

# INTRODUCTION AND EPHESIANS

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# Introduction

## *I. Authorship*

A. The letter was written by the Apostle Paul. That is declared in 1:1 and 3:1, and the early church accepted it as an authentic letter of Paul. Irenaeus referred to it that way, as did Clement of Alexandria and Tertullian, and the second-century document known as the Muratorian Canon listed it as one of Paul's letters.<sup>1</sup> S. M. Baugh states that before the seventeenth century "there had never been any question about Pauline authorship or the canonical identity of this epistle, including its acceptance in the early church among even the earliest apostolic fathers."<sup>2</sup>

B. The skepticism about Paul's authorship that was first raised by a few isolated individuals in the seventeenth century became more widespread in the mid-nineteenth century. Quite a few modern scholars deny that Paul was the author, but their reasons for doing so do not stand up to scrutiny. The vast majority of evangelical scholars who have published on the subject are convinced of Pauline authorship.<sup>3</sup>

C. The most complete recent defenses of Pauline authorship are in the commentaries by Markus Barth, Peter O'Brien, Harold Hoehner, and William Klein.<sup>4</sup> For additional substantive defenses of his authorship, see the commentaries by Klyne Snodgrass and Clinton Arnold<sup>5</sup> and the New Testament introductions by Donald Guthrie, by D. A. Carson and Douglas Moo, and by Andreas Köstenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles L. Quarles.<sup>6</sup> If you want the details of the debate, check those resources. I simply will say, in the words of Arnold, "In summary, there are many good reasons to stand with the testimony of the church over the first 1700 years and affirm Pauline authorship of Ephesians."<sup>7</sup>

## *II. Paul's Situation*

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<sup>1</sup> For specific references, see Barry Smith, [The Letter to the Ephesians](#), retrieved on 3/11/19.

<sup>2</sup> S. M. Baugh, *Ephesians*, EEC (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), 1.

<sup>3</sup> Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 46.

<sup>4</sup> Markus Barth in *Ephesians 1 – 3*, AB (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974), 36-50; Peter O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 4-47; Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 2-61; William W. Klein, "Ephesians" in Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, eds., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 21-33.

<sup>5</sup> Klyne Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 23-29; Arnold, 46-50.

<sup>6</sup> Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, rev. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 496-528; D. A. Carson and Douglas Moo in *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 480-486; Andreas Köstenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles L. Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2009), 580-585.

<sup>7</sup> Arnold, 50.

A. Paul tells us that he is in prison (3:1, 4:1, 6:20), which probably refers to his first Roman imprisonment.

1. I say the site of his imprisonment probably is Rome because only three cities are identified in the New Testament as places where Paul was imprisoned: Philippi (Acts 16:23-40), Caesarea (Acts 21:33-26:32), and Rome (Acts 28:16-31). It seems from Paul's letters that he was incarcerated at other times (Rom. 16:7; 1 Cor. 11:23; 2 Cor. 1:8-11), but nothing is said of the location or duration of those imprisonments. Some claim he was imprisoned in Ephesus, but that seems unlikely as there is no mention of it and Paul in Acts 20:31 gives the impression he ministered there continuously. Given that he was in jail in Philippi for only one night, the known candidates for his imprisonment when he wrote Ephesians are Caesarea and Rome.

2. Ephesians has a number of similarities with Colossians, and both Ephesians and Colossians were delivered by Tychichus (Eph. 6:21; Col. 4:7). That suggests that Ephesians and Colossians were written around the same time. And Colossians also has definite affinities with the letter of Philemon, which suggests that it too was written around the same time.

3. It is likely that Colossians and Philemon were written in Rome because it is more likely that a runaway slave (Onesimus) would choose the huge city of Rome over Caesarea as a city in which to hide, and unlike his imprisonment in Rome, there is no indication that Paul's imprisonment in Caesarea was one that allowed visitors like Onesimus. Also, when Paul wrote Philemon he expected to be released in the near future (v. 22), but that was not the case when he was imprisoned in Caesarea. Paul knew there that his only hope was to appeal to Caesar. Many scholars therefore agree that Rome is likely the place where Colossians and Philemon were written (e.g., F. F. Bruce, Peter O'Brien, Markus Barth and Helmut Blanke, Donald Guthrie, and D. A. Carson and Douglas Moo).

4. Since it is likely that Colossians and Philemon were written in Rome, and Ephesians is from the same time period, it also is likely that Ephesians was written in Rome. That is the dominant view of those who accept that Paul wrote the letter.

B. Luke says of Paul's imprisonment in Rome (Acts 28:16) that he was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier who guarded him.

1. This indicates that Paul "was able to occupy private lodgings in Rome,"<sup>8</sup> a conclusion that is confirmed in Acts 28:30, which says Paul stayed there two whole years "in his own rented quarters."<sup>9</sup> Those quarters were large enough to fit "the local leaders of the Jews" (Acts 28:17) and even greater numbers (Acts 28:23), and Paul was able to encourage and receive visitors (Acts 28:17, 23, 30).<sup>10</sup> It may well be, as Brian

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<sup>8</sup> Brian Rapske, *The Book of Acts and Paul in Roman Custody* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 177.

<sup>9</sup> This rendering is better than "at his own expense." See Rapske, 179-180; NAS, NASU, NET, and similarly, KJV, ERV, ASV, NKJV, NIV, CSB.

<sup>10</sup> Rapske, 181.

Rapske has argued, that the reason for Paul's loose custody in Rome was that the trial documents revealed the case against this Roman citizen was weak and inconsistent in terms of any Roman charges.<sup>11</sup>

2. Paul notes in Acts 28:20 that he is wearing a chain, and the term he uses (*halusis*) makes clear he is referring to a literal chain.<sup>12</sup> Rapske states, "Security against escape in light custody conditions usually called for a chain, which in keeping with the pattern, would bind the prisoner by the wrist to his soldier or guard."<sup>13</sup>

3. As for the nature of Paul's "own rented quarters," he almost certainly could not have afforded a private house in Rome, even with financial assistance from others, as the prices were exorbitant.<sup>14</sup> It seems most likely that "he lived in an apartment in one of the thousands of tenement buildings in Rome."<sup>15</sup> Rapske comments

Unlike life in the cubbyhole environment of most rooms in boarding houses, such accommodation would have given relatively more space to a prisoner occupant. It is hard to conceive of Paul as confined at night to a tiny room with a soldier-guard, or sitting by day entertaining visitors in the prurient environment of a restaurant [as would be the only option in a boarding house]. Much more convincing is the picture of Paul shut up with his guard in an apartment at night and, during the day, able to divide his time between his rooms and the precincts of his tenement – perhaps wandering about the courtyard if such was a part of his dwelling. . . . If Paul's quarters were of too modest a size to accommodate such numbers of visitors as Acts would seem to imply, perhaps the atrium – of course again, if such existed in his building – could have been used without great disturbance to the other tenants.<sup>16</sup>

### *III. Date*

On the conclusion Ephesians was written during Paul's first Roman imprisonment, the date would be around A.D. 61.

### *IV. Geographical Destination*

A. This is a perplexing issue because of the following facts.

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<sup>11</sup> Rapske, 191.

<sup>12</sup> Rapske, 310.

<sup>13</sup> Rapske, 181.

<sup>14</sup> Rapske, 236-237.

<sup>15</sup> Rapske, 238.

<sup>16</sup> Rapske, 238-239.

1. The words "in Ephesus" in 1:1 are not present in manuscripts that generally are regarded as the most reliable. Specifically, they are not present in P<sup>46</sup> (Chester Beatty Papyrus II), which is the oldest manuscript of Ephesians dating to around A.D. 200, in Codex Sinaiticus, or in Codex Vaticanus, the latter two being great Bible manuscripts of the fourth century. In addition, it seems the text of the letter that was known to Tertullian around A.D. 200, to Origen in the first half of the third century, and to Basil of Caesarea in the fourth century did not contain "in Ephesus" in 1:1. That is why the phrase is put in brackets in the standard Greek New Testament (Nestle-Aland 28<sup>th</sup> revised edition). Philip Comfort says one "can be confident" that "in Ephesus" was not the original text, and Paul Wegner says, "there is good evidence that this phrase should be omitted."<sup>17</sup>

2. The letter seems too impersonal to have been sent to the church in Ephesus, given how much time Paul had spent there. Parts of the letter suggest that Paul did not know the readers personally (1:15, 3:2, 4:21), which is not true of the Ephesians.

3. On the other hand, the participial expression (*tois ousin*) in 1:1 is followed by a place name when used in prescripts of other Pauline letters (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1; Phil. 1:1), a diverse group of later manuscripts include "in Ephesus," no manuscript has a place name other than "in Ephesus," and even the oldest manuscript (P<sup>46</sup>) that lacks "in Ephesus" in 1:1 has the title or superscription "To [the] Ephesians."

B. As Carson and Moo state:

In the end we must probably conclude that we do not know for sure for whom the letter was originally intended. The evidence of the great mass of the manuscripts and the improbabilities of the other views may drive us back to the view that it was meant for the church at Ephesus. If we feel that the absence of characteristic Pauline expressions of warmth (that would be expected in a letter to a church where he had spent as much time as he did at Ephesus) and of references to concrete situations are significant, then we will probably think of some form of circular letter. But we are left with difficulties whatever view we adopt.<sup>18</sup>

C. I am inclined to think the phrase "in Ephesus" was not in the letter originally. Its absence leaves one with a translation something like, "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who also are [called] believers in Christ Jesus." This is a bit awkward but not impossible.

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<sup>17</sup> Philip W. Comfort, *New Testament Text and Translation Commentary* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2008), 578; Paul D. Wegner, *Textual Criticism of the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 249. Recent defenses of "in Ephesus" being original include Hoehner, 78-79, 144-148; Arnold, 23-29; Baugh, 51-54.

<sup>18</sup> Carson and Moo, 490.

1. My guess is that this letter was intended for a group of churches in Asia Minor, which accounts for it being the most general and least situational of Paul's letters, but was first brought to the church in Ephesus. Copies were taken to other churches from Ephesus, and the association of the letter with Ephesus got set fairly early, as indicated by "To [the] Ephesians" being in the title of P<sup>46</sup>, which lacks "in Ephesus" in 1:1.

2. It is possible that the circular letter we know as Ephesians is the letter Paul refers to in Col. 4:16 as the letter the Colossian were to read "*from* Laodicea." Paul may have anticipated or instructed Tychichus to circulate Ephesians by carrying a copy from Ephesus, where Tychichus would first arrive when coming from Rome, along the same route reflected in the order of the churches in Rev. 1:11 (Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea). Colossae (also spelled Colosse) was just southeast of Laodicea. In that scenario, Tychichus would come to Colossae from Laodicea bringing the letters specifically to the Colossians and to Philemon and the circular letter we know as Ephesians. That, of course, is speculation.

3. At some point, the letter's association with Ephesus found its way into the text of 1:1, the participial phrase *tois ousin* making it easy to believe "in Ephesus" mistakenly had been dropped by a copyist. The addition of "in Ephesus" in 1:1 leaves one with a translation like, "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus, [the] faithful in Christ Jesus."

D. Whatever their specific locale(s), it is clear that the audience is comprised predominantly of Gentile Christians. Their ethnic background is shown by the way they are addressed in 2:11 and 3:1, by the depiction of their past as religiously deprived in comparison with that of Israel (2:11-13), and by reference to their past Gentile lifestyle (4:17).

## V. Purpose

A. As noted above, Ephesians was not sent to deal with a specific situation in a particular congregation. It has a wider initial audience and thus has a more general purpose, but there is disagreement among scholars as to what that purpose is.

B. I think there is something to Peter O'Brien's assessment of the matter:

Having addressed a specific problem in Colossians, Paul has remodeled his letter for a more general Christian readership. He writes Ephesians to his mainly Gentile readers, for whom he has apostolic responsibilities, with the intention of informing, strengthening, and encouraging them by assuring them of their place within the gracious, saving purpose of God, and urging them to bring their lives into conformity with this divine plan of summing up all things in Christ (1:10). Paul wants to 'ground, shape

and challenge' his readers in their faith. In other words, the main purpose of his letter is '*identity formation*'.<sup>19</sup>

## The Letter

### *I. Prescript (1:1-2)*

*Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who also are [called] believers in Christ Jesus: <sup>2</sup>Grace to you and peace from God our Father and [the] Lord Jesus Christ.*

A. Paul identifies himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ, meaning one who was called and sent by the Lord Jesus. He is a fully authorized messenger on Christ's behalf. And his apostleship was "by the will of God," not by personal ambition or human appointment. He is God's chosen instrument for ministering to mankind, especially the Gentiles.

B. He is writing to the "saints," which is more literally translated "holy ones" or "sanctified ones," meaning those set apart for God. It is Paul's regular description of Christians (Rom. 1:1; 1 Cor. 1:1-2; 2 Cor. 1:1; Phil. 1:1). It does not refer to some super-holy subset of the community of faith. In my translation of the text (without "in Ephesus"), that is specified: the saints are those who believe in Christ Jesus.

C. Paul desires for them continuing "grace and peace" from God the Father and the Lord Jesus. Grace refers to the unmerited favor that God lavishes on us in many different ways. Peace with God and each other is ours through Christ.

### *II. Praise to God for his work in Christ (1:3-14)*

*<sup>3</sup>Blessed [is] the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms in Christ, <sup>4</sup>inasmuch as he chose us in him before [the] foundation of [the] world that we might be holy and blameless before him, in love <sup>5</sup>having predestined us for adoption as sons for himself through Jesus Christ, in accordance with the good pleasure of his will, <sup>6</sup>to the praise of [the] glory of his grace with which he highly favored us in the Beloved. <sup>7</sup>In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of transgressions, according to the riches of his grace <sup>8</sup>which he lavished on us, with all wisdom and insight, <sup>9</sup>having made known to us the mystery of his will, in accordance with his good pleasure which he purposed in him, <sup>10</sup>for [the] administration of the fullness of the times, [namely] to bring all things together in Christ, the things in the heavens and the things on the earth [brought together] in him. <sup>11</sup>In him we were also allotted an inheritance, having been predestined according to [the] plan of him who works*

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<sup>19</sup> O'Brien, 57.

out all things according to the purpose of his will, <sup>12</sup>in order that we, who have hoped beforehand in the Christ, might be for [the] praise of his glory. <sup>13</sup>In him you also, having heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and having believed in him, were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, <sup>14</sup>who is a down payment of our inheritance, [vouching] for [the] redemption of [God's] possession, to [the] praise of his glory.

A. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is also our Father (1:2), is said to be "blessed" (1:3a). The adjective that is used (*eulogētos*) can have the sense of being praised and the sense of being given benefits and good things by a benefactor. We often translate it "praised" when it describes God to make clear it means that he is worshiped. I opted for "Blessed" to maintain the connection with the other uses of the same root (*blessed* us with every spiritual *blessing*).

B. This Great One who is praised because he is praiseworthy is then described as the one who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms in Christ (1:3b). He has blessed those in Christ, meaning he has bestowed on us various good things and benefits, and those good things and benefits are identified by the phrase "every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms."

1. They are "spiritual blessings" because, as Paul makes clear in vv. 4-14, they flow from the redemptive work of Christ. They are "S/spiritual" because it is the Spirit of God who makes them a reality in people's lives by impressing Christ's work on their hearts and lives.

a. As Andrew Lincoln states, "The blessing consists of God's saving activity in Christ and this fullness of divine blessing can be described as 'spiritual,' not because it belongs to a person's inner, hidden life but because it is bound up with the Holy Spirit."<sup>20</sup> Gordon Fee writes:

As elsewhere, *pneumatikos* is an adjective for the Spirit, that is, "pertaining to or belonging to the Spirit"; thus "*pneumatikos* blessings" mean "Spirit blessings, blessings that pertain to the Spirit." . . . [T]his is Paul's way of expressing in a condensed form what he spells out further in this letter and everywhere else – that the Spirit is the present means whereby God appropriates to the believing community the "blessings" that flow from the redemptive work of Christ.<sup>21</sup>

b. To avoid confusion on this point, S. M. Baugh renders the phrase "with every blessing of the Spirit." He defends that rendering by explaining that "Spiritual is frequently used in the present culture to refer to someone or something with any sort of religious sense, but for Paul it most often points to something related to the Holy Spirit."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Andrew Lincoln, *Ephesians*, WBC (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 19; see also, O'Brien, 95-96; Ernest Best, *Ephesians*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 113-114.

<sup>21</sup> Gordon Fee, *God's Empowering Presence* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 666-667.

<sup>22</sup> Baugh, 73 (see fn. 17).



2. In what sense are these Spirit-related blessings that God has provided to those in Christ "in the heavenly realms"? How are they already provided to us yet in the heavenly realms?

a. I suggest to you that Christians have *now* been blessed with a *foretaste* of things that will be fully realized only at the consummation that will occur in conjunction with Christ's return. At that time, heaven – what Paul in this instance means by "the heavenly realms," the place to which Christ was raised and seated at God's right hand (1:20-21) – will be brought to earth as depicted in Rev. 21:1-4, the effect of which will be the "heavenization" of creation, which includes our complete sanctification. That is when creation gets the ultimate makeover, and that is when the down-payment we experience now as Christians will be paid in full.

b. So the blessings we already have in Christ are in the heavenly realms in the sense our full experience of them awaits the final transforming merger of heaven and creation. It parallels Peter's statement in 1 Pet. 1:4 that an imperishable, undefiled, and unfading inheritance is *kept for us in heaven*. Elsewhere Scripture speaks of heaven as the place of our reward (Mat. 5:11-12), our treasure (Mat. 6:19-21; 19:21), our inheritance (1 Pet 1: 4-5), the place where our hope is laid up (Col 1: 5), and the place of the eternal "house" with which we long to be clothed (2 Cor. 5:1-2). The fullness of our blessings is now kept in the security of heaven to be received by us here on that great future day. As N. T. Wright explains:

[H]eaven is the place where God's purposes for the future are stored up. It isn't where they are meant to stay so that one would need to go to heaven to enjoy them; it is where they are kept safe against the day when they will become a reality on earth. If I say to a friend, "I've kept some beer in the fridge for you," that doesn't mean he has to climb into the fridge in order to drink the beer. God's future inheritance, the incorruptible new world and the new bodies that are to inhabit that world, are already kept safe, waiting for us, not so that we can go to heaven and put them on there but so that they can be brought to birth in this world or rather in the new heavens and new earth, the renewed world of which I spoke earlier.<sup>23</sup>

c. William Klein puts the idea this way regarding the phrase in question in Eph. 1:3:

Paul's reference ["in the heavenly realms"] is more likely soteriological and eschatological. Though believers are not yet literally resurrected and seated with Christ (1:20; 2:6), the spiritual transaction that will eventuate in these realities has occurred. Through what Christ accomplished in his resurrection and exaltation, the "age to come" has overlapped the present so that those "in Christ" in this age experience the spiritual benefits that will be consummated in the next age.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> N. T. Wright, *Surprised By Hope* (New York: Harper, 2008), 151-152.

<sup>24</sup> Klein, 48.

d. This "already / not yet" aspect to the blessings we have been given in Christ is evident elsewhere in Ephesians. For example, Paul says in 1:5 that God predestined those in Christ for adoption as his sons. There is a sense in which we already have been adopted as sons of God (e.g., Rom. 8:14-15; Gal. 3:26), but there is a fuller sense in which our adoption as sons awaits the resurrection of our bodies at Christ's return (Rom. 8:23, 8:11). He says in 1:7 (and Rom. 3:24 and Col. 1:14) that Christians presently have redemption, but 1:14 and 4:30 make clear that redemption in its fullest sense is still future (see also Rom. 8:23). Peter O'Brien comments on 1:14, "Redemption, which is a present 'spiritual blessing' at 1:7, here signifies the final deliverance (cf. 4:30), when God takes full and complete possession of those who are already his."<sup>25</sup>

### Excursus on Inaugurated Eschatology<sup>26</sup>

As I have said many times, this concept of the "already / not yet," sometimes called "inaugurated eschatology," is a fundamental perspective of the New Testament. Thomas Schreiner writes:

We have seen in this book that the already-not yet pervades the NT and is crucial for understanding NT theology. God's promises have been fulfilled with the coming of Jesus Christ, in his ministry, death, and resurrection. The resurrection of Jesus Christ and the pouring out of the Spirit signal the arrival of the age to come. Even though the new creation, the new exodus, and the coming age have arrived, they have not been consummated. Death has not yet been extinguished as the last enemy. Satan still afflicts the people of God and suffering still characterizes the existence of God's people. Not only so, but Christians still struggle against sin and are not yet free from it entirely. Indeed, the old creation persists, so that it too groans as it awaits liberation from the tentacles of sin and death (Rom. 8:18-25). Hence, the final fulfillment of God's promises is essential so that the universe will reach its intended goal. The in-between times will end, and the glory of God as Father, Son, and Spirit will shine forever.<sup>27</sup>

Gordon Fee similarly comments:

The absolutely essential framework of the self-understanding of primitive Christianity . . . is an eschatological one. Christians had come to believe that, in the event of Christ, the new (coming) age had dawned, and that, especially through Christ's death and resurrection and the subsequent gift of the Spirit, God had set the future in motion, to be consummated by yet another coming

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<sup>25</sup> O'Brien, 122.

<sup>26</sup> For further discussion, see pp. 4-18 of my paper "[The Parables of Jesus](#)."

<sup>27</sup> Thomas Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 802.

(*Parousia*) of Christ. Theirs was therefore an essentially eschatological existence. They lived "between the times" of the beginning and the consummation of the end. Already God had secured their . . . salvation; already they were people of the future, living the life of the future in the present age – and enjoying its benefits. But they still awaited the glorious consummation of this salvation. Thus they lived in an essential tension between the "already" and the "not-yet."<sup>28</sup>

Michael Bird puts it this way:

Fundamental to Paul's theology is that the future age (the eschaton) has already broken in and has been *inaugurated* through the life, death and resurrection of the Son of God. . . .

The coming of Jesus has inaugurated a new era of redemptive history and God's new age has been launched upon the world, something like a covert operation seizing key nodes along the rear echelons of an opposing force. Those people who confess faith in the Messiah and experience the transforming power of the Spirit of God are living billboards in our global metropolis advertising God's activity in the world and pointing to things soon to come. At the same time, the old age continues, death and evil are realities that need to be confronted and endured, but their power has been broken in principle and even in practice. What is more, the day is coming when God will finally do away with them and the old age will be no more. On that day God will be 'all in all' (1 Cor. 15:28).<sup>29</sup>

Texts in addition to the parables that indicate the kingdom of God is a *present reality* between the first and second comings of Jesus Christ include Lk. 17:21b ("the kingdom of God is among you" or "in your midst"), Rom. 14:17 (Paul no doubt considered the named aspects of the kingdom as being present), 1 Cor. 4:20 ("kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power"), Col. 1:13 (God "has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son"), Heb. 12:28 ("let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken"), Rev. 1:9 ("your brother and partner in the . . . kingdom"), and Rev. 5:10 ("you have made them a kingdom").

Texts in addition to the parables that indicate the kingdom of God is a *future hope* include Mat. 7:21-23 (kingdom entered at the judgment), Mat. 25:34 (Jesus says at judgment, "inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world"), Mk. 14:25 and parallels ("I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it anew in the kingdom of God"), Gal. 5:21b (also 1 Cor. 6:9-10, 15:50, and Eph. 5:5 – kingdom is something to be inherited), 2 Tim. 4:1 (kingdom connected with Jesus' appearing in judgment), and 2 Pet. 1:11 (entrance into eternal kingdom is future).

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<sup>28</sup> Gordon Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988), 19.

<sup>29</sup> Michael Bird, *Introducing Paul* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 114, 116.

This same "now and not yet" aspect characterizes other kingdom-related concepts:

- Eternal life – **now** (Jn. 5:24, 6:47; 1 Jn. 5:11, 5:13); **still to come** (Mat. 19:29, 25:46; Mk. 10:30, Lk. 18:30, Rom. 6:22; Gal. 6:8; Tit. 3:7; Jude 21)
- End of the ages – **now** (1 Cor. 10:11; Heb. 9:26); **still to come** (Mat. 13:39-40, 13:49-50, 28:20; Mk. 10:30; Lk. 18:30; 1 Cor. 2:6; Gal. 1:4; Eph. 1:21, 2:7, 5:16; Heb. 6:5)
- Redemption – **now** (Rom. 3:24; 1 Cor. 1:30; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14); **still to come** (Lk. 21:28; Rom. 8:23; Eph. 4:30)
- Salvation – **now** (Rom. 8:24; Eph. 2:5, 2:8; 2 Tim. 1:9; Tit. 3:4-5; 1 Pet. 3:21; Jude 3); **still to come** (Acts 15:11; Rom. 5:9-10, 13:11; 1 Cor. 3:15; 1 Thess. 5:9; Heb. 1:14, 9:28; 1 Pet. 1:5)
- Adoption – **now** (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 3:26, 4:6; Heb. 12:7-8); **still to come** (Lk. 20:36; Rom. 8:23)
- Death's defeat – **now** (2 Tim. 1:10); **still to come** (1 Cor. 15:26)
- New creation – **now** (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15); **still to come** (Rom. 8:19-23; Eph. 1:10; Rev. 21:1-4)

### C. Specifying the blessings

1. Before the creation of the world, God chose those in Christ, those he foresaw would believe in Christ of their own free will, to enjoy the benefits of salvation, one of which is to be holy and blameless before him (1:4). It is those "in Christ" who are destined for blessings, and one enters into (and remains in) Christ on the basis of faith.

a. Calvinists, of course, see this differently. They believe that God in eternity chose certain individuals for salvation *unconditionally*. Rather than choosing for the blessings of salvation those he foresaw would meet the condition of faith, God in eternity determined which individuals would believe and thus be saved. He then, in conformity with that choice, *irresistibly* caused those individuals to believe. All those who were not chosen to believe were doomed to damnation; it is *not possible* for them to be saved because God has chosen not to create faith in them.

b. This debate has gone on for centuries and is a much larger topic than can be addressed here. Let me just say that many devout, intelligent, and highly educated people are Calvinists. I think part of what drives them to their conclusion is the notion that salvation becomes a human accomplishment unless one's faith is fully determined by God. They reason that if we are free (in a libertarian, noncompatibilist sense)<sup>30</sup> to choose to believe in Christ, then salvation rests upon our good work of believing.

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<sup>30</sup> Calvinists believe in a "free" will that is compatible with determination (and thus is called compatibilist free will). They believe that God determines what one will choose so as to render it impossible for one to choose otherwise but that he does so by making one want that choice. Roger Olson writes in *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 75:

In compatibilist free will, persons are free so long as they do what they want to do – even if God is determining their desires. This is why Calvinists can affirm that people sin voluntarily and are therefore responsible for their sins even though they could not do otherwise. According to Calvinism God foreordained the Fall of Adam and Eve, and rendered it certain (even if only by

As Jerry Walls and Joseph Dongell put it, "If faith is viewed as *our part* in the process of salvation, then salvation must be viewed as a cooperative affair, and we should then describe ourselves as *self-saviors* in part."<sup>31</sup>

c. I think this Calvinist fear rests on an improper understanding of faith. As Walls and Dongell explain:

The Bible itself does not describe faith as a work that accomplishes a task, or as a deed that establishes merit, or as a lever that forces God to act. Instead, we find that genuine faith is something quite different. As Paul's treatment of Abraham shows, the patriarch's faith had no power over God, earned no merit before God and stood as the polar opposite to honorific deeds. Abraham believed God, and righteousness was "credited" to him, not paid to him. God alone justified Abraham freely on the basis of Abraham's faith (Rom. 4:1-6). Since by *its very nature* faith confesses the complete lack of human merit and human power, it subtracts nothing from the Savior's grace or glory. By its very nature, faith points away from all human status and looks to God alone for rescue and restoration.<sup>32</sup>

d. Roger Olson uses the illustration of a rich man giving money to a starving beggar that he might keep himself and his family alive. He imagines that the rich man bestowed the gift in the form of a check, which needed only to be endorsed and deposited in the poor man's bank account. He asks, "What if someone claimed that the act of endorsing the check and depositing it was the decisive factor in the poor man's family's survival? Surely even the Calvinist must see that no reasonable person would say that."<sup>33</sup>

e. What ultimately is at stake in this disagreement is the character of God. If God determines human decisions and actions in a way that makes it impossible for a person to decide or act contrary to that determination, then God necessarily is the author of sin and evil, which strains to the breaking point the claim that he is wholly good. Arminianism, which takes its name from Jacob (or James) Arminius, a Dutch theologian of the late 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, does not begin with free will; rather, its notion of free will flows from the biblical portrait of God as unconditionally and unequivocally good.

f. For a more detailed study of election, see Robert Shank, *Elect in the Son* (Springfield, MO: Westcott Publishers, 1970); William G. MacDonald, "The Biblical Doctrine of Election" in Clark H. Pinnock, ed., *The Grace of God and the Will of Man* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 1989) 207-229; Everett Ferguson, *The Church of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 78-90; Robert E. Picirilli, *Grace, Faith, Free*

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an efficacious permission) by withdrawing the grace necessary to keep them from sinning. And yet they sinned voluntarily. They did what they wanted to do even if they were unable to do otherwise. This is a typical Calvinist account of free will.

<sup>31</sup> Jerry Walls and Joseph Dongell, *Why I Am Not a Calvinist* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 77.

<sup>32</sup> Walls and Dongell, 78.

<sup>33</sup> See Roger E. Olson, *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 166.

*Will* (Nashville: Randall House, 2002); Jack Cottrell, *The Faith Once for All* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 2002) 388-399; Jerry L. Walls and Joseph R. Dongell, *Why I Am Not a Calvinist* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004); Roger E. Olson, *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006); Roger E. Olson, *Against Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011); William W. Klein, *The New Chosen People: A Corporate View of Election*, rev. ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015); A. Chadwick Thornhill, *The Chosen People: Election, Paul, and Second Temple Judaism* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015); Jerry L. Walls, *Does God Love Everyone? The Heart of What's Wrong with Calvinism* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2016); Robert E. Picirilli, *Free Will Revisited* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2017). For a good analysis of Calvinism in an online lecture, see Jerry Walls's [What's Wrong with Calvinism, Part 1](#).

2. The church, the body of believers, was chosen by God in eternity to be holy and blameless before him. We are now without fault or blemish, not in ourselves but because God in his grace has made us that way, and we will be declared as such when we are presented before him for judgment (Col. 1:22; Eph. 5:27). Of course, God desires that we live up to that calling, that we be in practice what we are through his grace, and on that Day the transformation into the image of Jesus that we now are experiencing (2 Cor. 3:18) will be completed; we will be like him (1 Jn. 3:2).

3. In love<sup>34</sup> God predestined those in Christ for adoption as his own sons (1:5a). God has chosen us to be his children; we are family! Parents, you know the difference between the child down the street you may love and the child who is your own son or daughter. You are bonded and committed to your own child in a unique way. Our marvelous God has chosen to be bonded and committed to us in an analogous way.

4. This predestining was all done in accordance with the good pleasure of his will (1:5b), meaning he freely purposed this familial relationship to his delight. The proper and intended result of which is that he be praised for the glorious grace with which he highly favored us in Christ (1:6).

5. In Christ we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of transgressions (1:7a-b). In accordance with the riches of God's grace which he lavished on us (1:7c – 8a), we have been delivered from his just judgment on our sins through the sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross.

6. The riches of grace that God lavished on us include all wisdom and insight (1:8b).<sup>35</sup> These were given in his making known to us the mystery of his will for the

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<sup>34</sup> With RSV, NIV, NAU, ESV, TNIV, Ernest Best, and John Muddiman, *The Epistle to the Ephesians*, BNTC (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2001), I take "in love" with what follows rather than with what precedes.

<sup>35</sup> See O'Brien, 107-108; Klein, 51. According to Thielman, "Most interpreters take the next phrase, *en pasē sophia kai phronēsei* (in all wisdom and understanding), as a further description of what God lavishes on his people." Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 61.

administration of the fullness of the times (1:9a, 10a),<sup>36</sup> which is to bring all things together in Christ, the things in the heavens and the things on the earth [brought together] in him (1:10b).

a. God, in accordance with what he was pleased to purpose in Christ (v. 9b), made known through the inspired teaching of the apostles and prophets the mystery of his will for the handling of the end of history, for the management of the completion of the ages, the content of which is to unify heaven and earth in Christ.

b. O'Brien writes: "The aorist infinitive 'to bring all things into unity' points not to the past, but signifies purpose: the summing up of all things is the goal to be achieved. This is not to suggest that the implementation of the divine plan is not already under way. . . . But the summing up awaits the consummation which will occur at the end."<sup>37</sup>

c. Max Turner comments:

The mystery God has made known to us is the central implication of what he 'set forth in Christ' . . . that is, in his ministry, death and resurrection-glorification. . . . The content of the mystery is God's intent 'that the universe, everything in heaven and on earth, might be brought into unity in Christ' . . . Essentially then, God's 'blessworthiness' is affirmed on the grounds that he has shown us in Christ and in the church the beginnings of his master-plan to restore the cosmos to himself, and to the harmony lost through rebellion and consequent alienation.<sup>38</sup>

d. As I indicated earlier, the eternal state, which will come about in conjunction with Christ's return, will be a redeemed and transformed creation, a "heavenized" creation from which sin and all its consequences have been expunged.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> I am swimming against a strong tide of commentators in connecting v. 10a to v. 9a. Best, for example, writes (p. 137), "Since [v. 10a] does not reveal the content of what God makes known it cannot depend on v. 9a." It seems to me, however, that v. 10a explains that the mystery in question pertains to God's will "for the administration of the fullness of the times," the content of which is specified in v. 10b. Perhaps I can claim Max Turner as an ally, but his exposition is not detailed enough to make that clear. In any event, I don't believe the difference affects the overall meaning of the passage.

<sup>37</sup> O'Brien, 114.

<sup>38</sup> Max Turner, "Ephesians" in G. J. Wenham and others, eds., *New Bible Commentary*, 21<sup>st</sup> Century ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 1226.

<sup>39</sup> There is a debate over whether the present earth will go out of existence and be replaced with a completely new earth or whether the present earth will continue in existence in a radically transformed state. I believe the entire creation is going to be renewed or redeemed (see Rom. 8:18-25). It will be radically altered but it will still in some sense be "this creation" that comes out on the other side of that transforming process. I think Grudem has it right when he states in *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 1160-1161:

The Reformed position seems preferable here, for it is difficult to think that God would entirely annihilate his original creation, thereby seeming to give the devil the last word and scrapping the creation that was originally "very good" (Gen. 1:31). The passages above that speak of shaking and removing the earth and of the first earth passing away may simply refer to its existence in its present form, not its very existence itself, even 2 Peter 3:10, which speaks of the elements dissolving and the

The curse will have been lifted (Rev. 22:3), and creation itself will have been freed from its slavery to decay (Rom. 8:20-21). It is what the Bible calls the new heavens and new earth (2 Pet. 3:13; see also, Isa. 65:17, 66:22; Rev. 21:1-3), the divine utopia in which Christians will dwell forever in resurrection bodies and in which there will be no evil, no death, no mourning, no crying, and no pain (Rev. 21:1-4). And God has revealed that Jesus Christ is the person through whom this all will be accomplished.

e. Andrew Lincoln remarks:

An important part of the eulogy is the middle section which blesses God for revealing that his gracious purpose in history is all-embracing (vv 9, 10). As believers are reminded of the revelation of this mystery, they are brought to realize that the salvation with which they have been blessed centers in the same comprehensive Christ in whom God is working to restore all things. The divine election which has grasped them is shown to be God's decision to sum up all things in Christ. To be in Christ, therefore, is to be part of a program which is as broad as the universe, a movement which is rolling on toward a renewed cosmos where all is in harmony.<sup>40</sup>

f. William Klein states:

Paul envisions that the universe of all things will find its grand, organizing, summarizing principle *in Christ*; he is the end toward which everything moves. In Christ, God achieves his age-long goal of overcoming and eliminating all barriers that separate people from each other and from God. So though Christ has already made the provision for the ultimate realization of God's ultimate triumph, its consummation has not yet arrived.<sup>41</sup>

7. In keeping with God's eternal purpose (1:11b), we who are in Christ were (as God's children) allotted an inheritance<sup>42</sup> in order that we might be to the praise of his glory (1:11a, 12a, 12c).

a. Those in Christ have been allotted an inheritance in the consummated kingdom of God. The new creation will be our home, the true promise land, and we will dwell there forever in perfect fellowship with God and one another. Paul frequently speaks of our kingdom inheritance as something yet future (1 Cor. 6:9-10, 15:50; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 1:14, 5:5; Col. 3:24; 2 Tim. 4:1). References outside of Paul include Mat. 7:21-23, 25:34; Mk. 14:25 (and parallels); 1 Pet. 1:3-4; 2 Pet. 1:11.

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earth and the work on it being burned up, may not be speaking of the earth as a planet but rather the surface things on the earth (that is, much of the ground and the things on the ground).

<sup>40</sup> Lincoln, 43-44.

<sup>41</sup> Klein, 52.

<sup>42</sup> KJV, NAU, NRS, NJB, ESV, and BDAG (p. 549) reflect a similar understanding of *eklērothēmen*.



b. We who have been given this inheritance are to the praise of God's glory because our existence as heirs is a testament to the magnificence of his kindness, mercy, and grace. We have an inheritance because of his glorious purpose.

c. I think Christians<sup>43</sup> are described in v. 12 as those who have hoped *beforehand* in the Christ simply to emphasize what is implicit in hope, namely that it exists prior to its realization.<sup>44</sup> As Paul says in Rom. 8:24, hope that is seen is not hope. Our hope in Christ en route to the consummation, en route to the full realization of our inheritance, itself glorifies God and thus contributes to our being for the praise of his glory.

8. The recipients of the letter, who are in Christ through having believed in him through the preaching of the gospel, were sealed, as were Paul and his companions ("you also"), with the Holy Spirit of promise (1:13).

a. They were stamped with God's identifying mark, sealed in that sense, by the gift of the Spirit. The Spirit is called "the Holy Spirit of promise" because his being given was promised in the O.T. (see Acts 2:17 which takes up the promise of Joel 2:28-32) or because he is the down payment on the promise of future blessings at the consummation, as indicated in v. 14.

b. The Spirit is described as a down payment of our inheritance (1:14). He is a foretaste of the eternal state that serves as a pledge of God's intention to fulfill his promise to redeem his people by taking full and complete possession of them at the consummation. As F. F. Bruce writes, "On the day of the resurrection God will 'redeem' his own possession, and the evidence of his commitment to do so is given in his 'sealing' that possession with the Spirit."<sup>45</sup> Baugh writes: "By being sealed with the Holy Spirit, believers come to possess by faith now the 'down payment of our inheritance' (v. 14), which will be consummated in the future. The inheritance centers on his people's resurrection in the new creation, of which the Spirit is the mediating agent (Rom 1:4; 8:11; cf. 1 Cor 15:35-50)."<sup>46</sup>

(1) The fact Christians have been sealed with the Holy Spirit as a down payment of our inheritance (see also, 2 Cor. 1:22, 5:5; Eph. 4:30) does not eliminate the possibility of apostasy. A down payment is given to assure the *recipient* that the one giving it will fulfill his part of the transaction ("down payment" is a commercial term). It does not guarantee that the "deal" will be completed in the event the recipient defaults.

(2) The point of the sealing and down payment metaphors is to assure the saint that God will be faithful to his promise of redemption and glory, not to suggest that the saint cannot be faithless. It is assumed that the saint, the recipient of

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<sup>43</sup> For arguments against narrowing the scope of "we" in v. 12 to Jews or Jewish Christians, see Hoehner, 231-234; Best, 147; and Lincoln, 36-37.

<sup>44</sup> Some (e.g., Lincoln, 37 and Best, 147) contend that *proelpizein* is essentially a synonym for the simple verb "to hope."

<sup>45</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 266.

<sup>46</sup> Baugh, 100-101.

the down payment, will desire completion of the "transaction" and thus will continue in the faith. That is certainly the norm, but God leaves the saint free to abandon the faith, and the one who does so will forfeit the blessings of being in Christ. That is why Paul warns the Ephesians about being deceived into embracing a lifestyle that would bring them under wrath (Eph. 5:3-7).

c. God's plan for our eternal inheritance and his giving the Spirit as evidence of his commitment to that plan are to the praise of his glory.

### **III. Prayer report and elaboration on it in light of Christ's exaltation (1:15-23)**

*<sup>15</sup>For this reason, I for one,<sup>47</sup> since hearing of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, <sup>16</sup>do not cease giving thanks for you when making mention [of you] in my prayers. <sup>17</sup>[I pray] that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you [the] Spirit of wisdom and revelation regarding knowledge of him, <sup>18</sup>so that you, by the eyes of your heart having been enlightened, may know what is the hope of his calling, what [are] the riches of the glory of his inheritance among the saints, <sup>19</sup>and what [is] the surpassing greatness of his power toward us who believe, [a power] in accordance with the working of his mighty strength <sup>20</sup>which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from [the] dead and seated [him] at his right hand in the heavenly realms, <sup>21</sup>far above every ruler and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the coming one. <sup>22</sup>And he put all things in subjection under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, <sup>23</sup>which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all things in all ways.*

A. Paul tells them that, because they have been included in Christ, with all the blessings that entails (1:13-14), he does not cease giving thanks for them when mentioning them in his prayers (1:15-16).

1. The depth of Paul's gratitude is reflected in the fact he *continues to give thanks* for their inclusion in Christ.

2. He thanks God because he knows that God is responsible for their being Christians. God conceived the plan of blessing, he made it a reality by sending his Son to die on the cross, and he offered them the gift of life through the message of the gospel (e.g., 2 Thess. 2:14) and gave them the freedom to choose it. All they did was to accept God's gracious rescue by responding in penitent faith. Certainly that provides them no basis to take credit for or boast about the rescue. That would be like a man who had been pulled from a well by a rescuer boasting that he aided in his release because he chose to relax and not struggle against the rescuer.

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<sup>47</sup> One of the meanings of *kagō* is "I in particular" (BDAG, 487). A more popular option is to consider the *kai* in *kagō* redundant in this context and simply leave it untranslated.

3. Paul knew of their inclusion in Christ when he heard about their faith *and* their love for all the saints (that is why he has been giving thanks ever since).

a. Love for other Christians is the flip side of love for God. The two go together. As John says in 1 Jn. 4:20 – 5:1:

<sup>20</sup> If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar. For the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen is not able to love God whom he has not seen. <sup>21</sup> And we have this commandment from him: the one who loves God must also love his brother. **5** Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the one who fathers also loves the one fathered of him.

b. Of course, Christians are to love all people, but there is a bond between them that is very special. We have the same Father, Savior, and Spirit. That is why Paul says in Gal. 6:10, "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially those who belong to the family of believers."

#### B. His intercessory prayer for them (1:17-19a)

1. Paul is praying that God may give them the Spirit of wisdom and revelation regarding knowledge of him, so that they, by the eyes of their hearts having been enlightened, may know certain things (1:17-18a), which he then enumerates. With most commentators and with the NIV and ESV, I think the reference here is to the Holy Spirit, in part because it is very difficult to understand the human spirit as a spirit "of revelation." If that is correct, Paul is praying that the Spirit of God who lives in them will impart to them wisdom and revelation concerning God, that he will effectively manifest himself in their lives as the Spirit of wisdom and revelation.

a. Fee writes: "[T]he prayer is not for some further Spirit reception, but for the indwelling Spirit whom they have already received to give them further wisdom and revelation. The emphasis, therefore, is not in receiving the Spirit as such, but on receiving (or perhaps realizing?) the resident Spirit's gifts."<sup>48</sup>

b. Hoehner likewise comments: "Paul is not praying that they be given the Holy Spirit for he has already been imparted to them. Rather, he is praying for a specific manifestation of the Spirit so that the believers will have insight and know something of God's mysteries as a result of the Holy Spirit's revelation."<sup>49</sup>

2. The goal of this enlightening from the Spirit for which he is praying is that they may grasp at a heart level the truths of God specified in 1:18b-19a. He is praying that they may understand more deeply: what is the hope of God's calling (1:18b), what are the riches of the glory of his inheritance among the saints (1:18c), and what is the surpassing greatness of his power toward us who believe (1:19a).

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<sup>48</sup> Fee (1994), 676, fn. 55.

<sup>49</sup> Hoehner, 258; see also, See also, O'Brien, 132; Best, 162-163; Lincoln, 57.

a. The relationship of the three "what is/are" clauses is uncertain. The fact there is no conjunction between the first two clauses is contrary to Greek style if the intent was to provide a list of three parallel items.<sup>50</sup> Though Paul still may have intended the three clauses to be parallel, as most commentators think, I am with Fee (and others) in thinking it is more likely that the second "what is/are" clause is an expansion on the hope that is mentioned in the first clause. In other words, "the first two [clauses] form a pair, which together are paired with the third."<sup>51</sup>

b. Paul wants them to comprehend the glorious hope into which God has brought them by calling them to Christ through the preaching of the gospel. He wants them to understand deeply what is in store for them, what is the content of their hope, which he describes in the next clause as the riches of the glory of his inheritance among the saints. O'Brien states, "This hope to which God has called them is linked with 'the summing up of all things in Christ', which is the final purpose of God's saving activity in his Son (1:10)."<sup>52</sup>

(1) As noted in 1:11a, those in Christ have been allotted an eternal inheritance in the consummated kingdom of God, in the renewed cosmos of perfect love, peace, and harmony that was accomplished through Jesus Christ. See Rev. 21:1-5. He is the one through whom all things are brought together, the things in the heavens and the things on the earth (1:10). We will live forever in the new heavens and new earth in resurrection bodies that are imperishable and immortal (1 Cor. 15:50-57). As Paul writes in Rom. 8:23-24 (ESV): "[W]e ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved."

(2) The inheritance is called "his" (God's) because Paul is emphasizing that God is the one who provided it for us (see, e.g., Num. 27:8-11). It need not refer to an inheritance obtained by God (through full possession of his people).

c. In addition to comprehending the glory of their future, Paul prays that they will grasp at a deeper level God's work in their past and present. He wants them to appreciate in a new way the surpassing greatness of God's power directed toward believers (1:19a), as that power has been exercised on our behalf in rescuing us and exalting us in Christ and as that power is available currently for our living to his glory.

### C. His elaboration on his prayer in light of Christ's exaltation (1:19b-23)

1. That power is in accordance with, is similar or analogous to, the working of his mighty strength which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms (1:19b-20).

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<sup>50</sup> See Fee (1994), 676, fn. 56.

<sup>51</sup> Fee (1994), 677.

<sup>52</sup> O'Brien, 135.

a. God by his power took Jesus from the ignominy of death by crucifixion (crucifixion being the known manner of his death did not need to be specified) and raised him to a position far above every ruler, authority, power, and dominion, and above every name, in both this age and the age to come (1:20-21). God raised him from the lowest depth of human experience to the greatest height imaginable, a position far above every ruling power in heaven or on earth, both good and evil. Now that's power!

b. The supremacy to which Jesus was exalted by God's power is permanent, something that encompasses both the "now and the not yet." O'Brien states: "The distinction between 'this age' and the 'coming age' is drawn from Jewish apocalyptic. With the first coming of the Lord Jesus the new age has already broken in upon the present, so that the two ages now overlap. The age to come has been inaugurated but not yet consummated, and it is in this future sense that Paul refers to it here."<sup>53</sup>

2. God directed analogous power *toward* Christians (NAS, NKJV, NASU, NET, ESV) in that, as he says in 2:1-6, we were dead in transgressions and sins and God made us alive in Christ, raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly realms! And he directs that power toward us not only in our initial deliverance and exaltation but also in the ongoing spiritual warfare that is part of life in this overlap of ages (see 6:10-17).

3. Paul adds (1:22) that the one under whose feet God has subjected all things was given in that position to the church! "Christ's dominion over the cosmos is for the benefit of believers."<sup>54</sup> The church therefore will not be defeated by any power in the sense of God's purpose for it being thwarted. As Jesus told Peter in Mat. 16:18, not even the gates of *Hades*, meaning the gates of the realm of the dead (see NIV note), will prevail against the church. Christians, the church, will not be locked up within the gates of *Hades*. We will be with Jesus at death awaiting resurrection life, and to the extent that blessed state still qualifies as "*Hades*" (Rev. 20:13), we are not staying there.

4. Paul also says (1:23) that the church is the body and fullness of Christ.

a. He is head over all things in terms of authority, but only the church is his body. The church has a unique relationship with the Lord Jesus. It is characterized not only by dependence and subordination on the part of the church but also by a special fondness and concern on the part of the Lord (Eph. 5:29).

b. The glory of the church is expressed in the statement that it is the fullness of Christ, meaning it is that which is filled with and by Christ (fullness given a passive sense). It is the community which he fills supremely with his presence and dynamic rule. It is true that Christ fills the cosmos in every way in the sense that, as God is said to "fill the heaven and earth," he pervades all things with his sovereign rule as he directs them to their divinely appointed goal. But he fills the church in a special sense with his Spirit, grace, and gifts, so that only the church *is* his fullness.

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<sup>53</sup> O'Brien, 143.

<sup>54</sup> O'Brien, 145.

D. Paul wants their hearts to be enlightened regarding these matters because he knows it will strengthen them for life today. Knowing at a heart level what ultimately is in store for us as Christians and truly appreciating the power of God that has worked in our lives and that is available to us now invigorates us spiritually. It fuels our determination and courage to keep the faith and to live nobly and sacrificially to the Lord's glory.

#### ***IV. God's power toward them in the grace of salvation (2:1-10)***

*And you were dead in your transgressions and sins, <sup>2</sup>in which you once walked, according to this worldly age, according to the ruler of the domain of the air, the spirit now working among the sons of disobedience. <sup>3</sup>We all also once lived among them in the lusts of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the flesh and of the thoughts, and we, like the rest, were by nature children of wrath. <sup>4</sup>But God, being rich in mercy, because of his great love [with] which he loved us, <sup>5</sup>even when we were dead in transgressions, made us alive with Christ – by grace you have been saved – <sup>6</sup>and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup>so that he might show in the coming ages the surpassing riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup>For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not from you, [it is] the gift of God; <sup>9</sup>[it is] not from works, so that no one may boast. <sup>10</sup>For we are his product, having been created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared in advance in order that we should walk in them.*

##### **A. Dead in transgressions and sins (2:1-3)**

1. As Christ had been dead physically as a result of having been crucified, they had been dead spiritually, meaning they were alienated or separated from God, as a result of having committed transgressions and sins. To *sin* is to violate the will of God; to *transgress* is to violate the will of God *as revealed in an express commandment*. As Douglas Moo puts it, "'Transgression' denotes a specific kind of sin, the 'passing beyond' the limits set by a definite, positive law or command. While every 'transgression' is also a 'sin,' not every 'sin' is a 'transgression.'"<sup>55</sup> The combination conveys the fullness and variety of their sinful past.

2. Their living that way was in conformity with "this worldly age" (lit. "the age of this world"), in conformity with the ruler of the domain of the air, the spirit now working among the sons of disobedience.

a. To live in conformity with "this worldly age" is to follow the attitudes, habits, and preferences of this fallen world, which are alien and hostile to God and his standards.

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<sup>55</sup> Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 277.

b. It is, as the next clause clarifies, to live in step with or under the influence of Satan, who is here called the ruler of the domain of the air, the spirit now working among the sons of disobedience.

(1) Satan is the god of this age (2 Cor. 4:4), the god of the old, fallen order which, though still present and evil (Gal. 1:4), is already doomed and expiring. The Apostle John says "the whole world," in the sense of everything opposed to God, "lies in [the power of] the evil one" (1 Jn. 5:19). John elsewhere calls Satan the ruler (or prince) of this world (Jn. 12:31, 14:30, 16:11).

(2) He is called "the ruler of the domain (or realm) of the air" because he is the chief demon and "the air" was understood in both paganism and Judaism to be the abode of evil spirits.

(a) The "air" is the lower reaches of the heavenly realms, what would be called the "first heaven" in the threefold division of heaven that Paul seems to use in 2 Cor. 12:2. So Paul also can say that the spiritual forces of evil occupy the heavenly realms (Eph. 6:12).

(b) Whatever else is meant by the notion of demons inhabiting the air, it says something about their proximity and access to mankind and probably something about their mobility and invisibility.

(3) Satan also is said here to be the spirit who is now at work among the sons of disobedience.<sup>56</sup> He is actively influencing mankind to act contrary to the will of God. Thus, Paul can say in 6:12 that our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world-controlling powers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

(a) Satan does not overpower Christians so that we have no choice or control over our actions. James 4:7 says "but resist the devil, and he will flee from you." Rather, his *modus operandi* is deceitful scheming and temptation. Ephesians 6:11, for example, refers to the "schemes of the devil." This method is illustrated by how Satan worked on Eve in Gen. 3:1-6. He duped her; he did not take away her ability to resist. (Demonic possession is another subject that raises other questions.)

(b) His subtle training or conditioning leads people so far from God that his reality and the truth of the gospel seem like a fairytale. It just seems counter-intuitive. As Paul says in 2 Cor. 4:4, "the god of this age has blinded the minds of the unbelievers so that [they] do not see the illumination of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." In 2 Tim. 2:26, after telling Timothy to correct the opponents with gentleness, he says "God may perhaps grant them a change of mind leading to a

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<sup>56</sup> See the discussion at O'Brien, 160 n. 29 of the different ways in which the genitive *tou pneumatōs* can be understood.

knowledge of [the] truth and they may come to [their] senses [and escape] from the trap of the devil, having been captured by him for that one's will."

3. Paul and all the other Christians<sup>57</sup> also once lived in disobedience, carrying out the desires and thoughts of their fallen natures, desires and thoughts that were contrary to God's will.

a. As a result of disobedience, they were, like the rest of mankind, under God's righteous judgment; they were justly due his wrath.

b. Paul says they were children of wrath "by nature" because the disobedience that rightfully earned God's wrath flowed from a nature that was bent on sin, which nature is in some way is traceable to Adam's sin (see esp. Rom. 5:17-19). In Alexander Campbell's words, as quoted by Jack Cottrell in *The Faith Once for All* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 2002), 180, "our nature was corrupted by the fall of Adam before it was transmitted to us; and hence that hereditary imbecility to do good, and the proneness to evil, so universally apparent in all human beings." We are all "greatly fallen and depraved in our whole moral constitution . . . in consequence of the sin of Adam."

#### B. But God in his mercy made us alive in Christ (2:4-7)

1. As God raised Jesus from physical death and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms (1:20), so he, in his rich mercy and great love for us, exercised analogous power toward us by raising us from spiritual death and seating us with Jesus.

a. When we entered into union with Christ (became "in Christ"), we in God's sight entered into union with what he had done for Christ.<sup>58</sup> We were made alive together "with Christ" and raised and seated together "with him."

b. We share in Christ's resurrection and exaltation, but our experience of that exercise of power is subject to the tension of the already and the not yet. The firstfruits of our sharing in Christ's resurrection and exaltation, the foretaste of that event that we experience in this overlap of ages, is the restoration of spiritual life in reconciliation with God and our exalted status as children of God; the fullness of that event will be experienced in our bodily resurrection and our position in the new heavens and new earth.

c. Paul stresses that this is all God's work; it is because of his great mercy, love, and grace that we have been blessed in this way.

2. God's amazing rescue in Christ of those who were dead was so that "the church, this society of pardoned rebels," would throughout time and eternity serve as a witness to the surpassing riches of his grace.<sup>59</sup> O'Brien writes:

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<sup>57</sup> For this understanding of the contrast between "you" (vv. 1-2) and "We all also" (v. 3), see Lincoln, 88 and Hoehner, 317-318, *contra* O'Brien, 161.

<sup>58</sup> See Lincoln, 108.



The apostle's thought in vv. 4-7 has gone full circle: he began by speaking of God's mercy and love as the motivation for his initiative in saving his people (v. 4); Paul then drew the readers' attention to the mighty rescue which arose out of God's gracious action (v. 5), and he concludes by declaring that God's lavishing his mercy on rebels is to serve as a demonstration of his grace for all succeeding ages. What God has done for those in Christ is a reality, but only in the coming ages will it be fully seen for what it is. In the light of God's gracious saving work, believers point men and women from themselves to the one to whom they owe their salvation.<sup>60</sup>

### C. Saved by grace for good works (2:8-10)

1. Paul again emphasizes that their move from death to life and their exaltation with Christ was not due to any human effort. We have been saved by grace, by God's unmerited favor, which we simply accepted through faith. Our salvation is not something we achieve in any way; it is a gift of God pure and simple. We in no way gain it by our efforts, so we have absolutely no grounds for boasting about it. We are *God's* product, the result of *his* work.

2. "God has created us anew in Christ and through Christ."<sup>61</sup> We are part of the new creation that has already invaded the present age in the person and work of Christ. And God's intention is that we, as participants in the new creation, should live in accordance with that status. We are to exhibit the godly behavior that God planned for our lives, regarding which he will elaborate in chapters 4 – 6. O'Brien concludes:

There are important ethical consequences of our being God's new creation, created in Christ Jesus. The divine intention, forcefully expressed by the purpose clause, is that we should walk in good deeds. We have a responsibility to live in the world so as to please him. There was a time when we walked in disobedience and sin, *followed the ways of this world*, were in terrible bondage to the devil, and were destined for wrath. But now because of God's mighty salvation in which a glorious change has been effected, we are expected, through the agency of his Holy Spirit, to demonstrate a changed life-style. Our attitudes and behaviour are to show all the hallmarks of the new creation. And when we walk in these ways which are according to his purpose, it is he himself who is powerfully working in our lives (Phi. 2:12, 13).<sup>62</sup>

### V. Call to remember God's saving work from a Gentile perspective (2:11-22)

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<sup>59</sup> See Bruce, 288.

<sup>60</sup> O'Brien, 173.

<sup>61</sup> O'Brien, 179.

<sup>62</sup> O'Brien, 181.

<sup>11</sup>Therefore remember that at one time you, the Gentiles in [the] flesh, those called "[the] uncircumcision" by what is called "[the] circumcision" (done by human hands in [the] flesh), <sup>12</sup>[remember] that at that time you were separate from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. <sup>13</sup>But now in Christ Jesus, you who at one time were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. <sup>14</sup>For he is our peace, the one who made both [groups] one and broke down the dividing wall which is the fence, having set aside in his flesh the hostility, <sup>15</sup>the law of commandments [expressed] in ordinances, so that he might create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, <sup>16</sup>and might reconcile both to God in one body through the cross, having put to death in himself the hostility. <sup>17</sup>And having come, he proclaimed peace to you, those [who were] far away and peace to those [who were] near, <sup>18</sup>for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. <sup>19</sup>Accordingly, you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, <sup>20</sup>having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, the cornerstone being Christ Jesus himself, <sup>21</sup>in whom the entire building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, <sup>22</sup>in whom you also are being built together into a place where God dwells in the Spirit.

#### A. From alienation to privilege (2:11-13)

1. Given that God has graciously saved them in Christ ("Therefore"), Paul calls them to reflect on their prior spiritual condition as Gentiles so that they may have an even greater appreciation of the mighty reversal God had effected on their behalf.

2. He notes that they were "the Gentiles *in the flesh*," which here is a reference to a physical, bodily difference between them and the Jews. Specifically, they were physically uncircumcised in contrast to the Jews who had been physically circumcised. As circumcision was a physical sign of Israel's covenant with God, their uncircumcision was evidence that they were outside of Israel's relationship with God.

3. Paul lists some deficiencies or inadequacies of their pre-Christian past so that they might appreciate more deeply the blessings they received in Christ.

a. They were separate from Christ, the Messiah, in the sense they had no part in Israel's messianic expectation. Israel expected the Messiah, the coming king who would rule on David's throne in fulfillment of God's purposes, because the Scriptures with which they had been entrusted (Rom. 3:2) spoke of this Messiah. The Gentiles were not plugged into that expectation.

b. They were not part of the nation of Israel, God's chosen people, and thus were not party to the various covenants God made with Israel based on his foundational promise of blessings to Abraham. They were outside the line of promise.

c. Being apart from Israel and thus outside the line of promise, they were, prior to their conversion, without hope of participating in the blessings of that promise. So they not only were separate from Christ in the subjective sense of being

unaware of or uninterested in the Messiah's promised coming as revealed in Israel's Scriptures (v. 12), they also were without hope in the objective sense of being outside the promises to Israel of messianic salvation.

d. They were without God in the world in the sense they had no relationship with the true God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

4. This was their dire state as Gentiles prior to their conversion, but now that they are in Christ they have been brought near by Christ's atoning death. In Christ Jesus, they have come to know Israel's Messiah, to participate in God's promises to Israel, and to have a relationship with the true and living God.

#### B. Christ's reconciling work (2:14-18)

1. The Gentiles have been brought near *in Christ Jesus* because Jesus is the one who created peace between Jews and Gentiles, the one who unified them. (The same is true of all different groups in the church [Gal. 3:26-28], but Paul's focus here is on Jews and Gentiles.) Lincoln remarks, "In accomplishing this, Christ has transcended one of the fundamental divisions of the first-century world."<sup>63</sup>

2. The unification of Jewish and Gentile believers into one body was achieved by the setting aside of the Mosaic law, which was accomplished through Christ's sacrifice on the cross.

a. The law is here referred to as "the dividing wall which is the fence,"<sup>64</sup> "the hostility," and "the law of commandments [expressed] in ordinances."<sup>65</sup> O'Brien comments, "[The law] separated Jews and Gentiles both religiously and sociologically, and caused deep-seated hostility. The enmity which was caused by the Jews' separateness was often accompanied by a sense of superiority on their part."<sup>66</sup>

(1) The law distinguished Israel from the Gentiles in the broad sense that it defined a special relationship between God and Israel; God chose Israel for a special role in his unfolding plan of redemption. But specific commandments also produced separation. There was a biblical restriction on Jews marrying indigenous foreigners, those from established communities within the nation (Dt. 7:3-4; Ezra 9:1-2; Neh. 13:25-27),<sup>67</sup> and there were varying applications of that principle in the first century. The extensive regulations defining uncleanness (e.g., involvement with certain animals, foods, bleeding, corpses, and graves) resulted in separation from unclean (noncomplying) Gentiles (see Gal. 2:12; Leviticus and Numbers).

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<sup>63</sup> Lincoln, 141.

<sup>64</sup> With most commentators, I take *tou phragmou* as a genitive of apposition (see O'Brien, 195, n. 160).

<sup>65</sup> On the relationship of the clauses, see O'Brien, 196 n. 164.

<sup>66</sup> O'Brien, 196.

<sup>67</sup> See my discussion of the issue in the context of Moabites at pp. 7-9 in [Introduction and Ruth 1:1-5](#).

(2) In the words of the second-century B.C. *Epistle of Aristeas*: "Our lawgiver . . . fenced us about with impenetrable palisades and with walls of iron to the end that we should mingle in no way with any of the other nations . . ." <sup>68</sup>

b. The Mosaic law is the *set or package* of commands that were part of the Mosaic covenant. The Mosaic covenant included the grandest and most complete expression to that time of God's moral requirements, but moral requirements did not begin when God gave the law to Moses at Mount Sinai.

(1) Mankind was under moral requirements *from creation*. It was wrong for Cain to murder Abel (Gen. 4:8-14) and for Lamech to kill a young man for striking him (Gen. 4:23-24). Indeed, it was mankind's rejection of God's moral requirements that caused God to flood the Earth in the days of Noah, long before Moses.

(2) He did so because the *wickedness* of man was great and the intentions of his heart were *evil* continually (Gen. 6:5); the earth was *corrupt* in God's sight and filled with *violence* (Gen. 6:11-13). The people of Sodom and Gomorrah sinned greatly (Gen. 13:13, 18:20), Er was killed for his wickedness (Gen. 38:7), Joseph's brothers sinned in selling him into slavery (Gen. 42:21-22, 50:17), and Abimelech and Joseph would have sinned if they had slept with another man's wife (Gen. 20:4-6, 39:8-9).

c. But until the Mosaic covenant, God's moral requirements had not been given as "law," had not been laid down as express commandments. (The only prior "law" in this proper sense was the express commandment that had been given to Adam.) Rather, they were known intuitively or innately as part of the law written by God on the human heart (see Rom. 2:15), which is part of our being made in God's image (Gen. 1:26-27). Remnants of that knowledge were reflected in various pagan cultural norms (e.g., Amos 3:9-10; 1 Cor. 5:1).

d. In addition to incorporating and detailing universal moral requirements, the Mosaic law included requirements that were peculiar to Israel, requirements that had no counterpart in the law of the heart to which all humanity was subject.

(1) These commands erected civil and ceremonial or ritualistic ("amoral") distinctions between Jews and Gentiles, probably (at least in part) to keep the people of God untainted by pagan practices in order to help them serve as a witness to their Gentile neighbors of the blessed life that exists under God (Deut. 4:6-8; Ezek. 5:5; Isa. 42:6, 49:6). This is the separating effect Paul is talking about.

(2) A distinction in the nature of Mosaic commandments is evident in 1 Cor. 7:19 where Paul says (NIV), "Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God's commands is what counts." Clearly the command to circumcise is not among the commands Paul now considers important to keep; there is a qualitative difference among the commands included in the law.

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<sup>68</sup> Quoted in O'Brien, 196, n. 165.

e. A new covenant was instituted between God and mankind through the sacrifice of Christ, the effect of which was to render the old covenant, the Mosaic covenant, obsolete or no longer operative (2 Cor. 3:4-18; Gal. 3:15-4:7, 4:21-31; Heb. 7:11-22, 8:6-13).

(1) And with the fulfillment in Christ of the planned obsolescence of the Mosaic covenant, *the set of commands* that was part of that covenant, the Mosaic law, ceased to be binding. This is clear from texts like Rom. 10:1-4, Gal. 3:23-25, and Heb. 7:11-14.

(2) It also is clear from the fact specific regulations that were part of the Mosaic law — such as Sabbath regulations (Col. 2:16-17; Rom. 14:5-6), food laws (Rom. 14:1 – 15:13; 1 Cor. 10:23–11:1), and circumcision (1 Cor. 7:19; Gal. 2:3-5, 5:2-6, 11-12, 6:12-13; Phil. 3:2) — are said to be no longer binding. That is why Paul, a Jew, could declare that he was not under the Mosaic law (1 Cor. 9:20).

f. Though the *set of commands* (the group, body, or package of commands) that constitutes the Mosaic law ceased to be binding, many of the *individual commands included in that set* have an ongoing or renewed applicability in the new covenant and indeed find their full expression there.

(1) Thus, Paul in Eph. 6:2 commands children to "honor your father and mother," quoting from the Ten Commandments in Ex. 20:12 and Deut. 5:16. In Acts 23:5 he accepts that it is wrong to speak insolently to the high priest on the authority of Ex. 22:28. In Rom. 12:19-20 he prohibits the Roman Christians from avenging themselves on the authority of Deut. 32:35. In 1 Cor. 9:9-10 and 1 Tim. 5:17-18 he cites Deut. 25:4 as authority for the right of missionaries and elders to be supported (a right Paul refuses to use). And in 1 Cor. 14:33-34 he argues for the silence of women in the assemblies by citing "the law" as requiring the submission of women.<sup>69</sup>

(2) In 1 Pet. 1:14-16 Peter grounds his command that they be holy in all their conduct on Lev. 11:44. And in Jas. 2:8-9 James applies to his readers the command of Lev. 19:18 that they love their neighbor as themselves, calling it the "royal law" because it was singled out by Christ, the fulfiller and authoritative interpreter of the law, as the essence of the interpersonal aspects of the Mosaic law (Mat. 22:34-40). The Ten

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<sup>69</sup> Paul does not identify a specific text from the Old Testament that expresses the principle of male leadership, but he probably has in mind a text like Gen. 2:21-23 in which Eve is shown to have been created after Adam and out of Adam and to have been named by Adam. In 1 Tim. 2:13 Paul cites the fact Adam was created first as a basis for male leadership in the church (see also, 1 Cor. 11:8-9). This is consistent with the Old Testament pattern of "primogeniture," the idea that the firstborn in any generation in a human family has leadership in the family. Other texts certainly could have factored into Paul's reference to the Law. For example, in Gen. 3:16 God tells Eve that as part of the curse her desire will be for her husband, probably meaning that woman in her fallen nature will desire to dominate her husband (see the use of "desire" in Gen. 4:7), contrary to God's created order, and that this desire generally will go unsatisfied because the husband has the leadership role. In Gen. 18:12 Sarah referred to Abraham as "her lord," and for that reason Peter cites her in 1 Pet. 3:6 as a paragon of wifely submission.

Commandments also are reflected in New Testament commands and prohibitions against idolatry, swearing of oaths, murder, adultery, stealing, slandering, lying, and coveting. Indeed, there are literally hundreds of commands in the New Testament issued by Spirit-inspired writers, many of which are rooted in the Old Testament.

g. A key point to note is that commands in the Mosaic law are not applicable *as Mosaic law*, that is, by virtue of being in the Mosaic law. Rather, they are applicable because they are universal moral desires of God that were included in the Mosaic law. And because those desires were articulated for the people of Israel in the Mosaic law, one can cite that articulation of God's universal desire as a Christian requirement. That does not mean the Mosaic law or the old covenant are still in effect. It means only that the Mosaic law included articulations of divine moral desires that preceded their embodiment in the Mosaic law and that continue after that set of laws was rendered inoperative.

h. The fundamental ethical requirement for the Christian is love (Mat. 7:12, 22:37-40; Rom. 13:8-10; Gal. 5:14). Love is the center, the bullseye, but there are definite requirements on how it expresses itself. It is not a subjective free-for-all. As Paul indicates in Rom. 13:9, the command to love your neighbor as yourself encompasses the commands of the law not to commit adultery, not to murder, not to steal, and not to covet (and other commands he does not specify). Thus, the Christian, though not being under the Mosaic law, the set of commands that are part of Mosaic covenant, upholds the transcendent moral requirements that were included in that law and fully expressed through Christ (e.g., Rom. 3:31, 13:8-10; Gal. 5:14). This ongoing moral law, centered in love, is the "law of Christ" (see 1 Cor. 9:21 and Gal. 6:2 with 5:14).

i. Because the commands of the Mosaic law relating to circumcision, sacrifices, the priesthood, feasts, holy days, ritual purity laws, and food laws are not part of the law of Christ (see Mat. 15:16-20; Mk. 7:18-19, indicating that the rules of ritual contamination are removed), not something Christians are required to obey (other than as an accommodation), Christ's ending of the Mosaic law ended the requirements that created the barrier between Jews and Gentiles. In this way, he created one new man out of the two.

j. Identifying what has ongoing applicability can be difficult, but it is a difficulty the New Testament thrusts upon us. What we cannot do is to fail to account for the biblical data by declaring that none of the law's commands holds any authority for the Christian. By my lights, that misrepresents God, leaves the members of the flock confused, and fuels frustration with the Scriptures.

3. Christ not only created one new body out of Jewish and Gentile believers, he also reconciled that one body with God by having atoned for the sin that alienated Jew and Gentile from him. Jesus ended in his crucifixion, in his flesh, not only the horizontal hostility between Jew and Gentile but also the vertical hostility between sinners and God. This reconciling work is an "already" foretaste of the "not yet" universal reconciliation referred to in 1:9-10.

4. Christ proclaimed peace to Jew and Gentile either through the event of his reconciling death as set out in vv. 14-16<sup>70</sup> or through the subsequent Spirit-empowered preaching of those he commissioned to spread the gospel.<sup>71</sup> That the same message of peace was proclaimed or preached to both Jew and Gentile is evident from the fact they both have access to God as sharers of the one Spirit. As put in v. 16, they both have been reconciled with God as one body.

### C. Members of God's household (2:19-22)

1. As a result of Christ's mighty reconciling work, these Gentiles who had once been outsiders are now insiders. They are now fellow *citizens* with all other Christians in the kingdom of God. Citizenship in the ancient world was a status that carried significant privileges. You see this, for example, in Acts 16:35-39 where the magistrates in Philippi had beaten and imprisoned Paul and Silas in violation of their rights as Roman citizens.

2. In more intimate terms, they are members of their heavenly Father's household, a part of his family. O'Brien states, quoting Towner, "In the Roman world of the day to be a 'member of a household meant refuge and protection, at least as much as the master was able to provide. It also meant identity and gave the security that comes with a sense of belonging."<sup>72</sup>

3. Paul says that they have been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets,<sup>73</sup> meaning "that their membership in God's people rests on the normative teaching that arises from divine revelation."<sup>74</sup> The apostles and prophets were inspired proclaimers of the gospel, and their message, the message of God, is what these Gentiles had received.

4. The cornerstone<sup>75</sup> of this building into which these Gentiles have been incorporated is Christ Jesus himself. In ancient times, the cornerstone was not something put into place at the time the completed building was dedicated. It was the first stone laid, and it set the line or standard by which the walls were constructed.<sup>76</sup> O'Brien concludes:

Paul seems, therefore, to be making the following points: Christ is the vital cornerstone on whom the building is constructed. The foundation and position of all the other stones in the superstructure were determined by him. He is 'the one from which the rest of the foundation is built outwards along the line of the proposed walls'. Accordingly, the temple is built out and up from the revelation given in Christ, with the apostles and prophets elaborating and explaining the mystery, which had been made known to them by the Holy Spirit (3:4-11, esp. v. 5). 'But all is built on Christ,

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<sup>70</sup> See Lincoln, 148-149.

<sup>71</sup> See O'Brien, 207.

<sup>72</sup> O'Brien, 212.

<sup>73</sup> For a critique of the suggestion that the phrase should be understood as "the apostles who are also prophets," see O'Brien, 214-216 and Hoehner, 402.

<sup>74</sup> O'Brien, 216.

<sup>75</sup> See the discussion in O'Brien, 216-218 and Hoehner, 404-406 on the meaning of *akrogōniaios*.

<sup>76</sup> See Hoehner, 406-407.

supported by Christ, and the lie or shape of the continuing building is determined by Christ, the cornerstone'.<sup>77</sup>

5. It is in Christ that previously divided people are brought to unity, which Paul here describes as their being fit together into a building, a unified structure. So it is in Christ that this structure, the community of faith, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. God dwells in the church, as he was present in a special way in the temple, but the church is a work in progress. It is growing *as* a holy temple *into* a completed holy temple. These believing Gentiles are among those ("you also") being incorporated into this construction project, having become part of the community in which God dwells in the Spirit.

## ***VI. The divine mystery and Paul's stewardship (3:1-13)***

*For this reason, I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles –<sup>2</sup>for surely you heard [of] the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you,<sup>3</sup> that by revelation the mystery was made known to me, as I already wrote in brief.<sup>4</sup> By reading that, you are able to perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ,<sup>5</sup> which [mystery] was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit:<sup>6</sup> that is, the Gentiles [are] joint heirs and members of the same body and sharers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel,<sup>7</sup> of which I became a servant according to the gift of God's grace that was given to me according to the working of his power.*

*<sup>8</sup>To me, the very least of all [the] saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the good news of the unfathomable riches of Christ<sup>9</sup> and to enlighten everyone [as to] what [is] the plan of the mystery that for ages was hidden in God who created all things,<sup>10</sup> in order that the richly diverse wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly realms through the church.<sup>11</sup> [This was] according to [the] eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord,<sup>12</sup> in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in him.<sup>13</sup> I ask [you], therefore, not to be disheartened by my sufferings on your behalf, which is your glory.*

### **A. Paul's prayer (3:1)**

1. Paul begins to tell them his prayer on their behalf in light of the tremendous blessings God has bestowed on them, the blessings he described in 2:11-22. But he quickly digresses and does not pick back up with the prayer report until 3:14.

2. He says that he is a prisoner on behalf of the Gentiles because it was preaching of the (Mosaic) law-free gospel to the Gentiles that led to his arrest in Jerusalem, which led to his imprisonment in Caesarea and ultimately to his imprisonment in Rome (Acts 21 – 28).

### **B. A steward of the mystery on their behalf (3:2-7)**

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<sup>77</sup> O'Brien, 217-218.



1. Paul had been given a stewardship of God's grace for the Gentiles' benefit in that he had been entrusted with a commission to proclaim that grace to them in the gospel. He assumes they had heard of that fact, which implies that they were not personally acquainted with him.

2. That stewardship of God's grace was given to him when the mystery was revealed to him. As O'Brien notes, in 1:9-10 the mystery "referred to God's all-inclusive purpose which has as its ultimate goal the uniting of all things in heaven and earth in Christ. Here, a more limited dimension to the mystery focuses on Gentiles, along with Jews, being incorporated into the body of Christ and thus participating in divine salvation."<sup>78</sup> That reconciliation is part and parcel of the larger mystery of universal reconciliation.

3. Paul has already mentioned in 1:9-10 and 2:11-22 the revelation of the mystery and the more particular aspect of Jew and Gentile reconciliation. From that they should be able to recognize his insight into the mystery of Christ, the mystery that is disclosed in Christ.

4. That mystery was not revealed to people in prior generations, but it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. This same point is made in Rom. 16:25-26 and Col. 1:25-27.

a. What was concealed in prior generations was not the truth that faith was the principle by which God would justify men and women, Gentiles as well as Jews. Elsewhere Paul makes clear that the gospel is not some new teaching but was promised in advance in the Scriptures (Rom. 1:2, 3:21, 15:8-12). He says in Gal. 3:8 that the gospel was proclaimed beforehand to Abraham. God's intention to bring the Gentiles into the blessing of the Jews is all over the O.T. (e.g., Gen. 12:3, 18:18, 22:18; Deut. 32:43 [Masoretic text]; Isa. 11:10, 42:6; Ps. 18:49, 22:27-28, 117:1).

b. The mystery that was newly revealed related to the *manner* in which God's intention to bless the Gentiles with the Jews would come to fruition. It would not be by Gentiles joining Jews as faithful adherents of the Mosaic law. Rather, it would be by the Messiah setting aside the Mosaic law, breaking down that dividing wall, so that Jews and Gentiles would be made into a new unified body, a Spirit-forged entity, a family, of full and equal members.<sup>79</sup> Christians by the second century would speak of themselves as a "third race" or "new race," neither Jewish nor Gentile.<sup>80</sup>

5. The content of the now-revealed mystery (its more limited dimension) is spelled out in v. 6. By entering into Christ through receiving the gospel, the Gentiles have become fellow heirs with Jewish believers, members with Jewish believers of the one body of Christ, and sharers together with Jewish believers in the promise.

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<sup>78</sup> O'Brien, 228.

<sup>79</sup> See Bruce, 314; O'Brien, 231-232; Hoehner, 440-441.

<sup>80</sup> O'Brien, 195.

6. Paul had the great honor of becoming a servant of the glorious gospel, a missionary to the Gentiles, as a result of God's gracious commission. That commission was according to God's power in the sense "that Paul received the power appropriate to the ministry to which he was appointed."<sup>81</sup> God not only graciously called him to such a grand task, he graciously empowered him for it.

### C. His call to make the mystery known (3:8-13)

1. Though he was the very least of all the saints because he had violently persecuted the church of God (1 Cor. 15:9), he was given by grace the glorious assignment of preaching to the Gentiles the good news of the unfathomable riches of Christ and to enlighten all people regarding the plan of the mystery that for ages was hidden in God who created all things. O'Brien comments:

As Paul fulfilled his commission of preaching the unsearchable riches of Christ to the Gentiles, so through this proclamation of the gospel men and women came into a relationship with God through his Son, the Lord Jesus. They were joined with Christ in his death and resurrection, and so became fellow-members, along with Jewish Christians, of the same body. In this way, the previously hidden mystery (described in v. 6) was being implemented in a wonderful manner: God was putting into effect his age-old plan, something that had not been seen or imagined before, and as the apostle to the Gentiles Paul had the great privilege of revealing this magnificent, divine administration to the eyes of human beings on earth, Jew and Gentile alike (*all*). Paul's commission, then, contained this second element, not as something additional or unrelated to the proclamation of the gospel but integral to it.<sup>82</sup>

2. The purpose of Paul's preaching to the Gentiles and consequent enlightening of all people regarding the nature of God's previously unrevealed mystery was that the richly diverse wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly realms through the church.

a. God discloses his complex, multifaceted wisdom to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms through the very existence of this unified, multiracial and multiethnic community that is the church. The church is an object-lesson even for the heavenly beings, angels and especially demons (Eph. 6:12). It is a foretaste or token of the cosmic reconciliation that now is in process, a sign of the already won victory, and thus it is a display of God's supreme wisdom in the achievement in Christ of his Fall-reversing purposes.

b. Implicit in this is the fact the demonic powers have been defeated, which is a comfort during the spiritual warfare that they and we wage while awaiting the final day.

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<sup>81</sup> Best, 316.

<sup>82</sup> O'Brien, 243-244.

3. The church's role in God's revealing of his wisdom to heavenly beings was part of God's eternal purpose, a purpose accomplished in Jesus Christ.

4. In their union with Christ through faith in him, all Christians have the privilege of confident access to God. They cannot be blocked from God by the spiritual forces of evil.

5. In light of the glory of the ministry God had graciously given to him, Paul ends the paragraph (v. 13) urging them not to be disheartened by his sufferings on their behalf. It is an honor to suffer in service of such a grand cause. Moreover, his imprisonment was their glory in the sense he was there for refusing to compromise the truth of Gentile equality with Jewish believers in the one body of Christ.

## ***VII. Prayer report completed and a doxology (3:14-21)***

*<sup>14</sup>For this reason, I bend my knees before the Father, <sup>15</sup>from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, <sup>16</sup>in order that he may grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inner person, <sup>17</sup>that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, <sup>18</sup>that you, having been rooted and grounded in love, may have power to comprehend, with all the saints, what [is] the width, length, height, and depth, <sup>19</sup>and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.*

*<sup>20</sup>Now to him who is able to do immeasurably beyond all things that we ask or imagine, according to the power that is working in us, <sup>21</sup>to him [be] glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever, amen.*

### **A. Prayer for power, love, and maturity (3:14-19)**

1. Paul picks back up the prayer report he began in 3:1. "For this reason" relates back to the God's gracious work on their behalf recounted in chapter 2. The fact he kneels signifies his great reverence and submission. He calls God "the Father," "which in the ancient world was not only a term of intimacy but also one that had overtones of dignity and authority. A father not only sought the good of his family but also ruled the clan or family unit."<sup>83</sup>

2. God is the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named because, as the creator of all things, he is the source of every order or class of heavenly beings and the ultimate ancestor of every family of humans. They all carry his name in the general sense they all are creatures of God.

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<sup>83</sup> O'Brien, 255.

3. Paul prays that God, according to his limitless resources, will strengthen them with power in the inner person through his Spirit, or as he puts it differently in the following clause, that Christ may dwell in their hearts through faith.<sup>84</sup>

a. The Spirit's transforming empowerment of their inner person is Christ, through the Spirit (Rom. 8:9-10; Gal. 2:20, 4:6), pervading their hearts, extending his occupancy, so to speak, of their inner being. It is Christ who indwells from salvation making himself at home, becoming deeply rooted in their lives, becoming the controlling factor in their attitudes and conduct.<sup>85</sup> As O'Brien remarks, "His indwelling is not something additional to the strengthening. To be empowered by the Spirit in the inner person means that Christ himself dwells in their hearts."<sup>86</sup>

b. This indwelling for which he prays is through faith, which means it happens in conjunction with their trust in Christ. It is through ongoing faith that we yield to rather than resist Christ's transforming influence, his making himself at home.

4. The strengthening with power of their inner man, the indwelling of Christ, for which he prays is so that, having been rooted and grounded in love as a result of that transforming empowerment, they may have the power with all the saints to comprehend certain things.<sup>87</sup> As one is transformed into the image of Christ, love becomes increasingly central to one's life, and as that happens, one's ability to be blessed with insight expands. Being rooted and grounded in love repositions a person so that he now is better able to receive from God the power to comprehend certain things as never before.

5. Paul prays that they may have power with all the saints to comprehend the width, length, height, and depth. He does not identify the object of this width, length, height, and depth, and there is disagreement over to what it refers. I am with those who think it refers to Christ's love for us that is mentioned in the next verse. (The NIV adds "love of Christ" to the text to make their preference clear; CSB adds "God's love.")

6. Paul wants God to enable them to grasp the immensity of Christ's love and with that for them to know in a deep and personal sense that love that is so magnificent it is beyond being known fully. O'Brien states: "[T]o speak of Christ's love as 'surpassing knowledge' means that it is so great that one can never know it fully. . . . No matter how much we know of the love of Christ, how fully we enter into his love for us, there is always more to know and experience."<sup>88</sup>

7. Paul's prayer for their increasing comprehension and knowledge of Christ's love is to the end that they may be filled with all the fullness of God.

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<sup>84</sup> With most commentators (e.g., Lincoln, 206; Fee, 696; Best, 341; O'Brien, 258), I see the infinitival clause at the beginning of v. 17 ("to dwell") elaborating and explaining the prior infinitival clause of v. 16 ("to be strengthened") rather than spelling out its goal or result.

<sup>85</sup> Hoehner, 481.

<sup>86</sup> O'Brien, 258.

<sup>87</sup> For this understanding of the relationship of the clauses, see O'Brien, 259-260.

<sup>88</sup> O'Brien, 264.

a. As D. A. Carson states, "To be 'filled to the measure of all the fullness of God' is simply a Pauline way of saying 'to be all that God wants you to be,' or 'to be spiritually mature.'"<sup>89</sup> He adds: "We may think we are peculiarly mature Christians because of our theology, our education, our years of experience, our traditions; but Paul knows better. He knows we cannot be as mature as we ought to be until 'we know this love that surpasses knowledge.'"

b. The church in principle "already" is the fullness of Christ (1:23, also Col. 2:10), but in practice it has "not yet" attained the fullness. Lincoln states, "The relationship between what the Church is and what the Church is to become . . . reflects ultimately the tension between the 'already' and the 'not yet' . . ."<sup>90</sup> In O'Brien's words, "They are to become what they already are."<sup>91</sup>

## B. Doxology (3:20-21)

1. Having boldly petitioned God on their behalf, he praises God as the one who can do immeasurably beyond all things that we ask or imagine. There is no limit to what he can do! And the power by which he can do all things is in accordance with, in conformity with, the power that is at work within Christians through the Spirit.

(a) Recall this is the mighty power that raised Jesus from the depths of human experience to the greatest conceivable height and took us from being dead in sins and transgressions and raised us to be seated with him. That power for transformation is at work within us as Christians, and we need stop denying and resisting it. We need to yield to it, to allow it to manifest within us.

(b) Our culture insists that we are like animals, fated by birth to be the way we are. It says we can't change the kind of person we are and has turned *not* changing into the greatest virtue – that's being true to yourself. But God loves us too much to leave us where he found us, trapped in our sin with all the hardship and sorrow that comes with that. He has made us new, has called us to be like his glorious Son, and has empowered us through the Spirit to be increasingly who he wants us to be.

(c) This is important to know as we struggle in this life because the world will tell us there is no power in Christ to change, that the promises are empty, and sell us its alleged solutions, which often revolve around denying that we need to change, and thus idolizing our sin, or treating us like chemical robots that have no spiritual needs only chemical imbalances.

2. Paul ascribes glory to God in the church and in Christ Jesus. Bruce writes:

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<sup>89</sup> D. A. Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 195.

<sup>90</sup> Lincoln, 214.

<sup>91</sup> O'Brien, 265.

God is to be glorified in the church because the church, comprising Jews and Gentiles, is his masterpiece of grace. It is through the church that his wisdom is made known to the spiritual forces of the heavenly realm. "The heavens declare the glory of God" but even greater glory is shown by his handiwork in the community of reconciliation. This community, moreover, consists of human beings who are united in Christ, members of his body, in whom Christ dwells: the glory of God "in the church" cannot be divorced from his glory "in Christ Jesus."<sup>92</sup>

3. This glory will have no end. Throughout all generations, forever and ever, the redeemed in Christ will bear witness to "the surpassing riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (2:7).

4. The "amen" would be said or echoed by the congregation as their endorsement of the doxology when the letter was read aloud.

### ***VIII. Unity, diversity, and maturity in the body of Christ (4:1-16)***

*I, the prisoner in the Lord, urge you, therefore, to walk worthily of the calling to which you were called, <sup>2</sup>with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, <sup>3</sup>making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. <sup>4</sup>[There is] one body and one Spirit, just as you also were called to [the] one hope of your calling, <sup>5</sup>one Lord, one faith, one baptism, <sup>6</sup>one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*

*<sup>7</sup>But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. <sup>8</sup>Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high, he took prisoners captive; he gave gifts to men." <sup>9</sup>(Now what is the [implication of] "he ascended" except that he also descended to the lower regions, the earth? <sup>10</sup>He who descended is himself also the one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.) <sup>11</sup>And he himself gave the apostles and also the prophets and the evangelists and the shepherds and teachers, <sup>12</sup>for the conditioning of the saints for [the] work of service, for [the] building up of the body of Christ, <sup>13</sup>until we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to the completed man, to [the] measure of [the] stature of the fullness of Christ, <sup>14</sup>so that we may no longer be children, being tossed by waves and blown about by every wind of teaching, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming. <sup>15</sup>Instead, let us, by speaking the truth in love, grow up [in] every way into him who is the head, [that is,] Christ, <sup>16</sup>from whom the entire body, being fitted together and united by every supporting ligament, brings about the growth of the body, in accordance with the degree of activity of each individual part, for the building up of itself in love.*

Note: In light of the great doctrinal themes sounded in chapters 1 – 3, Paul exhorts them in chapters 4 – 6 to live a certain way. It is not an airtight division, but there is a

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<sup>92</sup> Bruce, 331.

definite shift at 4:1 from theology to ethical admonition, from explaining what is theirs in Christ to urging them to live consistently with that mighty salvation.

A. Exhortation to maintain the unity (4:1-6)

1. Paul's exhortation is undergirded by the fact of his own costly commitment to Christ, which is reflected in his imprisonment.

2. He urges them to live worthily of the blessed state to which they have been called in Christ. Specifically, he urges them to make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, which involves conducting themselves with all humility and gentleness, with patience, and bearing with one another in love.

a. Christ has effected peace between the formerly hostile Jews and Gentiles (and by implication has done so regarding all hostilities). He put to death their hostility and formed them into one new body whose various parts share the same Spirit, the one Spirit in whom they have access to the Father (2:14-18). That unity is a spiritual fact. Paul does not exhort them to create it; he exhorts them to maintain it. Fee comments:

The "unity of the Spirit" does not refer to some sentimental or esoteric unity that believers should work toward. Rather, Paul is speaking of something that exists prior to the exhortation. Whether they like it or not, their lavish experience of the Spirit, which they have in common with all others who belong to Christ, has made them members of the one body of Christ, both on the larger scale and its more immediate expression in the local community and in their own (believing) households. So they may as well get on with "liking it" and demonstrate as much by the way they live.<sup>93</sup>

b. They are to maintain the unity of the Spirit, the unity Christ effected, in the form of the bond of peace, meaning they are to express that unity by living at peace with one another.

c. Qualities that are essential to the goal of living at peace with one another, to maintaining the unity of the Spirit, include humility, gentleness, and patience. These qualities facilitate peace and are part of what is necessary to bear with one another in love. And bearing with one another's weaknesses and failures out of love for each other is the essence of living at peace with one another.

d. Notice that gentleness, patience, love, and peace are fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). So part of maintaining the unity of the Spirit is yielding to the Spirit's transforming work in one's life that the virtues necessary for maintaining that unity may flourish.

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<sup>93</sup> Fee (1994), 701.

e. To fail to maintain the unity of the Spirit, to live in a manner that mars that unity, is to say that Christ's sacrificial death, by which relationships have been reconciled, is of no real consequence to us.

3. Paul underscores the unity of Christians that he has exhorted them to maintain by listing seven unifying realities of the Christian experience.

a. There is one church, one body of Christ, so all Christians are members of the same body. There is not one church for Jews and another for Gentiles.

b. There is one Spirit, so all Christians are sharers in the same Spirit. There is not one Spirit for the Jews and another for the Gentiles.

c. There is one hope to which all Christians were called, the hope mentioned in 1:18. There is not one hope for Jews and another for Gentiles. As I said when discussing that verse, the content of the Christian hope is the riches of the glory of his inheritance among the saints. It is the expectation of participating in the final purpose of God's saving activity in Christ, participating in the universal reconciliation of all things in Christ. Christians will live forever in the new heavens and new earth in resurrection bodies that are imperishable and immortal (1 Cor. 15:50-57).

d. There is one Lord Jesus Christ, so all Christians have the same object of faith (3:12). There is not one Lord in whom the Jews believe and another in whom the Gentiles believe.

e. There is one faith, one gospel,<sup>94</sup> so all Christians share a fundamental body of belief. There is not one gospel for Jews and another for Gentiles.

f. There is one baptism, so all Christians share in the same initiation rite, all have submitted to immersion because of their faith in Christ. There is not one baptism for Jews and another for Gentiles. Best writes, "The 'one baptism' is obviously the Christian initiatory rite of water baptism and not Spirit baptism, though of course the two cannot be dissociated."<sup>95</sup>

g. There is one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all, so all Christians have been reconciled to, brought into a special relationship with, the same God. There is not one God to which Jewish Christians relate and another to which Gentile Christians relate. They are children in a special sense of the same God.

h. This is not a comprehensive list of all that is important in the Christian faith, as the omission of the Lord's Supper indicates. It is a list of singular items ("one" things) that Paul gives to underscore the unity of Christians. He speaks generally and does not get into the boundaries of the one hope and one faith or the essentials of the

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<sup>94</sup> With Lincoln, 240; Best, 368-369; and O'Brien, 283, I take "faith" in an objective rather than subjective sense.

<sup>95</sup> Best, 369.



one baptism because that is not relevant to his purpose. We must seek those answers elsewhere.

## B. Diversity in unity that leads to maturity (4:7-16)

1. Within the unity of the body of Christ (4:1-6), there is a diversity of function of the individual members (see 1 Cor. 12:14-20). Each member has been given by the ascended Christ a gift of grace, in varied measure, that enables him or her to perform his or her distinctive role within the body. Elsewhere we see that those gifts of grace are imparted by Christ through the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:11).

2. This bestowal of grace on Christians upon Christ's ascension back to heaven is what is behind the statement with which they were familiar: "When he ascended on high, he took prisoners captive; he gave gifts to men."

a. This statement clearly is rooted in Ps. 68:18 (English versification), but it differs from that verse most significantly in the change from "he *received* gifts among men" (reflected in both the MT and LXX) to "he *gave* gifts to men."

b. Perhaps Paul is putting his inspired imprimatur on a known interpretive paraphrase that brought out what was latent in a victor's receiving "gifts" among men, namely that he shared those spoils with his people. Some rabbis apparently understood the text that way, as an early targumic rendering found in the Syriac Peshitta states: "Thou hast ascended on high; thou hast led captivity captive; thou hast given gifts to men." Or perhaps he is citing a Christian hymn that interpreted Ps. 68:18 in the same way.<sup>96</sup>

c. Hoehner suggests that Paul is not quoting Ps. 68:18 but summarizing the entire psalm in words that track v. 18.<sup>97</sup> The aspect of *giving* gifts to men is taken from examples throughout the psalm.

d. Whatever the details of the reference, the picture is of the victor returning with his captives and spoils and bestowing gifts on his people. That applies to Jesus as the one who ascended in victory and distributed gifts to his people. Hoehner states:

The point that Paul is trying to make is the fact that Christ, who ascended as victor, has the right to give gifts. For if Christ had been defeated, he would yet be in his grave and spiritual gifts would be useless to those whom he could not redeem. On the other hand, Christ did not receive gifts from the defeated foes as in Ps 68, for such would be useless to God and his children. Satan, sin, and death have been defeated by Christ's redemption. Consequently, those who were held in their bondage

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<sup>96</sup> See Muddiman, 188 and NET n. 7.

<sup>97</sup> Hoehner, 528.

have been freed and have obtained the gifts of the Spirit from their victorious Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.<sup>98</sup>

3. The parenthetical statement in vv. 9-10 elaborates on the reference of v. 8. Christ's great ascent from earth to heaven after the resurrection, which already has been mentioned (1:20-21), was preceded by his descent from heaven to earth at the time of his incarnation.<sup>99</sup>

4. The focus is on Christ's ascent in the context of his giving gifts.

a. Regarding the statement that Christ ascended "far above all the heavens," O'Brien comments:

This language parallels his exaltation and enthronement 'in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion' (1:20-21). In the light of this similar phraseology, and the following purpose clause, 'in order that he might fill the whole universe', which corresponds to the expression in 1:23 (Christ 'fills everything in every way'), 'all the heavens' is best understood as a metaphorical reference to the powers of 1:21 who have been subjugated to him.<sup>100</sup>

b. The goal of his exaltation is "that he might fill all things" in the sense of exercising universal sovereign rule. When God says in Jer. 23:24, "Do I not fill heaven and earth?" he is saying he exercises lordship over everything. Here that idea is applied to Christ.

5. It is this victorious, ascended Christ who gave to the church the apostles and also<sup>101</sup> the prophets and the evangelists and the shepherds and teachers.<sup>102</sup>

a. He provided to the church these various ministers of the Word whom he gifted to serve in their respective roles. These all are men through whom the gospel is revealed, declared, and taught.

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<sup>98</sup> Hoehner, 530.

<sup>99</sup> With most modern commentators, I understand τῆς γῆς as a genitive of apposition.

<sup>100</sup> O'Brien, 296.

<sup>101</sup> "Also" is my attempt to give some expression to the μὲν . . . δὲ formula while accepting that the definite articles belong directly with the following nouns (he gave the apostles, the prophets, etc.) rather than function as substantives with the nouns serving as predicates (he gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, etc.).

<sup>102</sup> The fact only one article is used for both shepherds and teachers does not mean the two groups are identical ("shepherds who teach"). See Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 284. As O'Brien states (p. 300), "it is more likely that the terms describe overlapping functions (cf. 1 Cor. 12:28-29 and Gal. 6:6, where 'teachers' are a distinct group). All pastors teach (since teaching is an essential part of pastoral ministry), but not all teachers are also pastors."

(1) The apostles and prophets were mentioned in 2:20 and 3:5. They had a foundational role as the authoritative proclaimers of the divinely revealed mystery of Christ, and their roles certainly overlapped with some of the others.

(2) "Evangelists" most likely refers to those who spread the foundational message of the apostles and prophets to new territories.

(a) That seems to be the case with Philip (called "the evangelist" in Acts 21:8) in Acts 8:26-40. Citing Eusebius, Hoehner states, "In the early church it was thought that the evangelists were those who preached the gospel and were the successors to the apostles in that they laid the foundations of the faith in new areas, appointed shepherds, and then moved to other lands and people."<sup>103</sup>

(b) Timothy is told to "do the work of an evangelist" (2 Tim. 4:5) while he was stationed in Ephesus (assuming he was in the same location as in 1 Timothy), but we are not told what that involved. Note that Paul wanted Timothy to come to him before winter (2 Tim. 4:21), so presumably the role Paul envisioned for him at Ephesus would be completed by that time.

(3) Shepherds are the leaders of local congregations. In brief, they are responsible for the spiritual welfare of the congregation (see, Acts 20:28; Eph. 4:11-12; 1 Thess. 5:12; 1 Tim. 3:5, 5:17; Tit. 1:9; Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 5:2). This necessarily involves them in teaching (Acts 20:32; 1 Tim. 3:2, 5:17; 2 Tim. 3:16; Tit. 1:9) and modeling (Acts 20:28; Heb. 13:7; 1 Pet. 5:3) the word of God.

(4) Three specific Greek terms refer to this one leadership position: *presbuteros* (translated elder), *episkopos* (translated overseer or bishop), and *poimēn* (translated shepherd or pastor). The interchangeability of these terms is clear from several passages.

(a) In Acts 20:17 Paul sends for the "elders" of the church in Ephesus. In 20:28 he reminds them that they are "overseers" and commands them "to shepherd" (verb *poimainō*) the church of God.

(b) In Tit. 1:5 Paul tells Titus to appoint "elders" in every city, and in 1:7 these elders are called "overseers."

(c) In 1 Pet. 5:1 Peter addresses the "elders," and in 5:2 he tells them "to shepherd" (verb *poimainō*) and "to oversee" (verb *episkopeō*)<sup>104</sup> God's flock.

(5) Teachers were those within the congregation who had some kind of formal responsibility for expounding or applying Scripture or explaining and reiterating apostolic teaching. "Timothy is urged not only to pursue a teaching

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<sup>103</sup> Hoehner, 543.

<sup>104</sup> The command "watch over" or "oversee" is omitted from certain manuscripts, but it is probably original.

ministry himself but also to entrust what he has learned to faithful men who will be able to teach others also (1 Tim. 4:13, 16; 2 Tim. 2:2)."<sup>105</sup>

b. These ministers of the Word function within the body as catalysts for the body's growth. As they deliver the nutrition of the word of God, the other members of the body are equipped to disseminate the truth of Christ throughout the body, to widen and deepen its impact and thus to nourish the body. The ministers of the Word condition the saints for the work of service (or ministry) so that the body of Christ is built up.

c. This building up of the body of Christ is to continue until its objective is achieved, until the church collectively arrives at its ultimate goal, which is described by three parallel clauses all beginning with the same preposition (*eis*). It is to continue until we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to the completed<sup>106</sup> man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. Until the church as a whole is as fully like Christ as it will be, with all having arrived at the same complete grasp of the faith and the Son of God, the work of building up the body continues.

(1) With Barth, Turner, and O'Brien, I understand this as a reference to the church's status after the return of Christ. Turner writes:

Paul is not describing some future historical period when the church gradually reaches unity of beliefs and organization, and becomes a mature church, as the NIV could be taken as suggesting. He anticipates rather the coming of Christ which will consummate the cosmic unity inaugurated at the cross (2:11-22). By faith, and in our knowledge of the Son, we already participate in this unity (indeed it is given to us to maintain [4:21]), but we yet wait to see it fully realized. At Christ's coming, and only then, shall we, the universal corporate church, 'form the Perfect Man, fully mature with the fullness of Christ himself' (NJB) or, perhaps better, attain 'to the mature manhood, measured by nothing less than the full stature of Christ' (REB).<sup>107</sup>

(2) The fact the work of building up the body will continue until its finalization at Christ's return need not mean that apostles and prophets always will be given to the church. Their role was foundational, and its effect continues through the truths revealed in the New Testament.

d. The purpose of the building up of the body of Christ that is to continue until the church's arrival at its complete, ultimate maturity is that the church may

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<sup>105</sup> O'Brien, 300.

<sup>106</sup> "The adjective τέλειος literally means 'having reached its end (τέλος).'" Hoehner, 554. I opt for "completed" (or "perfect") in the translation rather than "mature" because I think Paul is referring to the status of the corporate church at Christ's return.

<sup>107</sup> Turner, 1238.

*progress* toward that end, may increasingly grow out of the immaturity that makes it vulnerable to theological con men who peddle false teaching that undermines the apostolic gospel. The focus is on the theological grounding of the body of Christ.

e. Instead of being mired in infancy that makes them theologically unstable, the members of the body are to speak the truth out of love for one another, out of a commitment to one another's welfare (the opposite of the deceivers who seek their harm), and through that dissemination of truth grow as a body in all respects in Christlikeness.

f. It is from Christ that the entire body brings about the growth of the body in accordance with the activity of each of the individual parts. The growth is supplied from Christ the head as the body, in union with the head, serves as a conduit for Christ's transforming power through dissemination of divine truth.

g. "Every supporting ligament" probably is a reference to the ministers of the Word. As ligaments physically connect or join together various body parts, ministers of the Word serve to connect the members of the church by being the initial purveyors of the truths they hold in common. They serve a unifying or cohering purpose in the church as providers of a common message. O'Brien remarks (p. 315): "In this summarizing picture of v. 16, both gifted ministers and gifted members have a part to play in the body's growth. The former are represented by the ligaments which provide connections between the other parts of the body, while the latter have their distinct role to play in the well-being of the whole."

## ***IX. Live as new people in Christ (4:17-24)***

*<sup>17</sup>Therefore, I say this and solemnly declare in [the] Lord: you [are] no longer to walk as the Gentiles also walk, in [the] futility of their minds, <sup>18</sup>being darkened in understanding, having been alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. <sup>19</sup>Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to licentiousness so as to practice every kind of impurity with greed. <sup>20</sup>But you did not learn Christ that way. <sup>21</sup>For surely you heard of him and were taught in him, as [the] truth is in Jesus, <sup>22</sup>that, regarding [your] former way of life, you are to put off the old man who is being corrupted in accordance with the desires of deceit; <sup>23</sup>to be renewed in the spirit of your mind; <sup>24</sup>and to put on the new man who is created according to [the likeness of] God in righteousness and holiness of the truth.*

### **A. No longer live as Gentiles (4:17-19)**

1. Paul resumes the ethical exhortation that he began in 4:1-3, but he does so in light of his responsibility as an apostle that he has just explained in vv. 7-16. Part of the truth he is to convey to the saints is how they are to live, their ethical responsibilities as Christians.

2. He tells them that they can no longer live as Gentiles live, as those who have turned their backs on God and no longer have an awareness of or sensitivity to him. Having thrown off all restraint, they gave themselves to licentiousness (debauchery) so as to practice impurity "with greed," meaning with a continual lust for more.

#### B. Live new lives of righteousness and holiness (4:20-24)

1. Paul is confident they had been taught that being a Christian was incompatible with a sinful lifestyle. He feels sure they had been taught the necessity of changing the way they lived, making a fundamental break with their unethical past.

2. They had been taught to say goodbye to the sinful person they once were, a person who was in a state of moral decay as a result of desires that had been spawned by the lie in which they had wrapped themselves, the lie that they were not accountable to God.

3. When they were taught in Christ, they also were urged to be renewed in the spirit of their minds.

a. The expression "the spirit of your mind" is unusual and probably is a way of speaking about a person's interior life. As O'Brien puts it, "[t]hey are to yield themselves to God and allow themselves to be renewed in their inner person."<sup>108</sup> This is similar to Paul's exhortation in Rom. 12:2 ("Be transformed by the renewal of your mind").

b. "[T]his inward renewal is the work of the Holy Spirit (Tit. 3:5), progressively transforming believers into the image of Christ 'from one degree of glory to another' (2 Cor. 3:18). It is by the Spirit's power that the inner being is renewed every day (4:16)."<sup>109</sup>

4. And they were taught to put on the new self who displays the ethical qualities belonging to God, such as righteousness and holiness. Lincoln remarks, "Here, the language reflects a perspective in which there is a combination of God's gracious initiative and human responsibility, as it is made clear that the new person is created by God but must be put on by the believer."<sup>110</sup> These virtues of righteousness and holiness are a product of the truth, they flow from the truth of God's work and call in Christ.

#### X. Specific exhortations (4:25–5:2)

<sup>25</sup>Therefore, having put off falsehood, let each one speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. <sup>26</sup>Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your provoked state, <sup>27</sup>and do not give an opportunity to the devil. <sup>28</sup>Let the one who

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<sup>108</sup> O'Brien, 329.

<sup>109</sup> O'Brien, 330.

<sup>110</sup> Lincoln, 288.

*steals steal no longer, but rather let him labor, doing with [his own] hands what is good, so that he may have [something] to share with the person in need.* <sup>29</sup>*Let no spoiled word proceed from your mouth but whatever is good for building up according to the need, so that it may give grace to those who hear.* <sup>30</sup>*And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for [the] day of redemption.* <sup>31</sup>*Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and shouting and slander be removed from you, along with all malice.* <sup>32</sup>*Be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you. 5 Be imitators of God, therefore, as beloved children,* <sup>2</sup>*and walk in love, just as Christ also loved us and gave himself up on our behalf, an offering and sacrifice to God resulting in a fragrant aroma.*

A. Paul now elaborates on some specific consequences of their responsibility to put off the old man and put on the new man. Each of them is to put off falsehood and speak the truth to the other members of the body. If the body is to be healthy and growing, truth must be coursing through it (4:15). Falsehood circulating in the body is like a pathogen; it works against the body's health and growth.

B. In light of the responsibility to speak the truth to one another, they are told in vv. 26-27 to deal swiftly with their righteous anger, presumably by speaking the truth to the one who provoked it, so as not to allow that anger to deteriorate into sin. Anger is such a powerful emotion that even when it is proper it is dangerous. In sinful human beings, it readily morphs into malice, resentment, and bitterness, so harboring it provides an opportunity for the devil to work evil.

1. I think the anger addressed here is righteous anger because one is able to have it and not sin. There is an anger that is not sinful. Jesus was angry in Mk. 3:5, and yet Jesus was without sin (2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15; 1 Pet. 2:22). We often label this proper kind of anger "righteous indignation." Paul speaks of sinful anger in 4:31 (see also Col. 3:8; 1 Tim. 2:8).

2. It is not godly to be indifferent toward evil conduct, to yawn at moral outrages. If someone acts wickedly toward you or others, anger over that person's sin, his defiance of God, reflects the heart of God, who *hates* sin.

3. The problem, of course, is that righteous indignation in our sinful hands can easily devolve into sinful anger, an anger motivated by a sense of personal offense rather than the perpetrator's defiance of God and one that carries malice toward the perpetrator and desires revenge against him.

4. Paul is almost certainly citing the beginning of Ps. 4:4 which has the identical phrase: Be angry and do not sin. And I suspect he has in mind personal wrongs that may occur within the community.

5. O'Brien writes:

There is a proper place for righteous anger, but also 'the subtle temptation to regard my anger as righteous indignation and other people's anger as sheer bad temper' [quoting Bruce]. If ours is not free from injured pride, malice, or a spirit of revenge, it has degenerated into sin. The warning of James 1:19-20 makes the same point: 'Everyone should be . . . slow to become angry, for human anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires'.

In order to prevent anger from degenerating into sin a strict time limit is to be put on it: 'Do not let the sun go down on your anger'.<sup>111</sup>

C. Those who stole were to put that off, cease that conduct, and to put on the good work of earning material things that they might be able to share with those in need. Instead of taking from others through the minimal effort of stealing they are to work diligently so as to be in a position to give to others.

1. Hoehner notes that "working with one's hands" "does not necessarily imply that only manual work is valid, but Paul is using this expression as the normal portrayal of hard work for gain as opposed to gaining by stealing."<sup>112</sup>

2. Earning an honest living so as to have something to share with others is part of the good works for which we have been created in Christ (2:10).

D. No spoiled or rotten word is to proceed from their mouths, which probably means a word that is harmful. It is often translated in this context as foul, unwholesome, evil, or corrupt. Instead, they are to speak words that build others up according to their needs that their doing so may be a blessing, the giving of grace, to those who hear.

E. They are commanded not to grieve the Holy Spirit of God with whom they were sealed for the day of redemption.

1. The Spirit is grieved by rebellion in general, but here I think the focus is specifically on those sins that cause division and disrupt communal life, sins that break the unity of the Spirit (4:3). The preceding sins of lying, harboring anger, stealing, and destructive comments all qualify. They create resentment and hostility within the community.

2. The following commands also relate to this general command not to grieve the Holy Spirit.

a. Bitterness, wrath, anger, shouting, slander, and malice disrupt the communal peace and thus represent a failure to maintain the unity of the Spirit (4:3). They are to be done away with.

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<sup>111</sup> O'Brien, 339-340.

<sup>112</sup> Hoehner, 626.



b. On the other hand, the unity of the Spirit is maintained by their being kind, compassionate, and forgiving to one another. Regarding forgiveness, Paul reminds them that this is no more than God has already done for them in Christ, thus casting the unforgiver clearly in the position of the unmerciful servant in Mat. 18:21-35.

F. In sum, they are, as God's beloved children, to be imitators of him specifically with regard to loving one another. The model and ground for this life of love in the Christian community is Christ's love and sacrificial offering of himself. O'Brien writes:

The apostle's point is plain. Christ's handing himself over to death for his people was the supreme demonstration of his love for them. Because he is both the ground and model of their love, costly, sacrificial love is to be the distinguishing mark of their lives. To serve others in this way is not only to please God; it is also to imitate both God and Christ.<sup>113</sup>

### *XI. Light to replace darkness (5:3-14)*

*<sup>3</sup>But do not let sexual immorality and any impurity or greed even be named among you, as is fitting for saints, <sup>4</sup>nor obscene speech, foolish talk, or coarse joking, which are not proper, but rather thanksgiving. <sup>5</sup>For this you must know for sure: No sexually immoral or impure or greedy person (who is an idolater) has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.*

*<sup>6</sup>Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes on the sons of disobedience. <sup>7</sup>Therefore, do not be sharers with them; <sup>8</sup>for you were once darkness, but now [you are] light in the Lord; walk as children of light – <sup>9</sup>for the fruit of the light [consists] in all goodness, righteousness, and truth – <sup>10</sup>ascertaining what is pleasing to the Lord, <sup>11</sup>and do not participate in the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather even expose [them]. <sup>12</sup>For it is shameful even to mention the things being done by them in secret. <sup>13</sup>But everything exposed is made visible by the light, <sup>14</sup>for everything that makes visible is light. Therefore it says, "Awake, sleeping one, and rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."*

A. They are to live in love, but that is a self-giving, sacrificial love. There is absolutely no place in the Christian life for illicit or impure love, for self-indulgent sensuality. Paul says that sexual immorality, any impurity, and greed (covetousness) are not "even to be named" among them (5:3).

1. With NET, HCSB, NIV, and ESV, I translate *porneia* as "sexual immorality" because, as Best states, "*Porneia* has a wide range of meanings in relation to sexual behavior including fornication, adultery, homosexuality, prostitution, incest; 'fornication' is therefore too narrow a translation."<sup>114</sup> Sam Storms states:

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<sup>113</sup> O'Brien, 355.

<sup>114</sup> Best, 475.

Every Greek lexicon or dictionary of the NT is in agreement, that *porneia* refers to any form of sexual activity before or outside the relationship of monogamous marriage between a man and a woman. It can refer to pre-marital sex, adultery, homosexual practice, prostitution, bestiality, and all other expressions of sexual activity outside the marital relationship between a husband and wife.<sup>115</sup>

2. "Impurity" here refers to moral impurity, and more specifically, to moral impurity in the sexual realm. It is associated with sexual immorality in Rom. 1:24, 2 Cor. 12:21, Gal. 5:19, Col. 3:5, 1 Thess. 4:7. In this context, its focus is on unrestrained sexual behavior. Paul includes it with sexual immorality to cover the broadest possible spectrum of sexual misconduct.

3. Even "greed" probably has some sexual connotations here, referring to an excessive desire for self-gratification. The 10th commandment prohibits "coveting" one's neighbor's wife, and several Jewish writings combined the ideas of covetousness and sexual immorality. The cognate verb in 1 Thess. 4:6 has sexual connotations, and in Eph. 4:19 the word is used in the sense of being "greedy" for impurity (i.e., having a lust for more).<sup>116</sup>

4. That these sins are not "even to be named" among them means either that they should not occur even once or that they should not become acceptable subjects of conversation. In support of the latter is the comment in 5:12 "that it is shameful even to speak of the things being done in secret" by the disobedient. Casual discussion of "sexual sins creates an atmosphere in which they are tolerated and which can indirectly even promote their practice."<sup>117</sup> Paul obviously does not mean one cannot identify the sin to rebuke it or teach against it; he is mentioning it in that sense. He means, as Bruce writes, that "such unholy things should not be acceptable subjects of conversation among people whom God has called to be holy."<sup>118</sup>

a. The world understands quite well the principle that mainstreaming talk about sexual sins reduces resistance to it. This was part of the strategy of homosexual activists to promote acceptance of their sinful conduct within our society.

b. In 1987, two homosexual political strategists, Marshall Kirk and Hunter Madsen, wrote an article titled "The Overhauling of Straight America," and two years later published a book titled *After the Ball*. They laid out a six-point strategy for changing America's perception of homosexual behavior, and number 1 on that list was "Talk about gays and gayness as loudly and often as possible." They state, "The principle

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<sup>115</sup> Sam Storms, "The Problem of 'Porneia'," online at <http://www.samstorms.com/enjoying-god-blog/post/the-problem-of--porneia> (retrieved on 5/10/19).

<sup>116</sup> Lincoln, 322.

<sup>117</sup> Lincoln, 322.

<sup>118</sup> Bruce, 370.

behind this advice is simple: almost all behavior begins to look normal if you are exposed to enough of it at close quarters and among your acquaintances."<sup>119</sup>

B. Nor is there to be (or is their conversation to contain) obscene speech, foolish talk, or coarse joking. These things are not proper in the life of a Christian (5:4).

1. Obscene speech is what we know as talking dirty. Foolish talk is more general. It is unrestrained or unguarded speech (such as that of a drunken man), and in this context probably refers to talk about sex. Coarse joking refers here to the use of suggestive language and allusions to impure matters. O'Brien states, "All three terms refer to a dirty mind expressing itself in vulgar conversation."<sup>120</sup>

2. Instead of these things, Christian speech should be characterized by thanksgiving to God. Thanksgiving is the opposite of the self-indulgent sensuality of the preceding verses; it is recognition and appreciation of God's generous *giving*.

C. Paul strongly warns them about the danger of practicing sexual sin (5:5).

1. He flatly declares that no sexually immoral or (sexually) impure or (sexually) greedy person has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. The sexually immoral must repent to be included in that inheritance (see Gal. 5:19-21; 1 Cor. 6:9-10).

2. Greed, the excessive desire for something, in this case sexual experiences, is a form of idolatry because it elevates the desired thing over God; it is an idolatrous obsession.

D. Paul urges them not to let anyone deceive them into thinking that they can live in sexual sin and avoid the wrath of God (the opposite of life in the kingdom) (5:6). Every society has those voices. Because of the dire consequences, they must not join in with the disobedient (5:7).

E. In addition, they must not join in with the disobedient because they have been changed by becoming Christians. They have passed from darkness into the light of being in the Lord and should act accordingly (5:8). Living as children of light involves:

1. exhibiting goodness, righteousness, and truth (5:9)

2. ascertaining what is pleasing to the Lord (5:10)

3. not participating in the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather exposing them as evil (5:11)

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<sup>119</sup> From Alan Sears and Craig Osten, *The Homosexual Agenda* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 18.

<sup>120</sup> O'Brien, 361.

F. Indeed, it is shameful even to mention the things (the sexual sins) being done by the godless in secret (5:12).

G. It is light in the form of the godly living just described that exposes, makes visible, works of darkness by presenting a righteous standard for comparison (5:13).

H. The meaning of 5:14a is notoriously difficult.<sup>121</sup> I think Paul is supporting his statement that it is light that makes visible the works of darkness (v. 13) by noting indirectly that making things visible is the essence of light. Everything that makes things visible "is light" in the sense that is light's essence.

I. That revealing function of light is what is behind ("Therefore it says") the probable baptismal hymn quoted in 14b: "Awake, sleeping one, and rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." Those who are baptized into Christ pass from spiritual death to spiritual life, from alienation to reconciliation, and will have the Lord's light constantly revealing the truth to them, especially the truth about themselves. The new life is lived in the exposing light of Christ.

## *XII. So be careful how you live (5:15-20)*

*<sup>15</sup>Watch carefully, therefore, how you walk, not as unwise people but as wise, <sup>16</sup>making the most of the time, because the days are evil. <sup>17</sup>Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord [is]. <sup>18</sup>And do not get drunk with wine, in which there is debauchery, but be filled with [the] Spirit, <sup>19</sup>speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making music to the Lord with your hearts, <sup>20</sup>always giving thanks to God the Father for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

A. Because of the importance of holy living and the danger of deception, Paul urges them to take care to conduct themselves as wise people, as those who have insight into the true nature of things, especially God's gracious purposes in Christ. The wise are those who walk worthily of the calling to which they were called (4:1). To do so, of course, requires insight into the Lord's will (5:15).

B. Living wisely includes having a right attitude toward the opportunities time offers. Because we live in the midst of evil, it is even more important that we take every opportunity to let our light shine. Light is precious in this world, and our ray may be the only one someone sees (5:16).

C. Because wise or godly living is so important, for us and for others, Christians cannot afford to be foolish; rather, we must understand what the will of the Lord is. That

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<sup>121</sup> Against nearly all modern commentators and with the KJV and NKJV, I take φανερούμενον as a middle rather than passive voice.

is the heart of genuine wisdom. It is not right for a Christian to be apathetic toward the will of Christ (5:17).

D. Instead of the foolish pagan practice of getting drunk on wine, something that leads to debauchery, they are to engage in the wise counterpart of being filled with or by the Spirit.

1. Note that being filled with or by the Spirit is something one can be commanded to do. One can surrender one's will to what the Spirit wants done in one's life; one can increasingly give oneself over to his desires.

2. Whether one understands the preposition as "with" or "by," I think O'Brien captures the meaning of Spirit filling:

Believers are the recipients of the exhortation at 5:18, for, although we do not fill ourselves, we are to be receptive to the Spirit's transforming work, making us into the likeness (i.e., fulness) of God and Christ. We are to be subject to the Spirit's control (cf. 1:17; 3:16), which is tantamount to letting Christ's word rule in our lives (Col. 3:16), so that we may walk wisely (Eph. 5:15) and understand more fully the Lord's will (v. 17). The goal is to attain to what in principle we already have in Christ – fulness and spiritual maturity.<sup>122</sup>

3. Their being Spirit-filled leads not to debauchery, as does the pagans' being filled with wine, but to their speaking to each other in religious songs when in their gatherings they sing and make music to the Lord from their hearts, giving thanks then and always to God the Father for all things in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. (Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs are synonymous, being the three most common terms for religious songs in the LXX.)

a. O'Brien notes, "the apostle is not referring to two separate responses of speaking in songs (v. 19a) and singing (v. 19b), but is describing the same activity from different perspectives."<sup>123</sup> And since that activity clearly is corporate in that they speak to each another, its primary referent undoubtedly is the community gathered for worship.

b. Lincoln writes: "This Spirit-filled living will manifest itself in their corporate worship, as they address and edify one another by means of all the types of songs the Spirit inspires, as they sing their praise of Christ from the heart, and as they in Christ's name offer thanksgiving to their God and Father for all the blessings he has bestowed upon them."<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> O'Brien, 393-394.

<sup>123</sup> O'Brien, 394.

<sup>124</sup> Lincoln, 347.

c. As the church offers heartfelt praise and thanks to God in song, we also communicate to each other through that praise and thanksgiving and build each other up as a result. Our gatherings are not alcohol-fueled exercises in debasement but expressions of Spirit-transformed hearts to the glory of God.

### *XIII. Being Spirit-filled and submission in household relationships (5:21 – 6:9)*

#### A. Wives submit to your husbands (5:21-24)

<sup>21</sup>Submit to one another in fear of Christ. <sup>22</sup>Wives, [submit] to your own husbands as to the Lord, <sup>23</sup>for a husband is head of the wife as Christ also [is] head of the church, he himself [being] Savior of the body. <sup>24</sup>But as the church submits to Christ, so also the wives [are to submit] to the husbands in everything.

1. Verse 21 is a transition to the discussion of relationships in the ancient household. It could be understood as a continuation of the sentence begun in 5:18, but the standard editions of the Greek text (NA27 and UBS4) place a period at the end of v. 20 and begin a new paragraph at v. 21. John Muddiman states regarding v. 21:

The verb is a participle (lit. 'submitting') used in place of an imperative, a not uncommon idiom in a series of ethical exhortations (see Rom. 12.9-13; 1 Pet. 3.1, cf. 1 Pet. 2.18). It is grammatically possible, in the absence of any particle indicating the beginning of a new sentence, to see this verse as the completion of the series of participles in the preceding sentence: 'speaking, singing, chanting and giving thanks'. However, the doxological phrase at the end of verse 20 makes a satisfactory closure and would surely force the reader to draw a breath for a new paragraph. And in terms of content, 5:21 changes the subject and forms an introduction to the section that follows.<sup>125</sup>

2. That is why I start a new paragraph at v. 21 and render the participle as a command, as in the RSV, NEB, NRSV, REB, NJB, and NIV. As Muddiman notes, the section could be rendered like this:

<sup>18</sup> And do not get drunk with wine, in which there is debauchery, but **be filled with** [the] Spirit, <sup>19</sup> speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making music to the Lord with your hearts, <sup>20</sup> always giving thanks to God the Father for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>21</sup> submitting to one another in fear of Christ:

- <sup>22</sup> the wives to their own husbands as to the Lord, . . .
  - <sup>25</sup> Husbands, love the wives, . . .

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<sup>125</sup> Muddiman, 256.

- 6 Children, obey your parents in [the] Lord, . . .
  - <sup>4</sup>And fathers, do not make your children angry . . .
- <sup>5</sup>Slaves, obey the masters . . .
  - <sup>9</sup>And masters . . . giving up threatening . . .

But whether one begins a new sentence or paragraph at 5:21 is not key for the interpretation. The real questions are what is meant by "Submit (or submitting) to one another" and how do the following exhortations relate to that clause.

3. It is often claimed today that the command to submit to one another is a command for mutual or two-way submission, a command for person A to submit to person B and for person B likewise to submit to person A. That claim then becomes the basis for denying that a husband has leadership authority, a unique leadership role, and that a wife has a unique or distinctive duty to submit to her husband. It produces statements like, "I will submit to my husband as soon as he submits to me."

4. With a number of commentators, I think that is a serious misunderstanding of Paul's meaning. "Mutual submission" is an oxymoron, a self-contradictory phrase, like "governmental efficiency." In the context of personal relations, the Greek word rendered "submit" *always is one-directional*, always describes a hierarchical ordering in which one person has the leadership right, has authority over another, so by its very nature it cannot be mutual.

a. As O'Brien states:

[It] regularly functions to describe the submission of someone in an ordered array to another who was above the first, that is, in authority over that person. Further, none of the relationships where this verb appears is reversed: husbands are not told to be subject to their wives, nor parents to children, nor the government to citizens, nor disciples to demons. The word does not describe a 'symmetrical' relationship since it always has to do with an ordered relationship in which one person is 'over' and another 'under'. In this sense the term is not mutual in its force. . . . v. 21 is not calling 'for [the] mutual submission of all Christians to each other'. This is to misunderstand the semantic range of the term. Instead, believers are urged to be submissive to those who are in authority over them.<sup>126</sup>

b. Wayne Grudem likewise states:

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<sup>126</sup> O'Brien, 401-402.

When we look at the word Paul used when he said "submitting to one another" in Ephesians 5:21, we find that this word (Greek *hypotassō*) is always used of submission to an authority. No one has yet produced any examples in ancient Greek literature (either inside or outside the New Testament) where *hypotassō* is applied to a relationship between persons, and where it does not carry this sense of being subject to an authority.<sup>127</sup>

c. John Elliott states:

When the verb *hypotassō* and noun *hypotagē* are used in ethical contexts, they denote recognition of and respect for authority and order, which involve submission, deference to, subjection to, and obedience to superiors, namely God and humans in positions of recognized authority. . . . The meaning and use of the verb *hypotassō* in 1 Peter are consonant with its other NT occurrences and entail a recognition of and respect for order manifested in the acknowledgement of one's subordinate position in relation to those in authority, in showing proper deference, or in "placing oneself at the disposal of others" (Cervantes Gabarrón 1991a, 134-38).<sup>128</sup>

5. Despite that fact, it is claimed by some that the following phrase "to one another" requires that the submission be mutual, which means that *hypotassō* must here have a meaning it nowhere else has. Here, instead of meaning to yield to the leadership right of another, *hypotassō* supposedly refers to a two-way duty to be humble toward or to act in a thoughtful, considerate, or serving way toward another. But the phrase "to one another" does not require that the submission be mutual and thus does not require imposing on the word a definition it nowhere else has.

a. Just as in English, the Greek word rendered "to one another" (*allēlois*) can mean some within the group submitting to others within the group. Consider these statements, all of which are from articles on the internet:

- The comics at [the Comedy Club] unabashedly **stole material from one another**.
- Gang members are **killing one another** every day.
- They found his dogs so malnourished that they were **eating one another**.

b. Certainly no one thinks the writers meant to convey (a) that each comedian who had material stolen from him turned around and stole material from the one who stole from him, or (b) that gang members who were killed rose up and killed those who had killed them, or (c) dogs who were being eaten turned around and ate those who were eating them. In those cases, "one another" clearly means that *some* comedians, *some* gang members, and *some* dogs, were stealing from, killing, and eating *other* comedians, gang members, and dogs, respectively.

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<sup>127</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism & Biblical Truth* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2004), 191.

<sup>128</sup> John H. Elliott, *1 Peter*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 487.



c. You see that same usage of "one another" in the New Testament.

(1) Lk. 2:15 reports that "the shepherds said to *one another*, 'Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened.'" That means that some of the shepherds suggested this to the others, not that each said the same thing to the other.

(2) Lk. 12:1 tells of a crowd that was so large that "they were trampling on *one another*." That means that some in the crowd trampled on others in the crowd, not that each person who was trampled on also trampled on the one who trampled on him.

(3) Paul's command in Gal. 6:2 to "bear *one another's* burdens" does not mean that a person whose burdens were born by another must then bear the burdens of that person. Rather, it means that *some* who were more able should help bear the burdens of *others* who were less able.

(4) When James commanded in Jas. 4:11 that they not "speak against *one another*" he was not forbidding *mutual* slander but evil speech by any one of them against any other.

(5) Rev. 6:4 says "men slay *one another*," meaning that some men kill others, not that those being killed also kill those who are killing them.

6. This meaning of "to one another" fits neatly in this context. As indicated in the earlier quote of O'Brien, Paul is calling the Christians to be filled with the Spirit by submitting to those to whom they owe submission, which he then spells out in the following verses. Wives are to submit to their husbands, children are to submit to their parents, and slaves are to submit to their masters. They submit "to one another" by *some* within the group (wives, children, slaves) submitting to *others* within the group (husbands, parents, masters). So the phrase "to one another" provides no warrant for imposing on the word "submit" a meaning that is not attested anywhere in Greek literature.

7. O'Brien rightly comments: "In the present context, then, given that 'submit' is one-directional in its reference to submission to authority, and that the pronoun does not always indicate a symmetrical relationship, it is preferable to understand the clause 'submitting to one another' to refer to submission to appropriate authorities, not mutual submission."<sup>129</sup>

8. This does not mean, of course, that husbands, parents, and masters owe no duties to wives, children, and slaves, respectively. On the contrary, Paul spells out their duties after each of the duties of submission are specified. The point is not that husbands, parents, and masters lack their own duties but that those duties are different from a duty to submit. Husbands are never told to submit to their wives, parents are never told to submit to their children, and masters are never told to submit to their slaves.

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<sup>129</sup> O'Brien, 403.

9. That explains why there is no suggestion of mutuality in the other New Testament texts that declare a wife is to submit to her husband (Col. 3:18; Tit. 2:5; 1 Pet. 3:1, 5-6). If the duty to submit were mutual, whatever that means, why would nothing be said about it in these other texts instructing wives to submit to their husbands? I suggest that the duty to submit is not mutual and that it is a misreading Eph. 5:21 to conclude otherwise.

10. James Hurley puts it this way:

The conclusion to be reached is that when the New Testament speaks of the self-giving love of Christ and calls believers to emulate this, it does not use the verb *hypotassō* (submit oneself). When we are called upon to bend ourselves to the needs and desires of another, *hypotassō* is not the verb because it directly implies making oneself subject to authority, rather than responsible to needs. Let me repeat myself for the sake of clarity: I am not saying that husbands should not imitate Christ's self-giving love or that they are free to forget Paul's call to spare no effort for the building up of their wives (Eph. 5:22-33). Husbands *are* to love their wives as their own selves. I *am* saying that the New Testament does not use 'submit' (*hypotassō*) to convey this idea and that submitting to one another (mutual submission) is not an appropriate term to use in describing the mutual obligations of husbands and wives, parents and children, slaves and masters.<sup>130</sup>

11. Now, if you disagree and still think Paul is imposing a new meaning on the word "submit" by commanding a mutual submission, a duty that runs two ways instead of only one way, you then must explain how that works in the context of the following specifics not only of husbands and wives but also of parents and children and masters and slaves.

a. Since everyone recognizes that parents and masters have a unique leadership authority over children and slaves, that the duties they owe each other are not the same, one who insists that parents and children *submit* to each other and that masters and slaves *submit* to each other must quickly add "but not in the same way."

b. In other words, they must claim that whereas children submit to parent and slaves submit to masters *by yielding to their leadership authority*, parents "submit" to children and masters "submit" to slaves simply by being humble toward them and acting in a thoughtful, considerate, or serving way. So having mistakenly stretched the word "submit" to cover mutual, two-way obligations, they must revert to the one-way meaning, the actual meaning of the word, to account for the leadership authority of parents and masters. They thus bring in the back door the very notion of leadership authority that they ushered out the front door by claiming submission was mutual, all of which is misguided.

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<sup>130</sup> James B. Hurley, *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 144.

12. Before discussing the submission of wives to husbands, certain truths need to be understood.

a. Men and women are created equally in the image of God and together comprise mankind (Gen. 1:26-27, 5:1-2). In 1 Cor. 11:11-12 Paul points out that men and women are dependent on each other. In 1 Cor. 12:12-27, he makes clear that all who are in Christ are part of Christ's body and are equally precious; there are no second-class citizens in the kingdom. Peter describes husbands and wives as "co-heirs of the gracious gift of life" (1 Pet. 3:7). In terms of one's standing before God, Paul says in Gal. 3:28 that there is neither male nor female in Christ Jesus.

b. In the marriage partnership of two spiritually equal human beings, a man and a woman, the man bears the primary responsibility to lead the partnership in a God-glorifying direction. He is head of the wife as Christ also [is] head of the church (Eph. 5:23). God in his sovereignty has bestowed on the husband the responsibility of headship or leadership.

(1) In doing so, and in calling the wife to accept her husband's leadership, God is not saying that the wife is inferior to, less worthy, or less capable than her husband. Husbands and wives simply have different roles or functions.

(2) We ask, "*Why* did God place the leadership responsibility exclusively on the husband (and the men in the spiritual family) rather than letting the wife lead where she is the more (or equally) capable partner?" *Why* didn't he assign the roles on the basis of individual capability? Ultimately the answer is that God is sovereign (Ps. 103:19; 1 Tim. 6:15) and that he chose to do it that way.

(a) One could just as well ask why God gave the tribe of Levi the exclusive responsibility to care for the Tabernacle, or why he gave the family of Aaron the exclusive responsibility of serving as priests. Why limit these roles to people who happen to be born in a certain lineage rather than allowing everyone equal access to the roles?

(b) And that is precisely what led to Korah's rebellion in Numbers 16. Korah, a Levite, and 250 community leaders opposed Moses and Aaron on the basis that they should have equal access to God. All Israel was holy, so no one family line should be exalted to the priestly function. It was a challenge to God's right to choose select groups for specific roles. And, as you know, Korah, Dathan, and Abiram were swallowed by the earth, and the 250 community leaders were incinerated by God. The spirit of Korah is alive and well in those who deny the leadership role of men in the family and the church. As is usually the case, they have masked their rebellion with claims of insight and enlightenment, but it is still rebellion.

c. Understand that a submissive or nonleading role does not mean an inferior status.

(1) Jesus is God; he is one in nature, being, and essence with God the Father. So the Son is not inferior to or less worthy than the Father, yet he is functionally subordinate to the Father; he willingly submits to the Father's authority. This is made explicit in 1 Cor. 11:3, 15:27-28 and is demonstrated by a number of facts:

(a) He was sent by the Father (Mat. 10:40, 15:24, 21:3 7; Mk. 9: 37, 12:6; Lk. 4: 43, 9:48, 10:16, 20:13; Jn. 3:34, 4:34, 5:23, 5:30, 5:36-38, 6:29, 6:38-39, 6:44, 6:57, 7:16, 7:28-29, 7:33, 8:16, 8:18, 8:26, 8:29, 8:42, 9:41, 10:36, 11:42, 12:44-45, 12:49, 13:20, 14:24, 15:21, 16:5, 17:3, 17:8, 17:18, 17:21, 17:23, 17:25, 20:21; Gal. 4:4; Heb. 3:2; 1 Jn. 4:9-10, 4:14).

(b) He spoke the words of the Father (Jn. 7:16, 8:26-28, 8:38-40, 12:49-50, 14:24, 15:15).

(c) He came to do the Father's will (Jn. 4:34, 5:19, 6:38, 14:30; Heb. 10:5-9).

(d) He revealed the Father (Jn. 1:18, 12:45, 14:7-9, 17:6, 17: 26; Heb. 1:1-4).

(e) He seeks to please, glorify, and honor the Father (Jn. 5:30, 8:29, 14:13, 17:1-5).

(f) He judges only as he hears from the Father (Jn. 5:30).

(2) If Jesus, being in very nature God, can submit to the Father's authority, then certainly a wife can submit to her husband's leadership without denying her equal dignity or value. She is acting like Christ! That parallel is specifically drawn in 1 Cor. 11:3.

13. Paul says that wives are to submit to their own husbands as to the Lord, but that does not mean that the wife is to submit to her husband *as though he were Christ*.

a. Submission to Christ is expressed in unquestioning obedience because he is God. He is the holy and infallible Savior through whom all things were made. There can be no justification for questioning his will or attempting to enlighten him.

b. Husbands, on the other hand, are limited, sinful human beings. Unlike the Lord, they can make very foolish and even sinful choices.

(1) Submission to husbands is expressed in supporting their non-sinful decisions, not because of husbands' inherent qualities (who they are) but

because God has given the responsibility of leadership in the family to the husband. The wife is to submit to the husband "as to the Lord" in that, when the husband has finally chosen a course of action, the wife willingly supports and follows that choice. She does not resent it and does not seek to sabotage or undermine it.

(2) Of course, if a husband chooses a sinful course of action, the wife cannot support it. The husband's authority is from the Lord, and he has no authority to push one of Christ's disciples into sin. To follow one's husband into sin is not a submission that is "fitting in the Lord," to use the words of Col. 3:18.

c. Unlike the situation in submitting to Christ, the wife must help her husband in the discharge of his leadership responsibility. This often requires her to inform, question, advise, and correct her husband. A wife's submission to her husband does not mean she cowers silently and occasionally utters "Yes, O Great One." She is a nonleading partner and is called to use her abilities and gifts to bless her husband and the family.

d. In a healthy marriage, husbands and wives can almost always come to a consensus on what course of action should be taken, but occasionally they cannot. In those situations where a mutual decision cannot be reached, the wife is called by God to yield to her husband's decision. I think Hurley captures very well the spirit in which such decisions should be made:

The manner in which such decisions are handled is crucial. The husband may not be high-handed and stubborn, knowing that she will finally have to give way. That is not the model of Christ's headship. Neither may the wife be grudging and resentful. That is not the manner of our response to Christ. In the last analysis, when the two can devote no more time to individual and joint seeking of the grace of God to permit them to come to one mind or to be willing to yield to the other, an exchange along the following lines is in order:

Husband: "Not because I am inherently wiser or more righteous, nor because I am right (although I do believe I am or I would not stand firm), but because it is finally my responsibility before God, we will take the course which I believe is right. If I am being sinfully stubborn, may God forgive me and give me the grace to yield to you."

Wife: "Not because I believe you are wiser in this matter (I don't) or more righteous, nor because I accept that you are right (because I don't or I would not oppose you), but because I am a servant of God who has called me to honor your headship, I willingly yield to your decision. If I am wrong, may God show me. If you are wrong, may he give you grace to acknowledge it and to change."<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Hurley, 151.

14. It is true that Christ is Savior of the body, unlike the husband *vis-a-vis* his wife; but despite that difference, wives are to submit to their husbands in everything, just as the church does to Christ.

## B. Husbands love your wives (5:25-33)

<sup>25</sup>Husbands, love the wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave himself up for her, <sup>26</sup>that he might sanctify her, cleansing [her] by the washing of the water with a word, <sup>27</sup>that he might present the church to himself [as] glorious, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but in order that she might be holy and blameless. <sup>28</sup>In the same way, the husbands [also] ought to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself, <sup>29</sup>for no one ever hated his own flesh but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ also [does] the church, <sup>30</sup>for we are members of his body. <sup>31</sup>"For this reason, a man will leave father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." <sup>32</sup>This mystery is great, but I am speaking with reference to Christ and to the church. <sup>33</sup>In any case, you also, one by one, let each love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she fears the husband.

1. Husbands are to love their wives just as Christ also loved the church and gave himself up for her.

a. Given the exhortation to wives to submit to their husbands, first-century readers probably expected husbands to be exhorted "to rule" their wives. Instead, Paul commands husbands "to love" their wives. Love is an essential quality in the lives of all Christians (1:4, 3:17, 4:2, 4:15-16, 5:2), but here it is specifically required of husbands in relation to their wives.

b. The very fact he commands it shows that it involves an act of will. Biblical love is not infatuation; it is a self-giving commitment to another person's welfare. Of course, in a marriage this love exists in a context of natural affection and sexual intimacy, but that is not its essence.

c. The model for this love that husbands are commanded to have for their wives is Christ's love for the church. The husband is to view his relationship with his submissive wife, not in terms of what he can demand from her, but in terms of how he can give to her. He is not to seek to harm or exploit her, to use her for his gain, but to bless her.

d. A husband's commitment to his wife is to be so great that there is no sacrifice he is unwilling to make for her *genuine* welfare. If something is needed for her *genuine* wellbeing – for her good, her flourishing – understanding that not every want qualifies, and can be given consistently with the responsibility to lead the family in a God-glorifying direction, the husband is called to deny himself, to sacrifice his preferences and wants, in order to bless her. After all, Christ gave himself up on a cross for the church! You are to love your wife that way.

2. Having spoken of Christ's love for the church, Paul elaborates on its purpose (not intending this as part of the husband's responsibility for his wife). The purpose of Christ's love for the church, supremely expressed in his death, was:

a. To sanctify her – This means to consecrate her to God, to set her apart for a special relationship with him. Best remarks (p. 542), "Those whom God sanctifies are separated from the secular sphere and brought within that of his holiness (cf Eccles 33.12; 45.4), and are therefore acceptable to him." This sanctification was achieved by Jesus' atoning sacrifice on the cross, the cleansing effect of which is appropriated "by the washing of the water with a word."

(1) This is almost certainly a reference to baptism and is recognized as such by the vast majority of commentators. As Markus Barth acknowledges in *Ephesians 4-6*, Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974), 692: "Practically all interpreters in the East and West, in ancient, medieval, Reformation and modern times, agree in explaining [Eph.] 5:26 as a reference to baptism." Recent commentators sharing this view include Wood, Bruce, Lincoln, Perkins, Best, Muddiman, Klein, and Baugh.<sup>132</sup>

(2) Best writes, "As soon as the readers began to believe and were baptised they were saints, i.e. sanctified; sanctification and baptism are connected in 1 Cor 6:11, a connection brought out later in our verse."<sup>133</sup>

(3) The "with a word" is either the confession of the baptized person or the formula pronounced by the baptizer. A less likely possibility is to take "by the word" with "cleansing" (i.e., cleansing by the word through the washing in water). It would then be a reference to the gospel message.

(4) This allusion to baptism is particularly apt to the bridal imagery Paul is employing. Jewish marital custom employed a prenuptial bath, and the marital imagery of Ezek. 16:8-14 refers to God washing his bride.

b. To present the church to himself as glorious, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing – The bridal imagery comes to the fore. Christ died to make the church fit for him as a bride. Her splendor is not flawed by any physical defect (spot, wrinkle, or any such thing). The next clause makes clear that this is a metaphorical reference to her being holy and blameless.

c. To make the church holy and blameless – Purity is the distinguishing mark of the church Christ died to form. As I said with reference to 1:4, we

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<sup>132</sup> A. Skevington Wood, "Ephesians" in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978) 11:77; Bruce, 388; Lincoln, 375; Pheme Perkins, *Ephesians*, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 134; Best, 542-543; Muddiman, 265; Klein, 151-152; and Baugh, 487.

<sup>133</sup> Best, 542.

are now without fault or blemish, not in ourselves but because God in his grace has made us that way, and we will be declared as such when we are presented before him for judgment (Col. 1:22; Eph. 5:27). And on that Day, at the consummation of the kingdom, our transformation into his image will be completed so that we will be in nature and practice what we have been by God's merciful decree.

3. In the same way as Christ, who loves the church as his body (5:23, 30), husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. Just as a husband cares for his body's needs, so his love for his wife should be the sort that cares for her needs and facilitates her growth and development. This makes perfect sense given that the husband and wife are "one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). After all, no one ever hated his own flesh; instead, he nourishes and cherishes it.

4. One nourishes and cherishes one's own body as Christ also nourishes and cherishes the church, *for we are members of his body*. There is an intimate union between Christ and his disciples.

a. Paul elaborates on the Christ-church relationship by citing Gen. 2:24 without any introductory formula indicating that he is citing Scripture (e.g., "It says"). He simply begins the citation with its opening words, "For this reason," the immediate antecedent of which in Ephesians is "for we are members of his body." It seems he is saying, "*Because we are members of Christ's body*, men and women unite in the one-flesh relationship of marriage." If that is correct, he is saying that marriage was instituted in part to serve as a type for Christ's relationship with the church. O'Brien states, "Indeed, it was God's intention from the beginning when he instituted marriage to picture the relationship between Christ and his redeemed people."<sup>134</sup>

b. He says, "This mystery is great" (or profound), and then he clarifies that the mystery to which he is referring is Christ's relationship with the church. The mystery of Christ's relationship with the church is another aspect of the one grand mystery God has now revealed in Christ, and it is that mystery of which the intimate union of marriage is to be a type. Lincoln writes, "Both the OT passage and the marriage relationship of which it speaks are connected with the mystery, but their connection is that they point to the secret that has now been revealed, that of the relationship between Christ and the Church."<sup>135</sup> O'Brien adds (p. 434), "The mystery is not any particular marriage or marriage itself; it is the union of Christ and the church which is reflected in a truly Christian marriage. Such a mystery is indeed 'profound'."

c. As an intended type for Christ's relationship with the church, Christian marriage is to live up to that role. It is to reflect Christ's loving relationship with the church. So marriage is a type for Christ's relationship with the church, and Christ's relationship with the church sets the standard for how it is to function in that capacity.

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<sup>134</sup> O'Brien, 438.

<sup>135</sup> Lincoln, 381.



4. The bottom line, given in v. 33, is that, even if one does not grasp the full import of marriage's relationship to Christ and the church, husbands are to love their wives as themselves, and wives are to respect (fear) their husbands.

### C. Children obey your parents (6:1-3)

*Children, obey your parents in [the] Lord, for this is right.* <sup>2</sup>"Honor your father and mother" – which is [the] first commandment with a promise – <sup>3</sup>"that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth."

1. The children are here commanded to obey their parents as an element of their Christian discipleship. They are to obey them "in the Lord," meaning as an aspect of their (the children's) being "in the Lord." (This phrase appears in 2:21, 4:1, 4:17, 5:8, 6:10, 6:21.) This parallels the motivation of a wife's submission ("as to the Lord") and a slave's obedience ("as to Christ").

2. In Rom. 1:30 disobedience to parents is cited as a sign of Gentile depravity, and in 2 Tim. 3:2 it is cited as a sign of the evil of the last days.

3. The term "child" primarily denotes relationship rather than age and can be used of adults. The context suggests that these children were old enough to be conscious of a relationship to their Lord and to be appealed to on the basis of it, but young enough still to be in the process of being brought up (6:4). According to C. L. Mitton, this exhortation "could only refer to older children (perhaps what we should call teenagers) who were of an age to make a personal commitment to Christ, but still young enough to be living at home with their parents."<sup>136</sup>

4. For this is right – Paul appeals to them not only on the basis of their Christian commitment but also on the basis of what is right. It was common practice (e.g., Stoics) to appeal to what was generally recognized as right.

5. Paul reinforces his command by an appeal to Scripture. He cites the fifth of the Ten Commandments from Deut. 5:16 (see also, Ex. 20:12). He notes that it is the first commandment with a promise, and then gives the promise, to emphasize its importance, not necessarily meaning that the promise is applicable to their context. On the other hand, he may be applying the promise to their context in the sense that, as a general rule, those who heed the instruction of godly parents live well and long.

### D. Fathers do not anger your children (6:4)

<sup>4</sup>*And fathers, do not make your children angry but bring them up in [the] training and instruction of [the] Lord.*

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<sup>136</sup> Quoted in Lincoln, 403.

1. Having specified the children's duty to submit in the form of obeying their parents, he then gives the duty of fathers as the representative of those to whom the submission is owed. Fathers are commanded not to make their children angry but to bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. Fathers are specifically addressed because, as the head of the household, they have the primary responsibility for training the children. What is said to them, however, naturally applies to mothers as well.

2. Parents are not to provoke anger, meaning justifiable anger, in their children. This rules out excessively severe discipline, unreasonably harsh demands, abuse of authority, arbitrariness, subjecting a child to humiliation, and all forms of gross insensitivity to a child's needs and sensibilities. All of that is wrong, and a Christian parent is to have nothing to do with it.

3. Positively, fathers are to supply their children with Christian instruction. As grateful as you may be for whatever assistance you receive in that regard from others in the church, you are responsible for bringing them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. That is not optional; it is your duty as a Christian father. So if you think you are not equipped for the task, do not understand the Christian faith well enough to inculcate it into your child or to serve as quality control on what they receive from others, you need to spend the time and effort to be able to do so.

#### E. Slaves obey your earthly masters (6:5-8)

*<sup>5</sup>Slaves, obey the masters according to the flesh with fear and trembling, in sincerity of your heart, as to Christ, <sup>6</sup>not by way of eye-service, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ doing the will of God from [the] soul, <sup>7</sup>servicing with enthusiasm, as to the Lord and not to men, <sup>8</sup>knowing that whatever good each person may do, this he will receive from [the] Lord, whether slave or free.*

1. Christian slaves are to serve their earthly master wholeheartedly because that service is part of their discipleship, part of their service to the Lord. They are not to be grudging, resentful, half-hearted, and unreliable in their service but are to serve their masters with sincerity and faithfulness as they do Christ.

2. They are to do so knowing that Christ will reward faithfulness to him, whether it is shown by a slave or a free man.

#### F. Masters treat your slaves properly (6:9)

*<sup>9</sup>And masters, do the same to them, giving up threatening, knowing that the Master, both of them and you, is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.*

1. Having laid out the Christian slave's duty to submit to his master, Paul addresses the duty of their masters. Christian masters are likewise to make their service of the one heavenly Master determinative of their actions.

2. They and the slaves they own are fellow slaves of Christ. This will keep them from abusing their slaves. O'Brien states, "Christ's lordship over the lives of both slaves and masters has the effect of changing the dynamic of the relationship between them and lifting their mutual attitudes and behaviour to a new plane."<sup>137</sup>

## Excursus on First-Century Slavery

Slavery was a basic social institution in the ancient world. S. Scott Bartchy writes, "As many as one-third of the population of the empire were enslaved, and an additional large percentage had been slaves earlier in their lives."<sup>138</sup>

The Bible does not endorse or assume the goodness of any slavery; it simply tolerates in a specific social context a regulated form of a certain kind of slavery. It takes ancient slavery as a fact of life and regulates people's involvement in it. Unlike marriage and parent-child relationships, Scripture nowhere suggests that slavery was ordained or instituted by God. On the contrary, slavery was a product of sinful humanity. This is evident from the fact that in 1 Cor. 7:21 Paul urges, "Were you a slave when you were called? Don't let it trouble you-- although if you can gain your freedom, do so" (NIV). He would never give such advice to spouses or to parents and children. In this regard, it is probably more than coincidental that, from all indications, neither Jesus nor the Apostles owned slaves.

The seeds for slavery's dissolution were sown in texts like Phlmn. 16 ("no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother"), Eph. 6:9 ("Masters . . . do not threaten [your slaves]"), Col. 4:1 ("Masters, provide your slaves what is right and fair"), and 1 Tim. 6:1-2 (masters are "brothers"). (Note also that Jesus' teaching about mercy and forgiving debts [e.g., Mat. 6:12, 18:23-34] implies the inappropriateness of debt-slavery.) As has been said, where those seeds of equality came to full flower, the very institution of slavery would no longer be slavery.

Early Christians understood this implication, the significance of these "seeds." They not only demonstrated a radically different attitude toward slaves, dealing with them as they did freemen, but began the practice of freeing slaves one by one as they had opportunity. There are reports of early Christians releasing huge numbers of slaves, regarding which Philip Schaff comments:

These legendary traditions may indeed be doubted as to the exact facts of the case, and probably are greatly exaggerated; but they are nevertheless

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<sup>137</sup> O'Brien, 456.

<sup>138</sup> S. Scott Bartchy, "Slave, Slavery" in Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids, eds., *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 1098.

conclusive as the exponents of the spirit which animated the church at that time concerning the duty of Christian masters. It was felt that in a thoroughly Christianized society there can be no room for despotism on the one hand and slavery on the other.<sup>139</sup>

Paul Chamberlain writes:

In AD 315, only two years after the Edict of Milan the Christian emperor Constantine took the small step of criminalizing the act of stealing children for the purpose of bringing them up as slaves. Over the next few centuries, Christian bishops and councils called for the redemption and freeing of slaves, and Christian monks freed many themselves. The effects were stunning. By the twelfth century slaves in Europe were rare, and by the fourteenth century they were almost unknown on that continent, including in England.<sup>140</sup>

I do not doubt that the Christian principles of equality and brotherhood should have flowered more quickly into the eradication of slavery, but that was the result of Christian dullness to the implications of the gospel not to the intent or purpose of God. And, of course, even after slavery was essentially eliminated in Europe under Christian influence, the Evil Empire struck back.

European slavery was revived by the British in the seventeenth century, followed by the Spanish and the Portuguese. The abolitionist movement of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was led by Christians, people like William Wilberforce, Charles Spurgeon, John Wesley, William Lloyd Garrison, Charles Finney, and Harriet Beecher Stowe. This movement was driven by the understood implications of certain of the above biblical texts and the outright condemnation of kidnapping and slave trading in Ex. 21:16 and 1 Tim. 1:10, activities that characterized Colonial slavery.

The fact God did not forbid Christians in the first century from owning slaves but rather tolerated a regulated form of first-century slavery does not mean that was his ideal for mankind, that he was just fine with it. His ideal is brotherhood and equality, but it is possible that the world had gotten so twisted that he was willing to tolerate less than his ideal as a concession to the hardness of men's hearts, similar to what he did, through Moses, in permitting divorce (see Mat. 19:3-9).

Or maybe he tolerated it because mandating the release of slaves in that specific social context would have caused anarchy and consequent suffering as the gospel exploded across the Roman world. In other words, perhaps the thorn of slavery was embedded so deeply in the society that it needed to be removed slowly. Perhaps society first needed to be altered under Christianity's influence to be able to handle such a change without

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<sup>139</sup> Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church Vol. II*, 5<sup>th</sup> rev. ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1891), 353.

<sup>140</sup> Paul Chamberlain, *Why People Don't Believe* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 141.

overwhelming adverse side effects, without great ancillary suffering. James D. G. Dunn states:

[S]lavery was an established fact of life in the ancient world. As many as one-third of the inhabitants of most large urban centres were slaves. The economies of the ancient world could not have functioned without slavery. Consequently, a responsible challenge to the practice of slavery would have required a complete reworking of the economic system and a complete rethinking of social structures, which was scarcely thinkable at the time, except in idealistic or anarchic terms.<sup>141</sup>

Or maybe he tolerated it because he knew that mandating its abolition in that social setting would have triggered such an immediate and violent cultural reaction that the young church would be criminalized prematurely and thereby be crushed or at least prevented from spreading in the way that it did. In that case, you can see why God might want to plan for slavery's *gradual* death through the principles of equality and brotherhood rather than lead with that ethical mandate.

In the context of this regulated form of first-century slavery that God tolerated, if release was desired it needed to be worked out on an individual basis consistent with the principle of brotherhood. But as long as the relationship remained, the slave could not take advantage of having a brother for a master, and the master could not mistreat the slave.

That God tolerated a regulated form of first-century slavery does not mean he would tolerate that same form of slavery in a different social context, where it was not so tied up with the functioning of the society that mandating its removal would cause economic collapse, anarchy, and consequent suffering or where the entire church's survival or its launching into the world would not be jeopardized. Neither does it mean God would tolerate other forms of slavery, a slavery different from the slavery of the first century, such as the slavery that existed in early America.

That is why those believers in early America who cited the Bible in support of Colonial slavery were wrong. They were abusing the Bible by jumping from the fact God had *tolerated* an "apple," a modified form of first-century slavery, to the claim he had thereby *endorsed* an "orange," the slavery of early America.

Slavery in the first century was a very different institution from early American slavery. Bartchy states (paragraphs are not continuous in original):

Central features that distinguish 1st century slavery from that later practiced in the New World are the following: racial factors played no role; education was greatly encouraged (some slaves were better educated than their owners) and enhanced a slave's value; many slaves carried out sensitive and highly responsible social functions; slaves could own property (including other slaves!); their religious and cultural traditions were the same as those of the

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<sup>141</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 699.

freeborn; no laws prohibited public assembly of slaves; and (perhaps above all) the majority of urban and domestic slaves could legitimately anticipate being emancipated by the age of 30.

It must also be stressed that, despite the neat legal separation between owners and slaves, in none of the relevant cultures did persons in slavery constitute a social or economic class. Slaves' individual honor, social status, and economic opportunities were entirely dependent on the status of their respective owners, and they developed no recognizable consciousness of being a group or of suffering a common plight. For this reason, any such call as "slaves of the world unite!" would have fallen on completely deaf ears. (From p. 69: "The great slave rebellions, all of which were led primarily by prisoners of war between 140-70 B.C.E., never sought to abrogate slavery. Rather, these rebels sought either escape or to turn the tables by enslaving the owners.")

Furthermore, by no means were those in slavery regularly to be found at the bottom of the social-economic pyramid. Rather, in that place were those free and impoverished persons who had to look for work each day without any certainty of finding it (day laborers), some of whom eventually sold themselves into slavery to gain some job security.

Large numbers of people sold themselves into slavery for various reasons, e.g., to pay debts, to climb socially (Roman citizenship was conventionally bestowed on a slave released by a Roman owner), to obtain special jobs, and above all to enter a life that was more secure and less strenuous than existence as a poor, freeborn person.

Slaves were used for "an enormous variety of functions in enormously different circumstances," some of which when compared to New World slavery seem astonishingly responsible: "doctors, teachers, writers, accountants, agents, bailiffs, overseers, secretaries, and sea-captains."

Since slaves represented a substantial investment by their owners . . . , they could at least expect to receive enough food to keep them alive and working. Manumission could mean the end of that security. Epictetus [a first-century philosopher], himself an ex-slave, took pleasure in pointing out that the slave who thinks only of gaining his freedom may be reduced, when he is manumitted, to "slavery much more severe than before."

For many, self-sale into slavery with anticipation of manumission was regarded as the most direct means to be integrated into Greek and Roman society. For many this was the quickest way to climb socially and financially. As such, in stark contrast to New World slavery, Greco-Roman slavery functioned as a process rather than a permanent condition, as a temporary phase of life by means of which an outsider obtained "a place

within a society that has no natural obligations of kinship or guest-friendship towards him."<sup>142</sup>

Andrew Lincoln writes:

Many slaves in the Greco-Roman world enjoyed more favorable living conditions than many free laborers. Contrary to the supposition that everyone was trying to avoid slavery at all costs, it is clear that some people actually sold themselves into slavery in order to climb socially, to obtain particular employment open only to slaves, and to enjoy a better standard of living than they had experienced as free persons. Being a slave had the benefit of providing a certain personal and social security.<sup>143</sup>

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#### ***XIV. Stand firm in spiritual warfare (6:10-20)***

*<sup>10</sup>Finally, be strengthened in the Lord, that is, in the power of his strength. <sup>11</sup>Put on the full armor of God so that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. <sup>12</sup>For our struggle is not against blood and flesh but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world-controlling powers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. <sup>13</sup>Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done all things, to stand firm. <sup>14</sup>Stand therefore, having wrapped your waist with [the belt of] truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, <sup>15</sup>and having fitted the feet with the readiness of the gospel of peace; <sup>16</sup>in addition to all these, having taken up the shield of faith, by which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. <sup>17</sup>And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is [the] word of God, <sup>18</sup>with every kind of prayer and petition praying at all times in [the] Spirit, and to this end keeping alert, with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, <sup>19</sup>and for me, that a word may be given to me in [the] opening of my mouth to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, <sup>20</sup>for which I am an ambassador in chains, so that I may speak boldly about it as is necessary [for] me to speak.*

##### **A. Be strengthened by the Lord for the battle (6:10-13)**

1. The righteous living that Paul has been urging on them since 4:1 is not without opposition. So Paul urges them to be strengthened in the power of the Lord's strength.

a. O'Brien remarks, "Christ's triumph over the powers has 'already' occurred (1:21), so believers no longer live in fear of them. But the fruits of that victory

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<sup>142</sup> S. Scott Bartchy, "Slavery (Greco-Roman)" in David Noel Freedman, ed., *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 6:66-70.

<sup>143</sup> Lincoln, 418.

have 'not yet' been fully realized, so Christians must be aware of the conflict and be equipped with divine power to stand against them."<sup>144</sup>

b. Taking the first imperative as a passive (be strengthened, instead of a middle, strengthen yourselves), Paul is commanding them to lay hold of the strength Christ provides. He will make them strong for battle, but they have a role to play in that process. They must appropriate the power the Lord provides.

2. They must appropriate the Lord's power because they are not fighting mere men. Rather, they (and we) are engaged in a deadly war against evil spirit beings that are under the devil's leadership.

a. The Hebrew name "satan" derives from a verb meaning to be or act as an adversary. The Greek word "Satan" is a transliteration of the Hebrew name. The most common Greek word for Satan is "the devil" (*diábolos*), which may have come from a verb meaning to separate. If so, it implies the idea of one who separates humans from God. Other terms used of him include: "accuser" (Rev. 12:10), "tempter" (Mat. 4:3; 1 Thess. 3:5), "Beelzebul" (Mat. 10:25, 12:24, 27; Mk. 3:22; Lk. 11:15, 18, 19), "evil one" (Mat. 6:13, 13:19, 38; Jn. 17:15; Eph. 6:16; 1 Jn. 2:13, 3:12, 5:18), "Belial" (2 Cor. 6:15), "enemy/adversary" (1 Pet. 5:8), "deceiver" (Rev. 12:9, 20:3), "great dragon" (Rev. 12:3), "father of lies" (Jn. 8:44), "murderer" (Jn. 8:44), and "Destroyer" (Rev. 9:11).

b. "Beelzebul" is a transliteration of the Greek word. A majority of scholars believe it means "lord of the dwelling," with "dwelling" referring either to the house of demons or the house of a pagan god.<sup>145</sup> Belial, and its variant, Beliar, was used for Satan in early Judaism, perhaps being a combination of a Hebrew word for "worthlessness" and the name of the pagan god Baal.<sup>146</sup>

c. John refers to Satan as "the prince/ruler of this world" (Jn. 12:31, 14:30, 16:11) and says that the whole world lies in his power (1 Jn. 5:19). What he means is that those opposed to God ("the world") are under Satan's control or influence. That is why Satan is called the "god of this age" (2 Cor. 4:4).

d. He has "blinded the minds of unbelievers" (2 Cor. 4:4) in that he has shaped people's assumptions and perceptions, socializing them into this "worldly age" (Eph. 2:2), so that the gospel sounds foolish or offensive (1 Cor. 1:18). He has trapped others in the web of false doctrine (2 Tim. 2:25-26). Indeed, in 1 Tim. 4:1-2 Paul attributes to demons the false teachings of certain people, and in 1 Jn. 4:1 John indicates they are at work in false prophets. Thus, the Jewish opponents of the church are called a "synagogue of Satan" in Rev. 2:9, 3:9.

e. 1 Peter 5:8 warns that our "enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." His presence in our world is also evident from

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<sup>144</sup> O'Brien, 458.

<sup>145</sup> Sydney H. T. Page, *Powers of Evil* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 101.

<sup>146</sup> George H. Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015), 352.



his description as the "ruler of the domain of the air" (Eph. 2:2), which suggests proximity to us, and from the fact his minions are said to be in "the heavenly realms" (Eph. 6:12). By "heavenly realms" I think Paul means the "first heaven" or atmosphere rather than the "third heaven" which is the dwelling of God (see, 2 Cor. 12:2). These beings probably are connected to the air because they are spiritual creatures and thus "airlike."

3. Satan, and implicitly his minions, employs a multitude of deceptive schemes and stratagems to lure and trick his enemies, to turn them away from God and his purposes. Klyne Snodgrass writes:

Mention of the "schemes" of the devil reminds us of the trickery and subterfuge by which evil and temptation present themselves in our lives. Evil rarely looks evil until it accomplishes its goal; it gains entrance by appearing attractive, desirable, and perfectly legitimate. It is a baited and camouflaged trap.<sup>147</sup>

4. As an aside, demons can take possession of people, as we see in quite a few places in Scripture, but there are a number of questions about this.

a. Compared to the rest of the Bible and to modern Western society, demons took possession of people with astonishing frequency during Jesus' ministry. In *Angels and the New Spirituality*, Duane Garrett offers several possible explanations for this:

First, demon activity may have been more common when Jesus was on earth because of the spiritual conflict surrounding the incarnation. Second, perhaps demon possession is still common but we do not recognize it as easily as Jesus did. Third, Jesus happened to come during a time that was politically, socially, and religiously unstable when people embraced strange new types of spirituality. Thus, demon possession was more common. On the third view, demonic activity waxes and wanes in different times and different places in proportion to the behavior of the society. Personally, I think there is truth in all three explanations.<sup>148</sup>

b. But whatever the overall level of demon activity, I am convinced that a Christian who is faithfully abiding in Christ cannot be demon possessed in the sense of being indwelt by a demon.

(1) Paul says in Rom. 8:9 that the Christian is controlled by the indwelling Spirit of God. Our body is the "temple of the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 6:19), and there simply is no agreement between the temple of God and idols (2 Cor. 6:16).

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<sup>147</sup> Quoted in O'Brien, 464.

<sup>148</sup> Duane Garrett, *Angels and the New Spirituality* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 31.

(2) Christians are told to resist Satan, standing firm in the faith, and that he will flee from them (1 Pet. 5:9; Jas. 4:7). Since fleeing is the opposite of possessing, it seems the faithful Christian is immune to demon possession.

(3) The fact there are no examples in Scripture of a faithful Christian being indwelt by a demon reinforces that conclusion.

c. This is not to say that Christians are immune to demonic *influences*. The issue is one of the nature and degree of that demonic influence.

d. Of course, it goes without saying that we should absolutely avoid any occultic practices such as contacting spirits or dead people and exploring such things as psychic powers, mystical experiences (e.g., soul travel), and fortune telling. We likewise should avoid the objects connected with these things, such as tarot cards, crystal balls, ouija boards, love potions, charms, and occult symbols (e.g., 666, pentagrams, and upside-down question mark with a cross [a Satanic symbol]).

5. The way in which they are to appropriate the Lord's power is by putting on the full armor of God, meaning the full array of offensive and defensive equipment that God supplies. The threat is so serious that they need to don the *whole* armor to be able to stand their ground so as to prevail in the fight, so as to resist a time of particularly severe assault, which he labels "the evil day."

B. Stand firm having put on God's armor (6:14-17) – Paul here specifies the divine armor they need to put on if they are to stand firm.

1. Belt of truth – This probably refers to the leather apron that hung under a Roman soldier's armor and protected the thighs.<sup>149</sup> The Christian must be a "person of truth," one who accepts and prizes it. A passion for truth will protect one from Satan's schemes, which routinely depend on some compromise or distortion of the truth (e.g., Did God really say? I deserve to do this; this is unfair; I need this; God wants me to be happy; God doesn't care; it hurts no one). We must be unwilling to lie to ourselves.

2. Breastplate of righteousness – The breastplate covered the Roman soldier's chest to protect it against blows and arrows. A commitment to righteousness is a protection against Satan. If one becomes lax with regard to righteousness, with regard to doing what is right and just, one's vital organs are exposed, and Satan will exploit it. You weaken your resolve to do right, your resistance to wrongdoing, and you are opening the door.

3. Feet fitted with the readiness of the gospel of peace – Readiness for battle comes from an appreciation of the gospel as the gospel *of peace*, as the source of our peace with God and with one another. If we undervalue this peace, this reconciliation, we will more easily be influenced to disrupt it. If our relationship with God begins to

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<sup>149</sup> O'Brien, 473.

seem less significant, less of a big deal, the Enemy will work that attitude with a host of temptations to act unfaithfully to that relationship.

4. Shield of faith – This refers to the large shield carried by Roman soldiers that covered their entire person. When soaked with water, this shield extinguished the flaming arrows (dipped in pitch and lit before firing) of an enemy. Satan's flaming arrows, his assaults, are extinguished by faith in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. By faith one sees beyond the immediate and is able to put all temptations in their proper perspective. It is God who loves us, who has given us an inheritance in Jesus Christ, and who will deliver on his promises. Pleasing and honoring him is more important than any threat or bauble Satan may dangle before us.

5. Helmet of salvation – Accepting the fact of one's salvation both motivates (the love therein expressed) and strengthens (the certainty of the outcome) one in the pursuit of godliness. It also keeps one from being lured into sin by anxiety over one's salvation (as in Colossae).

6. Sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God – This is the only offensive weapon mentioned. The sword referred to is a relatively short sword (or even dagger) which was an important weapon in close combat. The "word of God" probably refers here to the proclamation of the gospel of Christ, which is given its penetration and power by the Spirit.

a. O'Brien comments, "In their warfare with the powers of darkness, they are to take hold of the word of God, the gospel (cf. 1:13; 6:15), and to proclaim it in the power of the Spirit."<sup>150</sup> Fee states, "[I]n urging them to take the sword of the Spirit and then identifying that sword with the 'word of God,' Paul is not identifying the 'sword' with a book, but with the proclamation of Christ, which in our case is indeed to be found in a book."<sup>151</sup>

b. Sharing the gospel protects the Christian who is sharing it through strengthening his identification with that message. Speaking publicly about one's convictions reinforces those convictions. But sharing the gospel also is an assault on the enemy's realm. It is the means by which men and women come to faith and thus are delivered from Satan's grasp.

### C. Watch and pray (6:18-20)

1. This spiritual combat, this standing firm in the face of demonic opposition, includes dependence on God in prayer. Christians are to pray "at all times," and their prayers are to be "in the Spirit."

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<sup>150</sup> O'Brien, 482.

<sup>151</sup> Fee (1994), 729.

a. Prayer is to be a frequent, regular part of our lives, a practice we never abandon or cease from engaging in because our struggle with the forces of evil will not end until the consummation. It is an ongoing feature of life in this overlap of ages.

b. Whenever we pray, it is to be as the Spirit would have us pray. We are to pray with a proper attitude and motives and in line with and in deference to God's will. We are not, for example, to pray "to be seen by men" (e.g., Mat. 6:5-6) or out of a desire to indulge our selfishness (Jas. 4:3) rather than a desire to glorify God.

c. We, of course, pray for our own spiritual strengthening, but we also pray for all the saints.

2. For this type of prayer life one needs the alertness which keeps at bay spiritual sleep and complacency and the perseverance that overcomes fatigue and discouragement.

3. Paul asks that they also pray for him that he may boldly proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which he is an ambassador in chains. It appears the result is expressed in 2 Tim. 4:16-17, a letter written during Paul's second Roman imprisonment shortly before he was executed. He writes there: <sup>16</sup> *At my first defense, no one stood by me, but all deserted me. May it not be counted against them.* <sup>17</sup> *But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me so that the proclamation might be fully accomplished through me and all the Gentiles might hear. And I was delivered from the lion's mouth.*

## XV. Closing (6:21-24)

<sup>21</sup>*Now in order that you also may know the things concerning me, what I am doing, Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful servant in the Lord, will make everything known to you.* <sup>22</sup>*I have sent him to you for this very thing, so that you may know the things concerning us and [that] he may encourage your hearts.*

<sup>23</sup>*Peace to the brothers, and love with faith, from God [the] Father and [the] Lord Jesus Christ.* <sup>24</sup>*Grace [be] with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with incorruptibility.*

A. Paul is having Tychichus deliver the letter so he can fill them in on Paul's situation and encourage their hearts. He commends Tychichus to them as the beloved brother and faithful servant in the Lord.

1. Tychichus also delivers the letter to the church in Colossae (Col. 4:7-8). Acts 20:4 identifies Tychichus as being from the province of Asia and someone who was with Paul in Greece and went with him to Troas at the end of his third missionary journey.

2. In 2 Tim. 4:12 Paul says that he had sent Tychichus to Ephesus, and in Tit. 3:12 he says he is planning to send either Tychichus or Artemas to Crete apparently to free the way for Titus to come to him.

B. He concludes by expressing his desire that God the Father and the Lord Jesus will supply his readers with a subjective experience of the peace that is already theirs in Christ and also will strengthen them in their love and faith. He wishes the blessing of God's grace on all who love the Lord Jesus with an undying love.