Hebrew prophets, God had promised to impart his spirit to those who would be forgiven of their sins, and the working of his spirit within them constituted the proof that they were his approved ones. (1:13; compare Jeremiah 31:34; Ezekiel 36:25-27; Joel 2:28, 29[3:1, 2]; Acts 2:33, 38, 39.)

1: 13-14

Sealed by the Spirit

13b-14 The Spirit seals the believer

For believers, the spirit is the deposit, first instalment, or pledge that guarantees their inheritance. In prospect is their full redemption, which will mean the attainment of the sinless state as God’s possession, “for the praise of his glory.” The glory to be praised likely is the splendour or magnificence God has revealed in the outworking of his marvellous purpose for believers. (1:14)

1: 15-23

Prayer for realisation of the believer's position in Christ

Probably to link the words that follow with the previous expression about the future redemption, the apostle introduced the thought about his praying with the Greek expression meaning “therefore.” Because of the marvellous redemption believers would attain, Paul, upon hearing about the faith of believers in the Lord Jesus and their “love for all the holy ones,” did not cease giving thanks to God for them whenever he remembered them in his prayers. Their faith in Jesus would have included recognizing him as their Lord and God's unique Son and acknowledging what he accomplished by laying down his life sacrificially. Love for the “holy ones” or for fellow believers would have been expressed in efforts to provide assistance in times of need. (1:15, 16; compare 1 John 3:14-18; 4:11, 12, 20, 21; see the Notes section regarding verse 15.)

The apostle petitioned the “God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory,” to give believers a “spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him.” When identifying the Father as the God of our Lord Jesus, Paul could base this on Jesus' own teaching. After his resurrection and prior to his ascension to heaven, Jesus had told Mary Magdalene to inform his “brothers” or disciples, “I am ascending to my Father and your Father and to my God and your God.” (John 20:17) As the “Father of glory,” God is the one to whom all splendor or magnificence belongs. He is the “all-glorious Father.” (REB) The purpose for his granting a “spirit of wisdom” (or the capacity for comprehension) and of “revelation” (the disclosure of what may previously have been hidden) would lead to their truly knowing him, fully comprehending their relationship to him as beloved children. (1:17)

Through the divinely granted wisdom and revelation, believers would be able to appreciate the aspects that the apostle next mentioned. The “eyes of [their (literally, ‘your,’ according to numerous manuscripts)] hearts” would be illuminated, making it possible for them to “know” or understand the hope to which they had been called. This suggests that they would come to see the greatness of the hope of coming to be united with Christ in the sinless state and enjoying all the blessings associated with their approved standing as God's children. The illumination of the “eyes of [their] hearts” would refer to the discernment they would come to have in their inmost selves. (1:18; see the Notes section.)

Paul also wanted believers to be enlightened within themselves respecting the “riches of the glory of his inheritance [the inheritance God has promised] among the holy ones.” All the “holy ones” or all of God's people share in this

inheritance. The inheritance would include the privileges and blessings they would come to have by reason of being God's children. This inheritance is unparalleled in glory, splendour, or magnificence. As a bountiful inheritance, the "glory" attached to it is described in terms of "riches." (1:18)

The apostle next focused on divine power. He desired that believers would be illuminated regarding the "exceeding greatness" of God's power at work in believers. That power corresponded to the might of God's strength, which incomprehensibly great power was at work in raising Christ from the dead and seating him at God's right hand in the "heavenly places." (1:19, 20)

In his highly exalted state at his Father's right hand, Jesus is "above all dominion and authority and power and lordship, and [above] every name named, not only in this age but also in the one to come." His Father, in the exercise of his sovereign power in connection with the resurrection of Christ, granted him all authority in heaven and on earth, and no one else, at any time in the future, will ever occupy such an exalted position. As "King of kings and Lord of lords," Jesus Christ has a name of unparalleled greatness. (1:21; Revelation 19:16)

The Father placed "all things under his feet," subjecting everything to him, and gave him [as] head over all things to the congregation." Accordingly, in relation to all creation and the congregation or community of believers, Christ is the head. Everything and everyone else is subject to him. (1:22)

The congregation is Christ's body, with the individual members being at one with him as their head. This reference to Christ's body is followed by the words, "the fullness of the one who fills all things in all." The measure of obscurity reflected in these words makes it difficult to establish the meaning. Either Christ or God could be understood as the one who fills all things in all, with everything (the "fullness") that is in union with him being pervaded by his influence and sustained by his power. In view of the emphasis on his exaltation, it appears more likely that the reference would be to Christ. (1:23)

The phrase about "the fullness" could also be read to mean that the congregation is Christ's fullness and that it completes him as his body, the members of which he brings into union with himself. This significance would seem to be less likely, as it is difficult to see how a discussion of Christ's exalted state would then focus on the congregation as being contributory to him. (1:23; see the Notes section.)

Notes:

In the Greek text, the words of verses 3 through 14 constitute just one sentence. This makes it difficult to determine for a certainty whether a particular phrase relates to the words that follow or precede it.

Especially verses 4 and 5 have been used in the development of the doctrine of predestination, which doctrine represents everything as having been divinely determined beforehand, including the evil of those who persistently remain in unbelief. It should be noted, however, that these verses are but part of a very long sentence, and this in itself should serve as a restraint in using them to support a doctrinal formulation that greatly expands on the actual words contained in the Scriptures. The sacred writings emphasize God's love for the world of mankind, and the greatness of this love transcends anything we humans can even imagine. In expression of his love, God sent his Son to the earth to lay down his life. By thus taking the initiative in reaching out to sinful humans, God made it possible for them to turn to him, be forgiven of their sins, and be reconciled to him as his beloved children. His desire is for no member of the human family to perish but for all to attain to repentance and to be reconciled to him, gaining the status of approved children in accord with his predetermined gracious purpose. (John 1:10-12; 3:16; 2 Peter 3:9.) It is inconceivable that God would act contrary to his predetermined purpose and his desire for all to attain to repentance by predestining to eternal condemnation any member of the human family for whom Christ died.

In verses 5 and 9, the Greek term *eudokía* can refer to the state of being favourably disposed and can include the thought of finding delight or satisfaction.

In verse 6, a number of later manuscripts add "his son" after "the beloved."

One objection that has been raised for viewing "wisdom" and "insight" as relating to God is that the Greek word for "insight," *phrónesis* is a faculty more commonly associated with humans. In the Septuagint, however, the term *phrónesis* is used with reference to God in connection to his creative activity (Proverbs 3:19; Jeremiah 10:12), and so there is no reason to rule out the application to God in Ephesians 1:8.

In verse 11, the form of the Greek word *kleróo* is a first person plural passive verb. If understood to mean "to obtain by lot" or "to inherit," this verb could be rendered "we have received an inheritance," and this significance is reflected in numerous modern translations. "In Christ indeed we have been given our share

in the heritage, as was decreed in his design whose purpose is everywhere at work; for it was his will.” (REB) “And it is in him that we have received our heritage, marked out beforehand as we were, under the plan of the One who guides all things as he decides by his own will.” (NJB) “In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will.” (NRSV)

For the significance “to obtain by lot,” the form of the Greek verb *kleróo* (in verse 11) could be translated “we were chosen.” “In Christ we were chosen to be God’s people, because from the very beginning God had decided this in keeping with his plan. And he is the One who makes everything agree with what he decides and wants.” (NCV) “In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will.” (NIV) “In him we were also chosen, destined in accord with the purpose of the one who accomplishes all things according to the intention of his will.” (NAB)

A shorter reading of verse 15, which does not include the reference to love, is found in the oldest extant manuscript (P46, c. 200 CE), fourth-century Codex Vaticanus, and a number of other manuscripts.

In verse 18, the oldest extant manuscript (P46, c. 200 CE), fourth-century Codex Vaticanus, and a number of other manuscripts do not include the plural form of “your” with reference to the “heart.”

The measure of uncertainty about the meaning of the concluding verse is evident from the variety of different renderings. “The church is filled with Christ, and Christ fills everything in every way.” (NCV) “The church ... is his body, the fullness of him who is filling the universe in all its parts.” (REB) “For the Church is his body, and in that body lives fully the one who fills the whole wide universe.” (J. B. Phillips) “And the church is his body; it is filled by Christ, who fills everything everywhere with his presence.” (NLT) *Die Gemeinde ist sein Leib: Er, der alles zur Vollendung führen wird, lebt in ihr mit seiner ganzen Fülle.* (The congregation is his body: He, who will lead everything to its completion, lives in it with all his fullness. [German, *Gute Nachricht Bibel*]) A footnote in the German *Neue Genfer Übersetzung* includes an alternate rendering that represents Christ as being completed by the congregation (just like the head needs the body). Another alternate rendering in the same translation refers to God as living in Christ with all his fullness.

Ephesians 2: 1-22

2: 1-7

The believer as a member of Christ's Body.

Addressing non-Jewish believers, Paul described the condition in which they had found themselves. They had been dead in trespasses and sins, for their defiled conduct would have led to death. From God's standpoint, they were in a state of condemnation, with the record of their having lived contrary to the prompting of their consciences exposing them as wrongdoers. (2:1, 11)

They had "walked" or lived in a manner typical of the age that characterized the "world," the Greco-Roman world of that time. Theirs had proved to be a way of life that conformed to the "ruler of the authority of the air." This ruler is doubtless the devil, with his influence seemingly being represented as coming from above the earth. There is also a possibility that the designation "ruler of the authority of the air" describes the devil as one who controls the corrupt element that the world of mankind alienated from God imbibes (or breathes in like the air). (2:2)

Either the devil himself or the evil influence emanating from him as "ruler of the authority of the air" is designated as "the spirit now at work in the sons of disobedience." Persons who persist in unbelief and conduct themselves contrary to God's ways are "sons" or offspring of disobedience in that they reveal themselves to be subject to disobedience in the same manner as children are subject to their parents. The "sons of disobedience" are rebels against God, with disobedience to him governing their lives. (2:2)

Manuscripts vary in whether Paul included himself among those who previously lived contrary to God's ways ("also we") or whether he continued to direct his words to non-Jewish believers ("also you"). The basic thought, however, is the same. Among the "sons of disobedience," all believers formerly had yielded to the desires of their flesh, doing what their flesh or sinful human nature wanted. By nature, or in their fallen or sinful state, they proved to be "children of wrath" just like the rest of humankind at enmity with God. Their corrupt way of life merited his wrath. (2:3)

Nevertheless, God, the one who is "rich in mercy" (or whose mercy is abundant and bountifully bestowed), "because of the great love with which he loved us," made us alive with Christ. The surpassing greatness of divine love was manifested while believers were in a state of alienation, "dead in trespasses." Upon putting faith in Christ and what he accomplished in laying down his life

for them, they ceased to be under condemnation for their sins but came to have a newness of life as approved children of God. Having been brought into living union with Christ by allowing themselves to be drawn to God's love and responding in faith to his Son, they became sharers in Christ's righteousness (his absolute uprightness and purity). Thus it proved to be by God's gracious favor that they were saved or delivered from the condemnation that their sins merited. As sinners, they did not deserve to be rescued from their fallen state. (2:4, 5; see the Notes section.)

With his Son, God raised believers from being dead in sins and under condemnation. In this way, they became sharers in Christ's resurrection and came to have a new life as God's approved children. He seated believers with his Son in the heavenly places, exalting them as his own precious ones. This seating in the heavenly places is "in Christ Jesus," for believers are united to him as their head. Whereas believers were despised in the world that was alienated from God, their having been made one with his Son seated them in heavenly places, far above the world's great ones who contemptuously looked down upon them. (2:6)

In coming ages, their being raised to a newness of life and seated in the heavenly places would serve to show the "exceeding riches" or the superabundance of God's gracious favour in the kindness he expressed toward believers. He acted in kindness toward them "in Christ Jesus," dealing with them as dearly beloved ones by reason of their having come to be at one with his Son and sharers in his Son's uprightness and purity. (2:7)

2: 8-10

The way of salvation in the Body

8-9 Saved by grace

Through their faith in Christ, believers were saved or delivered from the condemnation of sin. Whereas they responded in faith to the divine arrangement for having their sins forgiven, they were saved by God's gracious favor. Nothing they had personally done entitled them to have Christ die for them and provide the basis for being forgiven of their sins and reconciled to God as his approved children. Everything proved to be God's gift, unearned and unmerited. (2:8)

The standing of believers as divinely approved ones, persons who did not have their sins reckoned against them, had not come about as a result of personal efforts. It was not "out of works," precluding any boasting. (2:9)

When it comes to salvation, believers have no basis for pride in personal achievement, for they became what they are on account of God's action. By him, they have been made his sons or children. "In Christ Jesus" or as persons at one with him, they have been created "for good works." These good works God prepared beforehand so that believers might "walk in them." He had predetermined the way of life that would distinguish his beloved children, with love prompting upright conduct and selfless responsiveness to the needs of others. (2:10)

2: 11-18

The Body made one by Christ's blood

In view of their dignified standing as God's children, Paul wanted the non-Jewish believers to remember their former state as Gentiles "in [the] flesh" or by natural descent. Jews who took pride in circumcision (the sign of their covenant relationship with God) disparagingly called the Gentiles "the uncircumcision." Jewish circumcision had been carried out by human hands and so contrasted with the circumcision of the heart that God performed through the operation of his spirit and which circumcision resulted in upright conduct prompted by the responsive heart or the inmost self of the individual believer. (2:11)

At the time Gentile believers were in their former state, they were without the Messiah or Christ. They knew nothing about the coming of the promised Messiah and had no hope of a future deliverance through him from their sinful state that had death in view. In relation to the community of Israel or God's people as a nation, they were aliens. Non-Jews were strangers to the "covenants of the promise," knowing nothing about the covenants nor the promise inherent in them. These covenants could include the ones God made with Abraham, with the nation of Israel in the time of Moses and, finally, with David. The covenants contained the promise about the coming Messiah who would be the seed of Abraham, a prophet like Moses, and a king in the royal line of David. (2:12; Genesis 15:1-21; 22:15-18; Deuteronomy 18:15-19; 2 Samuel 7:12-16; 1 Chronicles 17:11-14)

Non-Jews had no hope of a coming Messiah and the blessings that would come through him, including forgiveness of sins and reconciliation to God as his children. They, as part of the world that was at enmity with the true God, did not know him. Having no relationship with him, they were without God. (2:12)

13-18 What we are in Christ

“In Christ Jesus,” or by having come to be at one with him, non-Jews who were once far off as strangers came to be near as God’s beloved children. This had been effected “by [literally, ‘in’] the blood of Christ.” The power inherent in his blood, which he shed sacrificially, made it possible for all who put faith in him and the surrender of his life for them to be forgiven of their sins, to be incorporated into his body, and to be acknowledged by his Father as his approved sons or children. (2:13)

Therefore, with reference to both Jews and non-Jews, Paul could say regarding Jesus, “He is our peace.” Through his death, he ended the marked separation between Jews and non-Jews, with all those putting faith in him coming to have an equal standing as children in his Father’s family. The former separation, division, or alienation was thus abolished, being replaced by the peace existing in a united family. Apart from Christ this peace is impossible. (2:14)

He made the two peoples, Jews and non-Jews, one and broke down the dividing wall that functioned as a barrier between them. This wall is called “the enmity,” for division does not produce peace but leads to disunity and hostility. “In his flesh,” or in the element of his fleshly or human body, he brought about the oneness of Jews and non-Jews, demolishing the former barrier. Christ sacrificed his physical body of flesh so that, through his death, both believing Jews and non-Jews could be united to him as head and members of his corporate body. (2:14)

The “wall” is identified as “the law of the commandments in decrees.” This literal reading of the majority of extant Greek manuscripts may be understood to mean that the law given to the Israelites contained commandments that consisted of single decrees or ordinances. It was the law, with its specific requirements (including circumcision, dietary restrictions, and distinctive grooming and clothing features) that brought about the marked separation between Jews and non-Jews. (2:15) At the temple in Jerusalem, this division existed in tangible form. A wall, with openings for passing through to courts having higher degrees of sanctity, marked the limits of the Court of the Gentiles. Large stones bore an inscription warning non-Jews not to go beyond the barrier. (See the Notes section.)

By fulfilling the law, living up to its purpose and then dying sacrificially, Jesus abolished it as a barrier between Jew and non-Jew. Thereby, “in his flesh” (or by means of the fleshly body that he sacrificed), he created a “new man” or new corporate person “in himself.” On the basis of having given up his body of flesh

in sacrifice, he created this “new man” (or “new people”) in himself upon bringing believing Jews and non-Jews into unity with himself as the one body of which he is the head. In this manner, he also “made peace,” for through his death he removed the divisive barrier existing between Jews and non-Jews. (2:15)

The “cross” (*staurós*) here represents what Christ accomplished through his sacrificial death, making possible forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with his Father. Through his death on the *staurós*, Jesus Christ reconciled both Jews and non-Jews “in one body to God.” To have an acceptable standing with his Father, Jews and non-Jews needed to put faith in him and the efficacy of his sacrificial death. In this way both peoples came to be united in “one body,” the body of which Christ is the head. The Son of God, “in himself” or through the surrender of his body in death, also removed the barrier that separated Jews from non-Jews, killing the “enmity” that had existed between them and their mutual alienation from God on account of their sinful state. (2:16; see the Notes section.)

After his baptism in the Jordan and later through the disciples whom he commissioned, Jesus came as one who could be recognized as the promised Messiah or Christ and proclaimed the glad tidings of peace “to those far off, and peace to those near.” Those “far off” are the non-Jews, as they had no relationship with the true God and were without the sacred writings that revealed his will and promises. From the standpoint of being in a covenant relationship with God and in possession of divine revelation conveyed through the prophets and recorded in the sacred writings, the Jews are designated as “those near.” Jesus carried out his activity among them, with rare exceptions interacting with non-Jews. Through the disciples, however, he declared the good news of peace to those who were far off, the non-Jews. The message of peace indicated how both Jews and non-Jews could come to be reconciled to God. Both peoples needed to put faith in him as the Son of God and accept the provision his Father made through him to be forgiven of their sins. (2:17; see the Notes section.)

Believers have had God’s spirit imparted to them and, “through” Christ, are granted approach to the Father. Based on Christ’s death for them, “both peoples,” Jews and non-Jews, gain an acceptable standing before the Father and, “through Christ,” are able to draw near to him as his dear children. It is only by recognizing Jesus Christ as the one through whom deliverance from sin has been made possible and him as Lord by his Father’s appointment that anyone can acceptably approach God. As sharers in the “one spirit,” God’s spirit, Jewish and non-Jewish believers are united as one in their access to the Father. (2:18)

2: 19-22

The believer as God's building or temple

For non-Jewish believers, their former state of alienation ended and they ceased to be “far off” from the true God. No longer were they strangers and like aliens passing through a foreign country. They were “fellow citizens of the holy ones,” having the same standing as Jewish believers, and came to belong to God's household, the family of his beloved children. (2:19)

Non-Jewish believers had come to be part of a sacred edifice. The apostles and prophets serve as the foundation of this edifice, and Christ Jesus himself is the cornerstone. Non-Jewish believers were built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets. In the capacity of the foundation, the apostles and prophets had been entrusted with the message about Christ, and they were the first ones to proclaim it. Jesus Christ had personally taught the apostles, and their testimony about him provided the solid basis for putting faith in him. Likewise many Christian prophets had a direct link to Jesus' teaching. All who become part of the sacred edifice must, like building blocks, be aligned in conformity with the most important stone, Jesus Christ himself. (2:20)

It is “in” Christ, or with the individual members being at one with him, that the entire “building, bonded together, is growing into a holy sanctuary in the Lord.” The unifying element is the Lord Jesus Christ, and the growth into a holy sanctuary is also in him as Lord. This holy sanctuary or temple is not portrayed in a static state, but in one of continual growth. An increasing number of believers continue to be built “on the foundation of the apostles and prophets,” with all seeking to be conformed to the pattern of the principal stone, Jesus Christ. (2:21)

Continuing to address the non-Jewish believers, Paul added, “In whom [in the Lord Jesus Christ to whom he had just referred] you also are being built up together [with all others] into a dwelling place of God in spirit.” As persons who had been united to Christ, non-Jewish believers along with Jewish believers collectively came to be a place where God would dwell by means of his spirit. His spirit would be in their midst, guiding them and serving as the means for supplying essential aid. (2:22; see the Notes section.)

Notes:

In verse 5, the oldest Greek manuscript (P46, c. 200 CE) and fourth-century Codex Vaticanus represent believers as having been made alive “in Christ,”

enjoying a newness of life by being at one with him. The majority of manuscripts, however, indicate that believers were made alive with Christ.

The covenant promise to Abraham was also repeated to Isaac and Jacob. (Genesis 26:2-5; 28:13-15; 35:11, 12) When relating the incident of Aaron's making atonement for the rebellious Israelites in the wilderness, the book of Wisdom (thought to have been written in the first century BCE) refers to his appealing on the basis of the "oaths and covenants" given to the forefathers. (Wisdom 18:21-23; compare Exodus 32:13; Numbers 16:41-50.) Therefore, the "covenants of the promise" mentioned in Ephesians 2:12 could have included the oath-bound promise God made to both Isaac and Jacob.

The first-century Jewish historian Josephus (*War*, V, v, 2) wrote that the stone barrier had a height of three cubits (about 4.5 feet), and "upon it stood pillars, at equal distances from one another, declaring the law of purity, some in Greek, and some in Roman letters, that 'no foreigner should go within that sanctuary.'"

In 1871, Clermont-Ganneau found an almost complete warning notice inscribed on stone having a thickness of nearly 6 inches. This notice indicates that no foreigner should enter the protective barrier "around the sanctuary" and then says, "Whoever is caught will have himself to blame for his ensuing death." A very fragmentary inscription, with similar wording, was discovered in 1935.

In itself, the Greek word *staurós*, commonly translated "cross" (in Ephesians 2:16), denotes a stake or pole, and the *staurós* which Jesus and later Simon carried was a beam. A long stake with a transverse beam would have been too heavy for one man to carry or to drag. The Latin term *crux*, from which the English word "cross" is derived, can designate a tree or a wooden instrument on which victims were either hanged or impaled.

In the allegorical Epistle of Barnabas (thought to date from the early second century and so from a time when the Romans continued to practice crucifixion), the *staurós* is linked to the letter tau (T). Moreover, very limited archaeological evidence does indicate that the Romans did make use of upright poles with a transverse beam.

Ancient abbreviated forms of the noun *staurós* and the verb *stauróo* (a number of preserved occurrences in P66 [second century] and P75 [though not consistently used in this late second-century or early third-century manuscript]) combine the letters tau (T) and rho (R) in a manner that is visually suggestive of a cross. This tau-rho ligature also appears in pre-Christian and non-Christian texts as an abbreviation for a number of terms, including the word *trópos*

(meaning “way,” “manner,” or “habit”). Possibly Christian copyists adopted this ligature when abbreviating *staurós* because of associating the implement on which Jesus died with the letter tau (T). The existence of other abbreviated forms for the noun *staurós* and the verb *stauróo* in ancient biblical manuscripts which do not use the tau-rho ligature would seem to support the conjecture that early copyists chose this ligature for its visual effect.

The Greek word rendered “crucify” (*stauróo*) can denote hanging, binding, or nailing a victim on or to a stake, a tree, or an implement with a transverse beam. Doubtless the availability of wood and the number of individuals who were executed determined the shape of the implement used for crucifixion. In a Latin work attributed to Vulcatius Gallicanus, Emperor Avidius Cassius had criminals tied from the top to the bottom of a 180-foot high wooden stake. The manner in which these persons were attached to this stake is referred to as crucifixion (*in crucem sustulit*, according to the Latin text). Roman soldiers do not appear to have followed any specific method when carrying out crucifixions. According to the first-century Jewish historian Josephus (*War*, V, xi, 1), the soldiers, out of wrath and hatred for the Jews, nailed those they caught, one in one way, and another in another way.

It is commonly believed that upright stakes were already at Golgotha or that the beams that had been carried to the site were attached to three adjacent trees (or possibly even the same tree) there. The minority view (expressed, for example, in Vine’s *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*) is that Jesus was nailed in an upright position to the pole that Simon had carried and that it was not used as a transverse beam.

In verse 17, many later manuscripts do not include the word “peace” with reference to “those near.” Likely considering the repetition of “peace” to be redundant, copyists did not include it.

Fourth-century Codex Vaticanus, unlike the majority of manuscripts, says, in verse 22, “dwelling place of Christ” (not “God”).

Ephesians 3: 1-21

3:1-12

The formation of the building (temple) revealed

1-6 The mystery and its meaning

The introductory words, “thanks to this” or “for this reason,” appear to relate to what non-Jewish believers had come to enjoy on account of what Christ Jesus had done for them. The apostle’s referring to himself in a solemn manner as “I, Paul,” may have been intended to remind those to whom he wrote about everything that had become associated with his name as an apostle, including his labors, the truth of the message he proclaimed, and his suffering for the sake of Christ. (3:1; see the Notes section.)

After referring to himself as “the prisoner of Christ,” he added, “for you of the [non-Jewish] nations.” He was then imprisoned, presumably in Rome, enduring for Christ, the one to whom he belonged. This imprisonment had resulted from his ministering to the Gentiles. (3:1)

At the temple in Jerusalem, Jews from the Roman province of Asia falsely accused Paul and incited mob action against him. If it had not been for the intervention of Roman soldiers, he would have been killed. Subsequently, the Roman commander (the chiliarch) permitted Paul to make his defense. When the apostle mentioned his commission to people of the nations, his Jewish listeners became enraged, declaring him to be deserving of death. Thereafter, under Roman authority, he was confined first in Jerusalem, then in Caesarea, and finally in Rome, where he waited for the time when Caesar would hear his appeal as a Roman citizen. (Acts 21:27-40; 22:21, 22; 23:12-35; 24:27; 25:8-15; 26:30-32; 27:1; 28:17-20, 30, 31)

In the Greek text, verse 1 is not a complete sentence, and the words from verse 2 through verse 13 do not finish the thought but are parenthetical. Not until verse 14 is the thought (begun in verse 1) completed, indicating that Paul prayed for the believing Gentiles. A number of modern translations make this explicit. “With this in mind I pray for you, I, Paul, who for the sake of you Gentiles am now the prisoner of Christ Jesus.” (REB) *Weil ich, Paulus, euch Nichtjuden diese rettende Botschaft verkündete, bin ich nun im Gefängnis. Als Gefangener Jesu Christi bete ich für euch.* (Because I, Paul, declared this saving message to you non-Jews, I am now in prison. As a prisoner of Jesus Christ, I pray for you.) (German, *Hoffnung für alle*)

The apostle’s words, “if indeed you have heard,” may be understood to mean “surely you have heard.” Those to whom he directed his letter must have come to know about the “stewardship” of God’s gracious favor that had been given to him for them. This stewardship referred to his service as an apostle to the nations, making known the glad tidings about Jesus Christ and how individuals could become recipients of God’s gracious favour or kindness. Divine unmerited kindness made it possible for people of the nations who put their faith in Christ

to be forgiven of their sins and to be reconciled to his Father as beloved children. So, as the apostle expressed it, the stewardship of God's gracious favor was for the benefit of those to whom he had written. (3:2; see the Notes section.)

Previously in his letter, Paul, in a few words, had written about the divine "mystery" (1:8-14; 2:11-22) as it related to Jews and non-Jews. "According to" or by revelation, Paul had come to know this long-hidden divine secret. (3:3)

In his encounter with the risen Lord Jesus Christ while on his way to Damascus in the role of a persecutor of believers, Paul heard the basic message of the mystery. Jesus Christ then told him that his commission to people of the nations would be "to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me." (Acts 26:15-18, NRSV)

Upon reading what Paul had written in this particular letter (or hearing it read to them), those whom he addressed would perceive his comprehension of the "mystery of Christ." It is the "mystery of Christ," for he is the one through whom his Father disclosed the previously hidden secret and who also fulfilled his Father's will respecting it. (3:4)

In "other generations," this mystery "was not made known to the sons of men" (humankind). To the "holy apostles and prophets" of the first century CE, however, it had been revealed. Possibly to distinguish the true apostles and prophets from false apostles and prophets, Paul called them "holy," indicating that they were holy or pure as divinely approved persons. The disclosure regarding this mystery came to the holy apostles and prophets "in spirit" or through the operation of God's holy spirit upon them. (3:5)

The revealed divine secret is that, with believing Jews, believers from the non-Jewish nations would come to be fellow heirs, members of the same body, and "joint partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the evangel." "In Christ Jesus" or through their union with him, believing Jews and non-Jews become fellow heirs as God's children, form one corporate body with Christ as head, and share in all the benefits and blessings included in the divine promise. With reference to the mystery, the promise made to the Israelites and their forefathers pointed to the coming of the Messiah and the resultant benefits and blessings. "Through the evangel" may be understood to mean that what the non-Jews would come to enjoy is revealed in the evangel or good news about Jesus Christ or that, by their response to this good news, non-Jews would come to be fellow sharers with Jewish believers. (3:6)

7-12 The mystery and Paul's ministry

In connection with the evangel, Paul became a servant, for he was divinely commissioned as an apostle to proclaim the glad tidings about Christ Jesus to people of the nations. It was not on account of any personal merit that Paul was entrusted with this ministry nor did he carry it out in his own strength. God, in expression of his gracious favour, granted it to him as a free gift “according to the working of his power.” Divinely empowered through the operation of God’s spirit, Paul faithfully discharged the sacred trust that had been committed to him. (3:7; compare 1 Corinthians 15:10.)

In view of his former course as an insolent persecutor of believers, the apostle referred to himself as the least of all of God’s holy ones (his approved people) to have been granted this gracious favour, being commissioned to proclaim the glad tidings of the “unfathomable riches of Christ” to peoples of the nations. Everything Christ made possible by laying down his life in sacrifice, and can do now that he lives, is of such greatness as to exceed human comprehension. Appropriately, therefore, Paul spoke of the “unfathomable riches of Christ.” These riches would include being forgiven of sins on the basis of Christ’s sacrificial death, reconciliation with God as beloved children, the prospect of life in a sinless state for all eternity, and the enjoyment of the blessings resulting from a never-ending relationship with God and his Son as part of the family of his beloved children. (3:8; compare 1 Timothy 1:12-16; see the Notes section.)

Another part of Paul’s commission related to bringing to light for “all” or “everyone” the nature of the “stewardship of the mystery” that had for ages been hidden “in God, who created all things.” This stewardship is God’s own arrangement for having his Son be the one with whom everything in heaven and on earth would be brought into a state of unity. Through this divine stewardship or manner of working, humans who had been alienated from God would be reconciled to him as their loving Father. In past ages, this remained a secret “in God,” for he did not reveal just how peoples of all nations could become reconciled to him through the arrangement he would make through his Son. As the Creator of all things, God does everything according to his will and purpose. This included the time for revealing the long-hidden mystery by having his previously purposed “stewardship” or his own predetermined arrangement for unifying everything in heaven and on earth become operative. (3:9; see the Notes section.)

The revelation of the mystery, by what would become evident “through the congregation” (the community of believers united to Christ as members of his corporate body), would serve to make known to the “rulers and the authorities in

the heavenly places” the “manifold wisdom of God.” The Scriptures reveal that angels have various functions and responsibilities, with certain ones being “chief princes.” (Daniel 8:15, 16; 9:20, 21; 10:13) Accordingly, the reference to the “rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places” may be understood to designate the angels as occupying positions of divinely granted power and authority. As they observe the outworking of God’s arrangement in connection with the congregation, they come to see to an increasing extent his multifaceted wisdom. (Compare 1 Peter 1:10-12.) The many-sided aspects of divine wisdom are seen in the rescue of humans from sin and condemnation, their reconciliation to God, and their inclusion in his family of angelic sons through their coming to be at one with his unique Son, Jesus Christ. (3:10)

The unifying of everything in heaven and on earth that is effected “in Christ Jesus our Lord” (or through oneness with him) constitutes God’s “purpose of the ages,” that is, his purpose from past ages or from the start. As his original purpose, it was no afterthought. (3:11)

In Christ, or as a result of having become united to him, believers have boldness, approaching God with confidence through faith in his Son (literally, “the faith of him,” signifying the faith that has Christ as its object). Because of what the Son of God has done for them, believers do not fear making their approach to the Father. They are confident that their faith in Christ and his sacrificial death for them has made them acceptable. (3:12)

3:13-21

Prayer for knowledge and power

In view of all the benefits that had come to them upon hearing and accepting the glad tidings about Jesus Christ that Paul proclaimed, non-Jewish believers addressed in this letter were not to become discouraged on account of the apostle’s tribulations or afflictions for them, as these meant “glory” for them. Paul’s willingness to endure hardships for the sake of Christ and making known the good news about him revealed that what believers enjoyed because of their faith in Christ proved to be of inestimable value. It was worth suffering for, and so Paul’s confinement and associated difficulties signified glory for those to whom he wrote. His tribulations, which had resulted from laboring among non-Jews, including people of the nations to whom he wrote, proved that what they possessed because of Christ had priceless value. Paul’s suffering confinement for non-Jewish believers or because he had ministered among them, therefore, was no reason for shame but proved to be a basis for proper pride. (3:13)

Verse 14 starts in the same way as verse 1, “thanks to this” or “for this reason,” and appears to relate to the words of Ephesians 2:19-22. There the reference is to the changed status of believing non-Jews because of what Jesus Christ had done for them. The marvellous change non-Jewish believers had experienced, along with their sharing in accompanying blessings, prompted Paul to pray for them. He would “bend [his] knees to the Father,” assuming a kneeling position when praying. (3:14; see the Notes section.)

From the Father, “every family in the heavens and on earth is named.” The Greek word for “father” is *patér*, and all who owe their existence to him are designated as *patriá* (commonly rendered “family”). Accordingly, the reference to “every family in the heavens and on earth” does not mean that there are family arrangements in heaven as there are on earth, but the expression “every family” denotes all who are sons or children of the heavenly Father, both angelic and human. To him, they owe their name, their real identity, or what they truly are as persons. (3:15)

In the case of those to whom he wrote, Paul prayed that the Father, “according to the riches of his glory,” would give them power, strengthening them in the “inner man” through his spirit. The “riches” of the Father’s “glory” are his vast resources of matchless magnificence or splendor from which he can supply the help and strength that his children, members of his beloved family, need. The “inner man” designates the believer’s real self as one who enjoys a newness of life as a child of God. Through the working of God’s spirit within the believer, the inner man is energized and strengthened to pursue a divinely approved course regardless of the circumstances.

Paul also prayed that those to whom he wrote might, through faith, have Christ dwell in their hearts. Christ’s dwelling in their hearts may be understood to mean that he would continue to be the controlling principle in their inmost selves, guiding their thoughts, words, and deeds. Through their faith in Christ, their life would be so bound up with him as to indicate that they lived for him and that he had totally taken possession of them. (3:17)

The words “in love” could be linked to Christ, which would signify that Paul prayed that Christ, in love, would make his home in the hearts of believers. A number of translations convey this significance (“that through faith Christ may dwell in your hearts in love” [REB]; “through your faith to let Christ in his love make his home in your hearts” [Goodspeed]). (3:17)

Another possibility is that the phrase “in love” relates to being “rooted and founded,” that is, firmly established like a tree with deep roots and a building on

a solid foundation. Numerous translations have adopted the meaning that links “rooted and founded” to the words “in love” (“that you, rooted and grounded in love” [NAB]; “that you, being rooted and established in love” [NIV]; “planted in love and built on love” [NJB]). (3:17)

It was Paul’s prayerful desire that the believers whom he addressed would have the capacity (literally, “be strong”) to comprehend, “with all the holy ones” (all others of God’s own people), the breadth, length, height, and depth, “to know the love of the Christ that surpasses knowledge, that [they] might be filled with all the fullness of God.” There is no object with which the breadth, length, height, and depth are associated. Possibly they relate to Christ’s love and the believers’ being able to grasp it to the greatest extent possible. (3:18, 19) A number of translations are explicit in making the application to the love of Christ. “May you, in company with all God’s people, be strong to grasp what is the breadth and length and height and depth of Christ’s love, and to know it, though it is beyond knowledge.” (REB) “And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge.” (NIV)

Christ’s love, expressed in the surrender of his life for sinners and his concern and care for all who have responded and will yet respond in faith to him, is of such greatness as to defy any comparison. It is a love that goes far beyond anything that humans have experienced and so surpasses knowledge. Nevertheless, Paul desired that fellow believers would comprehend the greatness of Christ’s love to the fullest extent possible. (3:19)

20-21 The benediction

In the context of love, the believers’ being “filled with all the fullness of God” may denote their being like their heavenly Father in manifesting love. By his dealings with them through his Son, he has filled believers with his love, impelling them to let love guide their thoughts, words, and deeds. (3:19; compare Matthew 5:43-48; 1 John 3:13-18; 4:7-11.)

Paul acknowledged that God, by the “power” at work in believers, could do exceedingly more than all that they could request or imagine. As the apostle had stated earlier, this power was revealed when God raised Jesus Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand, granting him a highly exalted position of unparalleled greatness. (1:19-23) With such incomprehensibly great power at work for the benefit of believers, Paul’s prayer for them would be answered. (3:20)

“To [God] be the glory in the congregation and in Christ Jesus to all generations” of the ages to come (literally, “of the age of the ages”). This may be understood to mean that God’s glory, magnificence, or splendor is to be revealed for all eternity in the congregation and in Christ Jesus as the head with whom the community of believers forms a united whole. Another possible meaning is that the congregation would ascribe glory to God, doing so for all eternity. Because Jesus Christ is the head of the congregation, the ascription of glory “in” the body would also be “in Christ,” the head with whom the body forms a corporate whole. The apostle concluded his prayerful expression with “Amen,” meaning “surely” or “so be it.” (3:21; see the Notes section.)

Notes:

In verse 1, numerous manuscripts do not include Jesus after Christ, but this has no bearing on the meaning of the text.

As the absence of “Ephesus” in Ephesians 1:1 suggests, Paul intended this letter to be read to believers besides the original recipients. There is a possibility, therefore, that his use of the words (in 3:2), “if indeed you have heard,” indicated that not all would have been personally acquainted with him.

The oldest extant manuscript (P46, c. 200 CE) does not include the expression for “holy ones” in verse 8. According to this shorter reading, the apostle identified himself as “the least of all.”

According to another manuscript reading of verse 9 (which does not include the word “all” or “everyone”), Paul’s commission included bringing to light what the stewardship of the mystery is. After the reference to God’s having created all things, many later manuscripts add, “through Jesus Christ.”

After “Father” (in verse 14), numerous manuscripts add, “of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

In verse 21, many later manuscripts omit “and” after “congregation” and read, “in the congregation in Christ Jesus,” meaning in the community of believers that is at one with Christ.

Ephesians 4: 1-32

4:1-6

A life worthy of Christ

1-3 The life described

The conjunction *oun* (therefore) points to the reason for Paul's appeal or entreaty. Based on the preceding context, this reason would be everything believers had come to enjoy through God's Son and their faith in him. In view of his confinement for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ because of his proclaiming the message about him to people of the nations, the apostle made his appeal as "the prisoner in the Lord." Being at one with his Lord, he could speak of being "in" him. Paul entreated fellow believers to walk or to conduct themselves worthily of "the calling" to which they had been called. They had been called or invited to become reconciled to God as his approved children. Therefore, they should live lives that gave evidence of their new status as members of his family. (4:1)

The dignity they enjoyed as children of God, however, gave them no reason for a proud bearing. Their changed condition had come about through God's gracious favor and not any merit on their part. Consequently, they needed to conduct themselves "with all lowliness and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love." In their relationship with one another as fellow children of God, they would demonstrate lowliness or humility through their readiness to act in the interests of others, willingly foregoing rights out of regard for them. Within the family of God's children, harshness has no place. Believers need to be gentle or considerate, responding in kindness to one another. Whereas they have been forgiven of their sins, they are not liberated from their flawed human condition. This necessitates their being patient, forbearing, or tolerant with one another, putting up with one another's failings in love. (4:2)

The objective of believers should be to put forth earnest effort to maintain the unity that God's spirit produces, preserving the resultant bond of peace that distinguishes a loving family. (4:3)

All believers are members of just "one body," the body of Christ that is at one with him as the head. The same spirit, God's spirit, operates in the case of every believer. All of them are called to the "one hope" of their calling. This one hope, to which their calling to be God's children has given rise, is their coming to be in the sinless state with Christ. (4:4)

Believers have only "one Lord," the Lord Jesus Christ who surrendered his life for them. They have only "one faith," the faith that centers on Jesus Christ and all that his Father has done through him. There is but "one baptism," the water baptism that signifies repentance and which, through their faith, brings them into a new relationship with God as their Father, his Son as their Lord, and the holy spirit as their helper. (Compare Matthew 28:19; John 14:16, 17.) In Galatians 3:27, the "one baptism" is referred to as a baptism "into Christ." This is because

the baptized believers come to be part of Christ's body, joined to him as their head. (4:5)

4-6 The basis of the worthy life

They have only "one God and Father." He is the "God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all." As the only God whom all believers recognize, he is over them, working through them to carry out his will and purpose, and operating within them by means of his spirit, progressively transforming them into his image as they yield to his spirit's influence. (4:6; see the Notes section.)

4: 7-16

The ministry and a worthy life

7-11 Christ's gifts for a worthy life

Accordingly, divisions were not to be tolerated in the community of believers. The differing gifts had been imparted to believers for the purpose of promoting unity. Christ had not granted these gifts because anyone merited them. Each one became a recipient of the gracious favour or unmerited kindness according to the way that Christ allotted the gift. So the gift itself proved to be an expression of gracious favour. (4:7)

Paul then used words from Psalm 68:18(19) to support the thought that Christ apportioned gifts, "Having ascended to the height, he led a captivity captive and gave gifts to men." The Septuagint reading (found in Psalm 67:19) is different but expresses the same basic thought. "You ascended to the height; you led a captivity captive. You received gifts in [or, among] man." While "man" is singular in the Septuagint (as it is in the extant Hebrew text), the term may be regarded as a collective singular denoting "men" or "people." Paul appears to have regarded the "captivity" as the conquered powers of darkness over which Jesus Christ, in keeping with his Father's will, triumphed by his death. (Compare John 16:33; Colossians 2:15; Revelation 3:21.) Upon his ascension to the height, the heavenly realm, he gave gifts to men, that is, to those who were and would come to be part of the community of believers. (4:8; see the Notes section.)

Reasoning on the basis of the word meaning "he ascended," the apostle, by means of a question, pointed out that this also indicated that Christ had descended into the lower parts of the earth. These "lower parts of the earth" could designate the realm of the dead. Another possibility is that the earthly realm itself is being identified as the lower regions (in contrast to the higher

regions or the heavenly realm). Both meanings are found in translations. “When it says, ‘he went up,’ it must mean that he had gone down to the deepest levels of the earth.” (NJB) “What does ‘he ascended’ mean except that he also descended into the lower [regions] of the earth?” (NAB) “When it says, ‘he went up,’ it means that Christ had been deep in the earth.” (CEV) “Now, the word ‘ascended’ implies that he also descended to the lowest level, down to the very earth.” (REB) “Notice that it says ‘he ascended.’ This means that Christ first came down to the lowly world in which we live.” (NLT) “When it says, ‘He went up,’ what does it mean? It means that he first came down to the earth.” (NCV) Jesus Christ did come down from heaven to the earth and also descended to the deepest part, the realm of the dead. Accordingly, either explanation would be in harmony with the rest of the Scriptures. (4:9)

Jesus Christ, the one who descended, “is also the one who ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.” After coming to the earth, which meant assuming a condition of humiliation, and laying down his life in sacrifice, he was highly exalted. In his exalted state, he is now “above all the heavens” and in a position to “fill all things.” His influence and sustaining power pervade all things that come to be at one with him, and thus he fills everything. (4:10)

The gifts Christ, after his ascension, gave to the community of believers were apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers. Apostles were men sent forth, either directly by the Lord Jesus Christ or by communities of believers (under the guidance of God’s spirit) as messengers to declare the good news about the Son of God. (Matthew 10:1-7; Luke 6:12-16; 9:1-6; Acts 9:1-6, 15; 13:1-3; 26:12-18) Evangelists also were proclaimers of the glad tidings about Jesus Christ. What appears to have distinguished evangelists who were not also apostles from the apostles was their not having been specifically sent forth. They did, however, act in accordance with the guidance of God’s spirit as they faithfully proclaimed the message about Jesus Christ. (Acts 8:5-8; 26-40)

Apostles filled the roles of prophets, shepherds, and teachers. Other men also served in these capacities. While prophets at times did foretell future events, they primarily made known God’s will, sharing words of encouragement that served to strengthen fellow believers. (Acts 11:27, 28; 15:32) Shepherds cared for the needs of fellow believers, being particularly concerned about their spiritual welfare as members of God’s congregation. (Acts 20:28) Teachers provided instruction for fellow believers. When expounding on the Scriptures, teachers would aid the hearers to understand the written word, enabling them to make personal application in their lives as members of God’s beloved family. (1 Timothy 1:3-11; 4:1-11; 6:1-4; 2 Timothy 3:14-17; 4:1, 2; James 3:1)

12-16 Purpose of the gifts

The gifts granted in the form of various functions faithful men would carry out as part of the community of believers served to “prepare the holy ones for the work of service, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain the oneness of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to [the state of] a mature man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” The “work of service” would be any service rendered in response to the needs of others, including providing food and clothing. (Acts 6:1-6; 9:36, 39) Loving response to the spiritual and material needs of fellow believers contributes to the building up of the entire congregation, forming strong bonds of affection among all. With faithful men functioning as Christ’s gifts for the benefit of everyone, the whole body would be built up. (4:12, 13)

Within the community of believers, individuals differ with reference to the measure of their faith and knowledge of God’s Son. Sound teaching should help all to attain ever greater faith and to draw closer to Jesus Christ, coming to know him in a more intimate personal relationship. This would make the unity of faith and knowledge become evident to an increasingly greater degree. The community of believers would be growing to become a “mature man” and making progress in attaining the measure of the full stature that Christ exemplified during the course of his life on earth. (4:13)

To resist the influence of wrong or destructive teaching, believers need to have a strong faith and to be solidly grounded in the truth about God and Christ. It would be dangerous for them to remain “babes,” as their faith would be too fragile to withstand being tossed to and fro like a light object by false doctrines that appear plausible and exert a powerful influence comparable to the wind. As mere babes, believers could not easily recognize the trickery, cunning, and deceit of those who teach falsehood. (4:14)

According to most manuscripts, the first word of verse 15 is a form of *aletheío*, meaning “to be truthful,” and can either denote “to speak the truth” or “to live the truth.” Both meanings are found in modern translations. “But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.” (NRSV) “Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.” (NIV) “Rather, living the truth in love, we should grow in every way into him who is the head, Christ.” (NAB) “But we are meant to hold firmly to the truth in love, and to grow up in every way into Christ, the head.” (J. B. Phillips) The conjunction *dé* (but) serves to

contrast the course faithful believers would be pursuing with the trickery, cunning, and deceit to which the proponents of falsehood resort. (4:15; see the Notes section.)

Believers, whether speaking or living the truth, would be guided by love. In every way or in all things, their growing would be “into Christ,” becoming progressively more like him as members of the body of which he is the head. (4:15)

Everything the body needs comes from Christ, the head. The body is joined together and made to function together “through every ligament of supply.” The expression “ligament of supply” may be understood to designate a body part that is connected to another and makes its needed contribution for the proper functioning of the body. As each part works in keeping with its “measure” or its proper function, the body grows and builds itself up “in love.” When everyone in the community of believers is at one with Christ and the individual members are supportive and caring, the body grows, increasingly becoming more like Christ. The body is built up “in love.” This could mean that, for the body or the community of believers to be built up, love is the essential element. Without love, the body would be weak and fragmented. None of the members would be built up or strengthened in their faith and devotion. (4:16)

4: 17-29

The new self and a worthy life

17-22 The old self put off

There is a possibility that the words “in love” may be understood yet another way. As the body grows, coming to be more like Christ, it becomes more loving. With the individual members manifesting love to a greater degree, the whole body would be built up in love. (4:16; see the Notes section.)

To add solemnity to the point he was about to make, Paul said, “This, then, I say and testify in the Lord.” Thus he expressed himself as one who was at one with the Lord Jesus Christ and who spoke in his name. The apostle urged believers to stop “walking” or conducting themselves as did people of the nations, persons whose life revealed an emptiness of mind. Those of the nations failed seriously in using their mental faculties in a noble way. (4:17; see the Notes section.)

Their moral corruption demonstrated that their thinking faculties had been darkened. As if blindfolded, they conducted themselves without any regard for the consequences, harming themselves and others. (Compare Romans 1:18-32.) On account of their self-imposed ignorance and the “callousness of their heart”

(or the unresponsiveness of their inner selves to the voice of conscience), they were “alienated from the life of God.” The “life of God” could refer to the newness of life that has God as its source or could designate the honourable life God meant for humans to live. (4:18)

In this context, the Greek word *apalgéo* appears to denote an absence of a sense of shame. Insensitive to any discomfort from a guilty conscience, people of the nations gave themselves up to shockingly indecent behavior or unrestrained debauchery. They engaged in unclean or defiling practices “in greediness [*pleonexía*].” The Greek word *pleonexía* denotes an inordinate desire for more. It is an extreme passion or addiction expressed in wanting more without any regard for others or the hurtful effect it might have on them. So, when performing all kinds of filthy practices, people of the nations did so with a passion for more and more indecent things to satisfy their lusts. (4:19)

Believers, however, did not learn from Christ the kind of moral corruption that existed among people of the nations. (4:20) If they had indeed heard him, having paid attention to his words as conveyed by those who had been with him, and had been “taught in him,” they would have known that Jesus Christ lived a life untainted by any trace of defilement or impurity. To be taught “in” Christ may mean to be taught as a believer who has come to be at one with him as a member of his body. Having heard and been taught, the believers whom Paul addressed knew that “truth is in Jesus.” At all times, Jesus Christ spoke the truth that his Father had taught him. Through him alone (his words, his deeds, his disposition), full knowledge about his Father is revealed. Jesus’ blameless life confirmed that the truth is indeed in him. (4:21)

In keeping with what they had heard and been taught, believers needed to strip off “the old man” of their former behaviour, the old self that had been corrupted by “desires of deceptions” or desires that, if acted upon, appeared to lead to gain but, in the end, would result in loss or harm. (4:22)

23-29 The new self put on

They needed to be renewed in the “spirit” of their minds. Instead of the former spirit that impelled them to think and act in corrupt or debased ways, a new spirit, a new activating or motivating power produced through the operation of God’s spirit, should be guiding their thinking, speaking, and acting. (4:23)

With the “old man” having been put away, believers should be putting on the “new man” or the new self that is created “according to God in righteousness and holiness [*hosiótes*] of the truth.” In being “according to God,” the new self

conforms to his image and becomes evident in an upright life. The Greek word *hosiótes* is descriptive of devoutness and purity. “In righteousness and holiness of the truth” could mean that the truth (with particular focus on Jesus Christ and all that he accomplished when surrendering his life) produces uprightness and purity. Another possibility is that “truth” here applies to true, actual, or real righteousness and holiness. (4:24)

Having put on the “new man” that is fashioned according to God’s likeness, believers should put away falsehood or everything that is opposed to truth, dependability, or trustworthiness. They are fellow members of the body of Christ. Therefore, in their dealings with one another, each one of them should be speaking the truth to his neighbour or fellow. Among them, a spirit of complete trust and dependability should prevail. (4:25; see the Notes section.)

Believers have been forgiven of their sins and are divinely approved on the basis of Christ’s righteousness and their faith in him. They, however, are not yet in possession of the sinless state. At times, in their interactions with one another, their failings and missteps can be a source of irritation. Therefore, the words of the psalmist (Psalm 4:5, LXX), which Paul quoted, are most appropriate, “Be angry and do not sin.” The anger or irritation resulting from the wrong that may have been committed should not be allowed to grow to the point where the transgression is countered by hateful words or actions. Grudges should not be permitted to develop. So, as the apostle admonished, the sun should not set while the individual is still in an angry state. (4:26)

The devil should not be given a place where he can undermine the unity that believers have as members of Christ’s body. If feelings of anger or ill-will toward fellow believers were to take hold, this would serve the devil’s purpose. It would create disharmony in the community of believers and be destructive especially to those with a fragile faith. (4:27)

Before becoming believers, some may have been thieves. Any who formerly were guilty of stealing were to stop and, instead, work hard with their “own [according to numerous manuscripts] hands,” taking care of their needs through honest labour. Besides no longer taking things from others, they should make it their aim to have enough to be able to share with the needy. (4:28)

The mouths of believers should not be used to utter rotten, degrading, or unwholesome words. Their speech should be good for building up others, addressing their needs in a wholesome and encouraging manner. This would result in imparting what is gracious or favourable to the hearers. (4:29)

4: 30-32

The Holy Spirit and worthy life

30 The Holy Spirit is grieved by an unholy life

Believers had been sealed with God's spirit for the "day of redemption." This sealing with God's spirit marked them as his approved children and served as a guarantee of their future redemption or absolute deliverance from sin. For them to act contrary to the guidance or influence of God's spirit would have meant that they had grieved the spirit. They were to avoid such grieving, or such an outrageous resistance of the spirit's influence for good. (4:30)

All bitterness, fury, anger, screaming, and blasphemy or abusive speech, along with all evil or badness of every kind, should be banished from the midst of God's family of approved children. (4:31) Instead, they should be "kind to one another," compassionate and forgiving. They have a powerful incentive to manifest a loving spirit, for "God in Christ has forgiven" them. God's forgiveness is "in Christ," for his Son's surrender of his life provided the basis for all who would respond in faith to be pardoned of their sins. (4:32; see the Notes section.)

Notes:

Later copyists seemingly wanted to make "all" (the last word in verse 6) to apply explicitly to believers and added either *hymín* (you) or *hemín* (us).

In verse 8, many manuscripts, including P46 (c. 200 CE), do not include "and" (*kaí*). Without the "and," the text reads, "Having ascended to the height, he led a captivity captive; he gave gifts to men."

After "descended" (in verse 9), many manuscripts add "first." The oldest extant manuscript (P46, c. 200 CE) and a number of others omit the word "parts."

In a number of manuscripts, the first word of verse 15 is "truth" (a form of *alétheia*). These manuscripts contain a verb that means "to do" (a form of *poiéo*) and so convey the thought of living or practicing the truth.

In verse 16, the point relating to Christ as head ("from whom all the body") is not completed. This aspect of the Greek text is preserved in the more literal renderings of modern translations. "From whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working

properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love." (NRSV) "From whom the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, with the proper functioning of each part, brings about the body's growth and builds itself up in love." (NAB)

Though not stated in the text of verse 16, the implication is that the head is essential in supplying what the body needs. A number of translations have added words to make this significance explicit. "The whole body depends on Christ, and all the parts of the body are joined and held together. Each part does its own work to make the whole body grow and be strong with love." (NCV) "For it is from the head that the whole body, as a harmonious structure knit together by the joints with which it is provided, grows by the proper functioning of individual parts to its full maturity in love." (J. B. Phillips) "And on him the whole body depends. Bonded and held together by every constituent joint, the whole frame grows through the proper functioning of each part, and builds itself up in love." (REB)

It is noteworthy that the apostle's focus was not on growth in numbers but on growth of the body as a community of believers that progressively becomes more like Christ.

In many manuscripts (in verse 17), the word "rest" precedes the term "nations" (rest of the nations), thereby indicating that the reference is to non-Jews. The oldest extant manuscript (P46, c. 200 CE) and numerous others, however, do not include the word "rest."

The words of verse 25 about speaking the truth are not introduced as a quotation. A similar thought is expressed in Zechariah 8:16 (LXX), "Speak truth each [one] with his neighbour."

In verse 32, manuscripts read either "God in Christ has forgiven you" or "God in Christ has forgiven us."

Ephesians 5: 1-33

5: 1-17

Imitators of God and a holy life

1-7 Imitating God as children of love

"Therefore" (in view of God's great love in granting forgiveness), Paul continued, "become imitators of God as beloved children." As members of his family, believers would rightly seek to be like their loving Father. (5:1)

They would then “walk” or conduct themselves “in love,” responding in a caring and compassionate manner toward others. In this regard, they additionally have the example of Christ. In expression of his love for us, “he gave himself for us [as] an offering and sacrifice to God for a fragrant aroma.” Christ’s surrender of his life for us demonstrated his great love for his Father, for he was delighted to carry out his Father’s will despite the personal humiliation and suffering it meant for him. Accordingly, his offering up himself and laying down his life sacrificially proved to be like a pleasing aroma to God. (5:2; see the Notes section.)

Believers are a “holy people” because of what God has done for them through his Son, and this should be reflected in all aspects of their life. Sexual immorality, uncleanness (or anything of an impure, debased, or defiling nature), and greediness or the inordinate desire for more and more should not even “be named” or mentioned. Such debased things should not be talked about among believers in a manner that is characteristic of persons who are alienated from God, because this would not be fitting for a holy or clean people. (5:3)

Degraded talk would include anything of a shameful or indecent nature, foolish or senseless expressions, and obscene jesting. Believers should banish all filthy speaking from their midst and, instead, give thanks to God for everything that he has done for them. (5:4)

They were fully aware of the need to shun the degraded ways of the world at enmity with God. This is because they knew that no sexually immoral person, unclean or corrupt individual, or one given to covetousness or greed would have an inheritance “in the kingdom of Christ and of God.” In the realm where God is recognized as Sovereign and Christ is acknowledged as Lord and King by his Father’s appointment, individuals who choose to continue living corrupt lives will never be granted a place. (5:5; see the Notes section regarding the phrase “which is an idolater.”)

There were corrupt individuals who tried to deceive believers. Based on what is written elsewhere in the Scriptures, these proponents of falsehood represented God’s mercy as allowing believers to engage in degraded practices. (Compare 2 Peter 2:18, 19; Jude 4.) For this reason, Paul warned fellow believers not to be deceived by “empty words,” or arguments that may have sounded plausible but had absolutely no validity. Impurity and corruption had no place in the community of believers, for God’s coming wrath would be directed against the “sons of disobedience,” or against those who defiantly engaged in the kind of degrading practices that Paul had mentioned. They were “sons” or children of

disobedience because they followed a way of life that was subject to disobedience to God. (5:6)

Disobedient persons will not escape divine judgment. Therefore, Paul urged those to whom he wrote not to become “sharers” with them, yielding to their deceptive words and then engaging in divinely disapproved acts. (5:7)

8-17 Imitating God as children of light

Formerly, believers were in darkness or in a state of ignorance about God and his will, living in a divinely disapproved manner. Upon putting faith in God’s Son, they ceased to be in darkness. In him, or by coming to be united to him as members of his body, they came to be “light,” or persons who were both in the light and could serve as light in aiding others to escape the darkness of ignorance and sin. In harmony with their new status, they should walk or conduct themselves as “children of light,” persons who had been liberated from their former condition of darkness. (5:8)

Unlike darkness, which is associated with corrupt deeds that those engaging in them feel a need to conceal, light is not linked to activity that is shameful. The “fruit of the light” embraces all “goodness” (or moral excellence that manifests itself in active concern for the welfare of others), everything that is “righteous,” upright, or just, and “truth,” or whatever is dependable or trustworthy. (5:9; see the Notes section.)

Believers should make it their aim to “determine [*dokimázo*] what is pleasing to the Lord.” The Greek word *dokimázo* basically means “to test” or “to prove.” In this particular context, the term relates to endeavoring to find out, establish, or determine and then to act accordingly. Believers recognize Jesus Christ as their Lord. Conduct that pleases him would also meet his Father’s approval. A number of manuscripts read, “what is pleasing to God.” (5:10)

To be recognized as belonging to their Lord, believers cannot share in the “unfruitful works of darkness,” but must, instead, “reprove” them. The “works of darkness” are the disgraceful acts that those who engage in them try to conceal from the view of others or from being perceived for what they are. These “works” are “unfruitful,” for they produce nothing that is good or wholesome. Rather than having any part in the disgraceful works of darkness, disciples of Christ should “reprove” or expose these works, making manifest how disgraceful and injurious they really are. (5:11)

The things that those alienated from God do in secret, or hidden from the view of others, are too shameful even to mention. (5:12) Corrupt individuals, besides

engaging in disgraceful practices while endeavouring not to be seen or discovered, may also try to entice others with deceptive reasoning, trying to make what is shameful appear to be acceptable. Everything that light exposes, however, “is made manifest.” Whenever debased practices are properly shown up as if a bright light had been focused on them, they will be recognized for what they are. (5:13) Everything that is thus made manifest “is light,” for that which has been exposed has been revealed as to its real nature and shown up as something to be shunned and abhorred. (5:14)

The quotation that follows seemingly serves to show that the exposing light is the light from Christ. “Awake, O sleeper, and rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.” Christ’s example and teaching provide the needed illumination for identifying the “works of darkness.” Those who are asleep, oblivious to the true nature of these works, need to wake up. All who are dead in trespasses and sins need to arise by accepting God’s arrangement through his Son to be forgiven of their sins. As persons no longer in a state of sleep and dead in sin, they will benefit from the illumination Jesus Christ makes available. (5:14; see the Notes section.)

In view of the corrupt influences to which believers were subjected, Paul admonished them to watch carefully how they walked or conducted themselves. Their way of life should be one of wise persons, not unwise or senseless ones. Conduct that harmonizes with God’s will is wise, for it results in lasting benefits. A failure to follow his guidance leads to a disastrous outcome, with harm to the individual and to others who may be affected. This failure characterizes the walk or conduct of unwise persons. (5:15)

Believers are urged to “redeem [literally, ‘buy out’] the time, because the days are evil.” In this context, redeeming the time could denote to make the best use of time or to redeem it for beneficial purposes from waste or misuse. (5:16) Modern translations commonly render the expression to refer either to time or opportunity. “Make the best of the present time, for it is a wicked age.” (NJB) “These are evil times, so make every minute count.” (CEV) “Make the best use of your time, despite all the difficulties of these days.” (J. B. Phillips) “Watch carefully then how you live, not as foolish persons but as wise, making the most of the opportunity, because the days are evil.” (NAB) “Use the present opportunity to the full, for these are evil days.” (REB) “Use every chance for doing good, because these are evil times.” (NCV)

The believers to whom Paul wrote found themselves living in a corrupt world. For this reason, he referred to the “days,” times, or age in which they lived as “evil.” (5:16) So it was essential for them to avoid being foolish, yielding to the

baneful influences with which they were faced. They needed to make sure that they were aware of or understood the will of the Lord. Their rightly perceiving his will would have meant acting in harmony therewith. Numerous later manuscripts read, “the will of God,” but the oldest extant manuscript (P46, c. 200 CE) says, “Christ.” This difference is immaterial, for the will of the Lord Jesus Christ is the same as that of his Father. (5:17)

5: 18-20

The filling of the Spirit and a worthy life

18 The true elixir of life and the false

In the Greco-Roman world, excessive drinking of wine was common, especially in conjunction with festivals and celebrations of triumphs and other events. Therefore, when conducting themselves as wise persons, believers would be moderate in their use of wine, avoiding intoxication and the dissipation or harmful effects associated therewith. Instead of deriving stimulation from wine, they should make it their aim to be filled with spirit, letting God’s spirit exert the wholesome influence that produces real joy and a genuine sense of well-being. (5:18)

19-20 The result of being Spirit filled

When allowing the holy spirit to guide them, believers would be able to speak to one another (literally, “speaking to selves [*heautoís*]”) in an encouraging manner, using the words of “psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.” Psalms would have been the sacred songs found in the book of Psalms. Both the hymns (praises directed to God) and the spiritual songs (compositions pertaining to spiritual matters) would have been Christian compositions. Believers experienced joy from singing and making music in their “heart” to the Lord. Such singing and making music to the Lord Jesus Christ stemmed from the “heart,” or the inmost self, and expressed appreciation for all that he accomplished by laying down his life for them and continuing to aid them. (5:19; see the Notes section.)

Always and for everything, believers should be giving thanks to God, their heavenly Father, “in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.” By continuing to acknowledge God as the source of all that they enjoy, believers are drawn closer to him as their loving, caring, and compassionate heavenly Father. Through their expressions of thanks in prayer, the importance of their relationship with him and dependence on him for everything are kept prominently in view. When rendering thanks in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, believers acknowledge

that everything they have received from his Father has been made possible through him. (5:20)

5:21-33

Husbands, wives and a worthy life

21 The general principle

“In fear of Christ,” or out of reverential regard for him as their Lord, believers should subject themselves to one another. They would do so by willingly and eagerly functioning as caring and unassuming servants in response to the needs of fellow believers (5:21; compare Matthew 23:11; Luke 9:48; 22:26; John 13:14, 15; 1 Corinthians 9:19; Galatians 5:13; Philippians 2:3, 4; see the Notes section.)

22-24 The duty of wives

Within the family or as members of a household, the believers’ subjection depended on the position they occupied. Their being submissive, however, was not an expression of forced servitude. When conscientiously caring for their duties and responsibilities, wives would be subjecting themselves to their own husbands “as to the Lord.” This ennobled their being submissive to them, for their subjection demonstrated their recognition of and desire to please Christ as their Lord and as the one who had died for them and made it possible for them to become his Father’s beloved children. (5:22)

In the family, the submissiveness of wives as to the Lord is based on the divinely assigned role of husbands. “The husband is the head of the wife, as also Christ [is] the head of the congregation.” Additionally, Christ is the “savior of the body.” Through his death, he delivered believers, or those who became members of his body, from sin and condemnation and reconciled them to his Father. By his Father’s appointment, he is the head of the congregation and is rightly such because of everything he has done for the community or family of believers. Similarly, the husband occupies the God-given place as head of his own family. This is based on the original priority of existence, the man having been created first and then the woman. (5:23; compare 1 Timothy 2:13.)

“As the congregation submits to Christ, so also [should] wives to their husbands in everything.” The community of believers seeks to follow Christ’s guidance and direction, which is always right and beneficial. He would never require anyone to do something that is injurious, and so a wife’s submissiveness “in

everything” could not include cooperating with her husband in committing moral wrongs. (5:24)

25-33 The duty of husbands

Members of Christ’s congregation are not sinless, and so their individual submission to him is not free from flaw. Accordingly, the example that wives are called upon to imitate is not one of absolute perfection. Husbands, however, in keeping with their weighty responsibility as family heads, are to imitate Christ, the sinless one. They are to love their wives “as also Christ loved the congregation and delivered up himself for it.” The love of God’s Son proved to be of unparalleled greatness, for he sacrificed his very life for those who would become part of his body or his congregation. This is the kind of self-sacrificing love husbands are to have for their wives. (5:25)

Christ’s love, care, and concern for the congregation has not ended. He surrendered his life to sanctify the congregation or to make it pure or holy in the eyes of his Father. With the “washing of the water in the word,” Jesus Christ cleansed the congregation. (5:26)

The context does not make it possible to be certain about what this washing signifies. A number of translations interpretively identify the “washing of the water” as being baptism (“washed by baptism and God’s word” [NLT]; “cleansing her with the baptismal water by the word” [Weymouth]), and the word has been represented as designating the confession made at the time of baptism (*im Wasser der Taufe und das dabei gesprochene Wort* [in the water of baptism and the word then spoken (*Gute Nachricht Bibel*, German)]). According to another view, the washing is figurative. *Durch sein Wort hat er den Schmutz ihrer Verfehlungen wie in einem reinigenden Bad von ihr abgewaschen.* (Through his word he has washed away the dirt of her transgressions as with a cleansing bath. [*Neue Genfer Übersetzung*, German]) If the expression is figurative, the “word” may be understood to denote the message about Christ, as faith in him and what he accomplished by surrendering his life had made the cleansing from sin possible. (5:26)

Christ’s ultimate purpose is to present the congregation to himself like a virgin bride in a state of glory, splendor, or honor. In a condition of virgin purity, the congregation would be without a “stain,” “wrinkle,” or any similar flaw. As his bride, the community of believers would be holy or pure and unblemished in all respects. (5:27)

In harmony with the example of Jesus Christ's love for the congregation, believing husbands are obligated to love their wives as they do "their own bodies, for whoever loves his wife loves himself." In the intimate marriage relationship, husband and wife come to be one. Therefore, a husband's loving his wife means loving himself. (5:28)

People who do not love themselves are the exception, not the norm. "For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as also [does] Christ [the Lord, according to other manuscripts] the congregation." Individuals do not customarily loathe themselves to the point of totally neglecting their bodily needs. Most people do whatever they can to obtain the necessities of life. As the head of the congregation, Christ continues to provide aid and guidance through the holy spirit that functions as the helper for believers. (5:29) Individually, believers are members of Christ's body, benefiting personally from him as their head. (5:30; see the Notes section.)

To emphasize the closeness existing between husbands and wives and what that relationship reveals about Christ and the community of believers, Paul quoted from Genesis 2:24 (LXX), "On this account [the woman's being of the same flesh and bones as the man], a man will leave [his] father and mother, and will cling to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." A man leaves his own parents to enter a relationship with a woman who had once been a stranger to him, forming a more intimate union than the one existing between himself and the parents whom he has always known. (5:31)

"This mystery is great," the apostle continued, "but now I am speaking of Christ and the congregation." The union of two former strangers reveals the mystery of how believers from all nations and races and from very different backgrounds and stations in life become members of a loving and united corporate body that is at one with the head, God's Son. (5:32)

Returning to the subject relating to the relationship of husbands and wives, the apostle continued, "Moreover, each of you also should so love his wife as he [does] himself, and the wife should fear the husband." (5:33) Believing husbands would want to treat their wives in the loving and caring manner in which they would treat themselves. The kind of "fear" here mentioned is not dread and alarm, but designates a proper regard or respect.

Notes:

In verse 2, certain manuscripts read "you," not "us." This difference, however, has no significant bearing on the meaning of the text.

With apparent reference to the greedy or covetous person, verse 5 (according to the reading of the oldest extant manuscripts and many others) says, “which is an idolater.” Numerous other manuscripts read, “who is an idolater.” The object of a person’s greed or covetousness takes on such importance and gives rise to such intense desire that it becomes an idol, claiming the kind of attachment that rightfully belongs only to God.

In verse 9, numerous later manuscripts refer to the “fruit of the spirit” (not the “fruit of the light”). The reading “spirit” may have arisen on the basis of Galatians 5:22.

No specific passage in the preserved Hebrew Scriptures nor in the ancient Greek translation, the Septuagint, parallels the quotation in verse 14. Possibly the quotation is from a Christian composition. Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 confirm that such compositions or songs existed. In a number of manuscripts, the concluding phrase reads differently, “And you will grasp [form of *epipsaúo*] Christ.”

The Greek reflexive pronoun (*heautoís*), in verse 19, is probably to be understood as meaning “to one another.” This is the significance the pronoun clearly has in Ephesians 4:32, where the reference is to forgiving one another. In verse 19, modern translations commonly represent the reflexive pronoun as meaning “one another.” “Speak to one another in psalms, hymns, and songs; sing and make music from your heart to the Lord.” (REB) “Sing psalms and hymns and inspired songs among yourselves, singing and chanting to the Lord in your hearts.” (NJB) “Speak to each other with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making music in your hearts to the Lord.” (NCV)

In verse 21, manuscripts variously read, “in fear of Christ,” “in fear of Jesus Christ,” “in fear of the Lord,” and “in fear of God.” The reading with the best manuscript support is, “in fear of Christ.”

After “his body” (in verse 30), a number of later manuscripts add, “of his flesh and of his bones.”

Ephesians 6: 1-24

6: 1-4

Children, parents and a worthy life

1-3 Injunction to children

Paul admonished children to be obedient to their parents. According to many manuscripts, the expression “in the Lord” appears in connection with this admonition. This may apply to the parents as being “in the Lord” or at one with him as members of his body. Another possibility is that the directive is for children to obey their parents out of regard for Jesus Christ as their Lord. The apostle added the reason for obedience, “for this is righteous.” It is only right that children obey their parents, as it reflects a proper regard for the love, attention, and guidance they received during the most vulnerable part of their lives. Without adult care, babies cannot survive, and children continue to be dependent for years thereafter. (6:1)

Furthermore, obedience to parents is right because it harmonizes with God’s will. The apostle quoted the God-given command found in Exodus 20:12 and Deuteronomy 5:16 (LXX), “Honour your father and mother.” Such honor would include obedient response to parental direction. Most parents are concerned about the welfare of their children and try to give the kind of advice that will be helpful and beneficial. Therefore, when children defiantly ignore their parents, they dishonor them. (6:2)

Of the Ten Commandments, the command to honor father and mother is the first one to which a promise is attached. (6:2) Paul’s quotation of the promise is shorter than the extant Septuagint reading of Exodus 20:12 and Deuteronomy 5:16 but expresses the same meaning. The promise is, “that it may be well with you and you may be long-lived on the earth.” Sound parental guidance serves to safeguard children from pursuing a wayward course that is destructive to well-being and can result in a premature death. (6:3; compare Proverbs 1:8-7:27.)

4 The injunction to fathers

Fathers are cautioned not to provoke or anger their children. This could happen if fathers are unreasonable or harsh with their children, demanding much more from them than they could possibly do and administering discipline inconsistently and with unwarranted severity. Instead, they need to rear their children in the “discipline and admonition of the Lord.” The discipline or training and the directives fathers give to their children to avoid or to desist from a wrong course should be based on the example and teaching of their Lord Jesus Christ. (6:4)

6:5-9

Servants, masters and a worthy life

5-8 Servants to obey

In the Greco-Roman world, many believers were slaves and so had lords “according to the flesh,” or human masters. When slaves became disciples of God’s Son, they were to conduct themselves in a manner that honored him. This called for them to obey their masters with “fear and trembling, in sincerity of [their] heart, as to Christ.” Obeying “with fear and trembling” would denote manifesting proper regard or respect for their masters and maintaining a wholesome apprehension of not wanting to displease them and incur their anger. Such obedience, however, was not to be a mere outward expression. It was to be a reflection of a sincere heart, or the inmost self, as if the services rendered were directly done for Jesus Christ. (6:5)

In performing their assigned duties, slaves were to be exemplary, avoiding “eye service as to men” or working only while they were being watched or just enough to escape punishment. They were slaves of Christ, and so their desire should have been to do “the will of God” with every fibre of their very being (literally, “out of the soul”). (6:6)

As believers, they were to render service to their masters with a good attitude as to Lord Jesus Christ and not merely to men. (6:7) While conscientiously serving their masters in a manner that honoured Christ, they could do so with the certain knowledge that he would repay them for whatever good they might do individually. Whether slaves or free, believers could rest assured that the Lord Jesus Christ would not fail to reward faithfulness. Unlike human masters who might be unjust, Jesus Christ would never treat anyone unfairly. (6:8)

9 Masters to obey

Among believers in the first century CE, some were masters and obligated to follow the example of Jesus Christ. In their dealings with their slaves, they were to do “the same things to them,” probably meaning that they should manifest the same disposition and uprightness as they would expect from believing slaves. In imitation of Christ, they would not threaten their slaves or abuse them in any way. Though “lords” or masters, they, like their slaves, were subject to their Lord in the heavens, and he is not partial. Jesus Christ would not look with favor on any master who mistreated his slave. (6:9)

6: 10-20

Spiritual conflict and a worthy life

10-12 The warrior's resources

In view of the pressures that believers faced as they endeavoured to be faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ, they needed strength to resist succumbing to destructive influences. This required that they be empowered in him and in the “might of his strength.” They would need to rely on him for strength, remaining at one with him as their Lord. The “might of his strength” is far greater than anything they could possibly imagine and so would be more than adequate to be victorious in the trials and struggles they would encounter. (6:10)

Believers had an enemy, and to win in the fight against this enemy they needed spiritual protection and weaponry, which God could supply. The apostle urged believers to “put on the armour of God,” making it possible for them to stand against the “schemes of the devil.” They would be able to recognize the crafty deception and have the strength to resist it. (6:11)

The apostle indicated that believers have a real fight on their hands. It is not a “wrestling” or battling against “blood and flesh,” or a warring against other humans, but it is a struggle against the powers of darkness of the superterrestrial realm. The powers of darkness are described as “sovereignities,” “authorities,” “world rulers of this darkness” or, according to other manuscripts, “world rulers of the darkness of this age,” and “spirit powers of evil in the heavenly places.” This superterrestrial realm of darkness manifested itself in the enslavement of people to superstition, fear, ignorance, and a corrupt way of life characterized by moral degradation, hatred, violence, and inhumanity. (6:12; see the Notes section.)

13-20 The warrior's use of his resources

To be prepared for the assault that had its source in the realm of darkness, believers needed to take up the “armor of God,” enabling them to withstand “in the evil day and, having done everything, to stand [firm].” The “evil day” appears to denote any time of trouble, trial, or distress. (Compare Psalm 41:1; 49:5.) “Everything” that believers would be doing may refer to “all” the essential efforts for gaining the victory in the fight against the powers of darkness. (6:13)

Like soldiers, believers were to stand fast while properly protected and equipped for battle. A soldier's girdle provided support, protection, and a place from which a sword or dagger could be suspended. The “truth,” particularly as it

relates to Jesus Christ and what he revealed about his Father, serves like a protective and supporting girdle. A breastplate protects the heart and other vital organs. The “breastplate of righteousness” shields the inmost self of the believer from harmful desires. On the basis of faith in Christ and what his death accomplished for them, believers have gained a righteous or divinely approved standing before God. Nevertheless, they are not sinless and so need to cooperate with the leading of God’s spirit to maintain their approved standing, seeking to be attached to uprightness as if it were a protective breastplate and thus resisting temptations to be drawn into sin. (6:14)

Paul likened the sandals for the feet to the believer's being prepared in relation to the “evangel of peace.” The evangel is the good news about Christ, which reveals how “peace” or reconciliation with God is possible. Believers should be prepared or in a state of readiness to share this message at every opportunity. (6:15)

“In everything” or, according to other manuscripts, “with” (literally, “upon”) “everything” or “all,” believers need to take up the “shield of faith,” with which they would be able to extinguish the flaming arrows of the wicked one. The introductory words may be understood to mean either “in all circumstances” or “upon being equipped with all the armour previously mentioned.” Faith enables believers to recognize that the trials and troubles of the present are but momentary and that the divine promises are sure to be fulfilled. Therefore, the devil’s assaults, comparable to fiery missiles, would prove to be ineffective in causing spiritual harm to those who hold fast to their faith. The protective barrier faith provides would prevent any destructive “fire” from causing injury, for believers would not yield to the pressure to succumb to sin. (6:16)

“Salvation” functions as a helmet. In this case, “salvation” may be understood to refer to the future deliverance upon which the believer’s hope is to remain fixed. While having an approved standing before God, believers are yearning for the time when they will be completely liberated from sin and reflect the image of their heavenly Father flawlessly. Like a protective helmet, the believer’s focus on salvation safeguards the mental powers from yielding to God-dishonoring influences that could jeopardize sharing in the ultimate deliverance from sin. (6:17)

The “sword of the spirit” is “God’s word.” It is God’s word or message, specifically about his Son and what he accomplished through him, that functions like an effective sword in combating error and being successful in the fight against the powers of darkness. Its being called the “sword of the spirit” may

identify God's word or message as having been revealed through the operation of his spirit. (6:17)

“Through all prayer and supplication” may point to the vital means for standing fast when facing satanic assaults. “Supplication” may denote a more intense form of appeal to God than does “prayer,” and “all” could refer to every kind of prayer and supplication (private, silent, audible, public [while assembled with fellow believers], praise, thanksgiving, and appeals for help or guidance). At all times or on every occasion, prayers and supplications should be expressed “in spirit” or while being guided by God's spirit. While praying, one should remain awake or alert “with all perseverance,” not allowing the mind to wander and not beginning to repeat words without careful attention. “All perseverance” in remaining alert while praying suggests that one would persist in prayer, with every effort being made to keep the mind focused. Prayers, as Paul continued, included “supplication for all the holy ones” or all fellow believers. (6:18)

He requested that the recipients of his letter would pray for him, so that he “might be given a word” or message, enabling him to open his mouth with “boldness to make known the mystery of the evangel.” It was the apostle's desire to be granted a message or the right words to speak when bearing witness regarding the Son of God. He wanted to do so with boldness, courageously and with firm conviction, making known the glad tidings about Jesus Christ and his Father's purpose respecting him. This good news had long been a mystery or been hidden from past generations. With the coming of Jesus Christ to the earth and the surrender of his life, the time had come for the mystery to be disclosed and proclaimed far and wide. (6:19; see the Notes section.)

As an apostle to the nations, Paul had been diligent in making known the “mystery.” On account of discharging his commission among the non-Jewish peoples, he came to be in confinement and, at the time this letter was written, found himself as an “ambassador in chains.” In his role as an ambassador for Christ, he had proclaimed the message about him and the significance of his death. The apostle also made an appeal to those who heard him to become reconciled to God. (6:20; compare 2 Corinthians 5:20.)

Paul repeated the reason he had asked fellow believers to pray for him. He wanted to have divine help to declare the mystery of the evangel with boldness, speaking just as he should. (6:20)

6:21-24

Personal note; closing salutation

21-22 Personal note.

Paul appears to have entrusted the letter to Tychicus, whom he called a “beloved brother and faithful servant in the Lord” (a dear fellow believer who had revealed himself to be a trustworthy servant in furthering the cause of the Lord Jesus Christ). With firsthand knowledge about Paul’s affairs, Tychicus would have been able to share specifics with fellow believers and relate everything about him. (6:21) This was, in fact, the reason Paul sent Tychicus, wanting those to whom the letter was sent to know about him and to “console [their] hearts.” Having learned about the apostle’s confinement, they would have been deeply concerned and troubled in their “hearts” or inmost selves. (Compare Ephesians 3:13.) The report Tychicus could give would serve to comfort them, allaying their anxiety. Moreover, the fellowship they would enjoy with him would provide opportunities for mutual encouragement. (6:22)

23-24 Closing salutations (Peace, love, faith and grace are mentioned in benediction and blessing.

The letter concludes with a prayerful expression. “Peace to the brothers [‘holy ones,’ according to P46 (c. 200 CE)] and love [‘mercy’ (fifth-century Codex Alexandrinus)] with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Favour [be] with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ in incorruptness.” (6:23, 24)

For believers to have peace would mean for them to enjoy an inner sense of well-being that comes from the assurance that God and Christ deeply love them and will help, strengthen, and sustain them regardless of the circumstances in which they may find themselves. The peace that comes from God and Christ also promotes unity within the community of believers. Being coupled with faith, love may be understood to be an expression of faith or complete trust in God and Christ. As their gift to the community of believers, love would continue to flourish among all. Believers would have genuine concern and care for one another, impartially responding to everyone’s needs. Whereas those to whom Paul wrote had faith, God and Christ would continue to aid them in progressively strengthening their faith. (6:23)

The gracious “favour” or the unmerited kindness that God and Christ grant to believers includes their aid and guidance. Loving Jesus Christ in incorruptness may mean loving him with an undying or never-ending love, or with a genuine and unwavering love. (6:24; see the Notes section.)

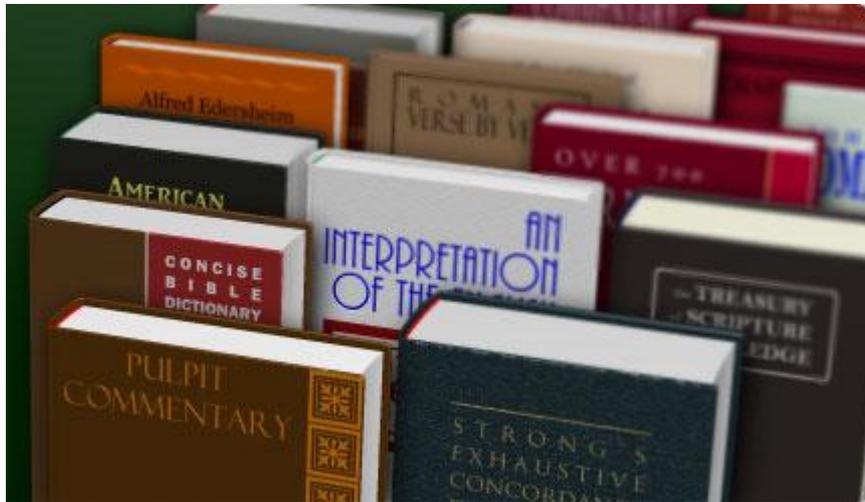
Notes:

In verse 12, extant manuscripts read either “our wrestling” or “your wrestling.”

Fourth-century Codex Vaticanus and a number of other manuscripts end verse 19 with “mystery,” omitting “of the evangel.”

Many manuscripts conclude verse 24 with “Amen.”

A subscription in a number of manuscripts indicates that the letter was sent from Rome.



Your examination on Ephesians, Testing yourself while meditating on God’s Word.

The book of Ephesians is the tenth book of the New Testament. This epistle to the Ephesians was written in Rome, The letter would then be to the saints and faithful in Christ Jesus anywhere. The doctrine of the Epistle confirms this view and it contains the highest church truth, but has nothing about church order. The Church here is the true Church, “His body,” not the local church, as in Philipians, and Corinthians. This Epistle can be divided into three parts: 1) The believer’s standing in Grace. 2) The walk and service of the believer. 3) The walk and warfare of the Spirit-filled believer. The author of this book is Paul. Listed below are questions on the book of Ephesians. These questions can be used freely for Sunday school or bible study to help all young Christians study

the scriptures. My prayers are with you always and may God bless you in your studies.

Ephesians Chapter 1

- 1) Who wrote the book of Ephesians? (Ephesians 1:1)
- 2) To whom is this letter addressed? (Ephesians 1:1)
- 3) According to the wonderful doxology of verse three, what has been given to every true Christian? (Ephesians 1:3)
- 4) Why have we been chosen in Christ? (Ephesians 1:4)
- 5) How far back does this plan of perfecting a peculiar people unto Himself go? (Ephesians 1:4)
- 6) Unto what are believers predestinated (“checked off before hand”)? (Ephesians 1:5)
- 7) When one is marked off before hand, what makes him acceptable to God? (Ephesians 1:6)
- 8) What is the price that gives us entrance into Heaven? (Ephesians 1:7)
- 9) What does the believer experience when he is saved? (Ephesians 1:7)
- 10) What attributes of God are illuminated by His Grace? (Ephesians 1:8)
- 11) The divine plan of redemption looks forward to what occasion? (Ephesians 1:10)
- 12) How should the knowledge of such an inheritance cause us to live? (Ephesians 1:12)
- 13) What happens when one really hears the gospel and believes it? (Ephesians 1:13)
- 14) The Holy Spirit is what part of our inheritance? (Ephesians 1:14)
- 15) In what way did Paul continue to remember the saints at Ephesians? (Ephesians 1:16)
- 16) What was the first thing that Paul prayed the saints might come to discern? (Ephesians 1:17)
- 17) What was the second thing that Paul wanted us to understand? (Ephesians 1:18)
- 18) Can you list the third thing that Paul desired for the converts? (Ephesians 1:19)

19) When Jesus Christ was raised from the dead, where does He sit at in Heaven? (Ephesians 1:20)

20) When Jesus Christ was raised from the dead, what was He exalted over in Heaven? (Ephesians 1:21-23)

Ephesians Chapter 2

1) When one is spiritual dead, to what spirit is his mind most susceptible? (Ephesians 2:2)

2) Since they do not have the new nature, what nature do they have? (Ephesians 2:3)

3) What are their lives predominantly controlled by? (Ephesians 2:3)

4) What must this experience be attributed to? (Ephesians 2:5)

5) As to position, what place does every Son of God occupy? (Ephesians 2:6)

6) As we look into the future eternity, what do we learn as to why God saved us? (Ephesians 2:7)

7) How long will God display before the universe what He accomplished through the gift of His Son? (Ephesians 2:7)

8) Of what do we constantly need to be reminded regarding our Salvation? (Ephesians 2:9-10)

9) What new and living way had been opened for all who would receive it, after Israel also had rejected our Saviour? (Ephesians 2:13)

10) What has been broken down as a result of Christ's redemptive work? (Ephesians 2:14)

11) The cross has what effect upon believing Jews and Gentiles? (Ephesians 2:16)

12) What two classes is Christ's peace offered to? (Ephesians 2:17)

13) Can you state the position now of the believing Jews and Gentiles? (Ephesians 2:19)

14) What is the purpose of the cementing together of true believers by the Holy Spirit? (Ephesians 2:22)

Ephesians Chapter 3

1) What three words does this chapter open with? (Ephesians 3:1)

- 2) How does Paul refer to his commission? (Ephesians 3:2)
- 3) How did Paul come to understand this mystery? (Ephesians 3:3)
- 4) How is this “mystery” now defined? (Ephesians 3:6)
- 5) Who also shared in this knowledge and of this mystery? (Ephesians 3:5)
- 6) What was the marvel to Paul that he should be called to preach to the Gentiles? (Ephesians 3:8)
- 7) What was God’s purpose in the mystery? (Ephesians 3:10)
- 8) Where is the family of God now located geographically? (Ephesians 3:15)
- 9) Can you state Paul’s first petition for the Christian? (Ephesians 3:16)
- 10) What was Paul’s next petition in verse seventeen? (Ephesians 3:17)
- 11) What two things did Paul desire in regard to the Christian’s love? (Ephesians 3:17)
- 12) What was Paul’s next petition in verse eighteen? (Ephesians 3:18)
- 13) Concerning what does the apostle now pray that we might have an “experiential knowledge,” even though the thing itself passes comprehension? (Ephesians 3:19)
- 14) Can you state the last petition in your own words? (Ephesians 3:19)
- 15) Who should we give glory to throughout all ages in this verse? (Ephesians 3:21)

Ephesians Chapter 4

- 1) What is the key thought of the practical section of the epistle? (Ephesians 4:1)
- 2) How will the realization of the loftiness of our calling immediately itself in the life? (Ephesians 4:2)
- 3) Can you state one of the primary duties of every Christian? (Ephesians 4:3)
- 4) Who is the author of unity in this verse? (Ephesians 4:3)
- 5) What is the doctrinal basis for this unity of the Spirit? (Ephesians 4:4-6)
- 6) When our Lord ascended to Heaven, what two special signs of His deity were manifested? (Ephesians 4:8)
- 7) When Jesus Christ ascended, whom did He lead in this verse? (Ephesians 4:8)
- 8) Which direction did the Spirit of Jesus go when it went into the paradise section of the realm of departed Spirits (Hades)? (Ephesians 4:9)

- 9) What did Christ do next after demonstrating to these saved spirits in paradise that His atoning sacrifice had at last been made? (Ephesians 4:10)
- 10) The Holy Spirit gives enablement to believers to make them effective servants. What were Christ's gifts to His Church? (Ephesians 4:11)
- 11) Can you describe the nature of the work assigned to these persons? (Ephesians 4:12)
- 12) When we begin to become "full grown" in Christ, what will we supposedly leave behind? (Ephesians 4:13-14)
- 13) What happens to those who are in love with the truth of GOD'S Word? (Ephesians 4:15)
- 14) How can a person effectively contend for the truth? (Ephesians 4:15)
- 15) If the body is to develop properly, what must every part contribute? (Ephesians 4:16)
- 16) In what should a Christian differ from people of the world? (Ephesians 4:17)
- 17) What is naturally expected of unregenerated people? (Ephesians 4:18)
- 18) When people have no capacity for moral or spiritual feeling, to what do they usually give themselves? (Ephesians 4:19)
- 19) What more can a believer do than "learn of Christ"? (Ephesians 4:20)
- 20) What should the wife do for the Lord in this verse? (Ephesians 4:22)
- 21) What should a Christian always be careful to do? (Ephesians 4:25)
- 22) If the devil gains control of us, where does the fault lie? (Ephesians 4:27)
- 23) If we have need of anything, how are we supposed to get it? (Ephesians 4:28)
- 24) What should never pass the lips of a Christian? (Ephesians 4:29)
- 25) If one is truly born of the Spirit, unto what time is his salvation secure? (Ephesians 4:30)
- 26) When occasions of difference occur between us as Christians, what should we ever remember? (Ephesians 4:32)

Ephesians Chapter 5

- 1) What does Paul say that we should be followers of whom in verse one? (Ephesians 5:1)
- 2) In what special respect is the believer expected to show conformity of life with that of God? (Ephesians 5:2)

- 3) Can you list three sins that are not to be named among Christians? (Ephesians 5:3)
- 4) Can you list other things which a Christian should not do? (Ephesians 5:4)
- 5) Who can definitely be considered as outside the Kingdom of Jesus Christ? (Ephesians 5:5)
- 6) What is said of those who are born again? (Ephesians 5:8)
- 7) What is the fruit of the Spirit contrasted with? (Ephesians 5:9)
- 8) What happens when one who is walking in the light is among sinful men? (Ephesians 5:13)
- 9) If men want their lives to count against the darkness of this world, what must they do? (Ephesians 5:14)
- 10) Why is it sinful for a Christians to fool away their time? (Ephesians 5:16)
- 11) What should take up all the Christian's time? (Ephesians 5:17)
- 12) While drunken people often sing their worldly songs, what does the Holy Spirit cause believers to do? (Ephesians 5:19-20)
- 13) What will always be an outstanding characteristic of those who are filled with the Spirit? (Ephesians 5:20)
- 14) Unto whose husbands are wives to be submissive to? (Ephesians 5:22)
- 15) The headship of the man in the family is patterned after that of Christ. In what sense is the husband the head of the woman? (Ephesians 5:23)
- 16) How is the husband to treat his wife? (Ephesians 5:25-28)
- 17) What tremendous obligation is laid upon the husband? (Ephesians 5:25)
- 18) What was He seeking to do for His Church? (Ephesians 5:26)
- 19) Why does the Church, as a body, need cleansing? (Ephesians 5:27)
- 20) How is a man to love his wife? (Ephesians 5:28)
- 21) What does this imply as to a man's actions toward his wife? (Ephesians 5:29)
- 22) In speaking of the relationship of husband and wife, what other relationship did the apostles have in mind? (Ephesians 5:32)

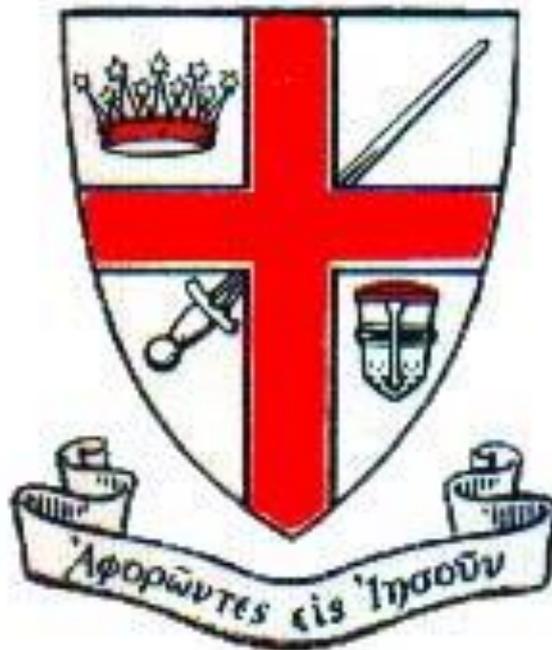
Ephesians Chapter 6

- 1) What is one decree of God for the well-being of the family and society? (Ephesians 6:1)

- 2) In subservience to whom are parents to exert authority in the family? (Ephesians 6:1)
- 3) Can you state the first commandment with a promise attached? (Ephesians 6:2)
- 4) What is the promise in verse three of the book of Ephesians? (Ephesians 6:3)
- 5) What is the father's duty in this verse? (Ephesians 6:4)
- 6) How is the father to bring up his children? (Ephesians 6:4)
- 7) How could even the duties of a slave be sanctified? (Ephesians 6:5)
- 8) What did the apostle think about a Christian working hard just when the employer is looking? (Ephesians 6:6)
- 9) What is the way to serve even the hardest employer with good will? (Ephesians 6:7)
- 10) Under what obligation does God put the employer? (Ephesians 6:9)
- 11) What should every employer bear in mind? (Ephesians 6:9)
- 12) In facing evil powers, what must take the place of natural wisdom and courage? (Ephesians 6:10)
- 13) What must every Christian have to be victorious? (Ephesians 6:11)
- 14) Can you state the eminent peril of every believer? (Ephesians 6:12)
- 15) Who will provide this armour in verse eleven? (Ephesians 6:11)
- 16) Why is a whole armour needed in this verse? (Ephesians 6:13)
- 17) What must be done in addition to "withstanding" in this evil day? (Ephesians 6:13)
- 18) Can you name two parts of the armour that are given? (Ephesians 6:14)
- 19) What relationship is there between the girdle and Christ? (Ephesians 6:14)
- 20) What is the Christian's breastplate made of? (Ephesians 6:14)
- 21) What does the Christian need to give him firm spiritual footing? (Ephesians 6:15)
- 22) What does the shield represent? (Ephesians 6:16)
- 23) By faith, what is he able to do? (Ephesians 6:16)
- 24) Which is the great offensive weapon? (Ephesians 6:17)
- 25) At what special time may this praying be directed to the throne of God? (Ephesians 6:18)

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