

EPHESIANS:
The Mystery of the Gospel

A STUDY GUIDE

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All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness. *2 Timothy 3:16*

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ABBREVIATIONS

ESV. English Standard Version
KJV. King James Version
NIV. New International Version
NKJV. New King James Version
RSV. Revised Standard Version
WCF. Westminster Confession of Faith
WSC. Westminster Shorter Catechism

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EPHESIANS

Introduction

The author of this book was the Apostle Paul, a native of the city of Tarsus in the Roman province of Cilicia (southern Turkey). Paul, whose Hebrew name was Saul, was a Jew by nationality who enjoyed the legal status of Roman citizen by birth (Acts 22:26-28). He had been brought up a strict Pharisee (Acts 26:5, Philippians 3:4-6) and had studied in Jerusalem under the famous rabbi Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). Like other rabbis of his time, Paul had learned a secular trade to support himself; he was a tent maker, or possibly a leather worker (Acts 18:1-3).

Saul the Pharisee had been a fierce enemy of the followers of Christ (Acts 26:9-11). But one day, while traveling to Damascus to initiate a persecution of the Christians there, the Lord Jesus appeared to him in a vision (Acts 9:1-9). Saul was immediately converted to Christ; three days later he was baptized in Damascus.

Looking back on his life without Christ, Paul concluded that everything he had once taken pride in—his Hebrew ancestry, circumcision, integrity or righteousness as measured by the law of Moses—was garbage, spiritually speaking. (Philippians 3:8-11). He no longer believed that the Law of Moses had the power to save anyone from divine judgment or that anyone could be righteous in God's sight or live a holy life by keeping that law. *Christ* became God's power to save; *Christ* is God's righteousness for us; *Christ* is God's wisdom unto salvation, and *Christ* dwelling within is the source of holiness in our lives.

Paul knew from the time of his conversion that God had called him to preach the gospel of Christ to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15). Indeed, God had called him to be an apostle. Paul was not one of the Lord's original twelve apostles. Christ had appeared to him "last of all, as to one untimely born" (1 Corinthians 15:7-10), favoring him with a personal revelation of the gospel and commissioning him an apostle to the Gentiles (Galatians 1:11-17). The original apostles, having interviewed Paul at his request, acknowledged Paul's apostolic call (Galatians 2:1-10).

Three times Paul traveled west as a missionary from Antioch in Syria, preaching to both Jews and Gentiles. On his third missionary journey, probably A.D. 53-57, Paul headed west again. Before reaching Greece he found so much work to do in Ephesus, an important port in the Roman province of Asia (western Turkey) that he stayed there two years.

When Paul finally left Ephesus he spent three months in Greece before returning to Antioch (Acts 19:21, 20:1-6). Arriving in Antioch, Paul went up to Jerusalem, where he was arrested at the instigation of Jewish opponents. After two years in custody Paul was sent to Rome when he exercised his right as a Roman citizen to

appeal his case directly to Caesar. According to tradition he was martyred in Rome some years later during the reign of Nero.

Paul probably wrote Ephesians while imprisoned in Rome (3:1, 6:20). Some commentators believe Ephesians was written not to the church at Ephesus only, but as an encyclical letter to other churches as well. See Lesson 1, study note 1, for further discussion of this question. Whoever the original recipients were, Ephesians contains profound truth for Christians of all ages: in it Paul reveals the mystery of the gospel (1:9, 3:1-6).

LESSON 1: EPHESIANS 1:1-5***STUDY QUESTIONS***

1. How does Paul identify or describe himself? v. 1
2. The word *apostle* means *appointed messenger*. Who appointed Paul? Whose messenger is he? v. 1
3. To whom is he writing? v. 1.
4. How does Paul describe the Ephesians? v. 1
5. What does Paul wish for the Ephesians? v. 2
6. How is God related to us? v. 2
7. What does it mean for us to bless God? v. 3
8. How is God related to Jesus Christ? v. 3

9. What kind of blessings has God blessed us with? *v. 3*

10. Where are those blessings found? How do they relate to Jesus Christ? *v. 3*

11. Did we choose God or did God choose us? *v. 4*

12. When did God choose us? *v. 4*

13. What is God's intention for us? *v. 4*

14. What status has God given us? *v. 5*

15. Why have we attained this status? *v. 5*

16. What motivated God to do this? *v. 5*

ANSWERS TO THE STUDY QUESTIONS

1. How does Paul identify or describe himself? v. 1

He is an apostle of Jesus Christ.

2. The word apostle means appointed messenger. Who appointed Paul? Whose messenger is he? v. 1

God appointed Paul to be a messenger of Jesus Christ.

3. To whom is he writing? v.1

He writes to the church in Ephesus. See study note 1.

4. How does Paul describe the Ephesians? v. 1

He describes them as saints who are faithful in Christ Jesus.

5. What does Paul wish for the Ephesians? v. 2

He wishes them grace and peace. See study note 2.

6. How is God related to us? v. 2

He is our Father. See study note 3.

7. What does it mean for us to bless God?

It means to express thanksgiving, reverence and honor towards him.

8. How is God related to Jesus Christ? v. 3

God is his Father. See study note 4.

9. What kind of blessings has God blessed us with? v. 3

Every spiritual blessing. Paul will describe them in the rest of the letter.

10. Where are those blessings found? How do they relate to Jesus Christ? v. 3

They are presently in the heavenly places with Christ.

11. Did we choose God or did God choose us? v. 4

Paul states clearly that God chose us first. See study note 5.

12. When did God choose us? v. 4

He chose us before we existed, before the creation of the world.

13. What is God's intention for us? v. 5

His intention is that we stand before him holy and blameless.

14. What status has God given us? v. 5?

We have been adopted as his sons and daughters.

15. Why have we attained this status? v. 5

God predestined us to be his sons and daughters.

16. What motivated God to do this? v. 4b

His love for us.

STUDY NOTES

1. The saints in Ephesus.

Chapter 19 of the Book of Acts tells us more about the city of Ephesus. A fact relevant to our study is that Ephesus was the home of a famous shrine dedicated to the Greek goddess Artemis (Roman Diana). Apparently people from all over the province of Asia went there to worship Artemis. It's likely that the Christians to whom Paul writes were involved in the city's demon-inspired worship before they turned to Christ:

“And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience” (2:1-2).

But now Paul's readers were *saints*. Don't think of *saint* as a super-pious person, so holy that he or she can intercede for you in heaven. The word *saint* simply means someone *set apart for God*. The word often denotes Old Testament believers, but the New Testament calls all the faithful saints, New Testament believers as well as Old Testament believers.

In some passages the word *saint* means *holy one*. God works holiness, God-like righteousness, in those who trust in Christ. Paul will go on in his letter to tell what profound changes they had experienced in their standing before God and in their character in passing from paganism to Christ.

Some Bible commentators believe Ephesians was originally a letter intended for a group of churches. They think the words *in Ephesus* were added to the copy sent to Ephesus, and that from that copy manuscripts were multiplied; eventually the words *in Ephesus* were contained in the majority of Greek manuscripts used in translations into other languages. On the other hand, only a few ancient manuscripts lack the words *in Ephesus*, and they all originated in Egypt. Maybe an Egyptian scribe deliberately removed the words from a copy of Paul's letter because he wanted to show that the truths in Ephesians were for all Christians.

Consider also that Paul sent the letter by “Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful minister” (6:21-22). Tychicus carried *another* letter to the church in Colossae, a city not far from Ephesus. Tychicus did not bring the same letter to both churches. In my opinion, the words *in Ephesus* were part of the letter Paul sent to the Ephesians, and the name the Christian church has attached to this letter is warranted. Nevertheless, we don't have to decide which manuscripts reflect the original. Whoever the original recipients were, the truths of Ephesians are God's truths for all Christians everywhere and at every time.

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 2 Timothy 3:16

2. Grace and peace.

Paul begins all his letters with a wish that God would grant his readers grace and peace. His words echo the benediction with which God commanded the Aaronic priests to bless his people in Old Testament times (Numbers 6:22-27).

The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, “Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, Thus you shall bless the people of Israel: you shall say to them,

The LORD bless you and keep you;

the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;

the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.

“So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them.”

The Ephesians had already received the grace of God in Christ; nevertheless, Paul wishes more of God’s grace for them. Considering the fanatical hatred of the citizens of Ephesus for anyone who did not worship and honor Artemis, they needed God’s peace

3. God our Father.

In v. 2 Paul refers to God as our Father. The New Testament refers to God as our Father in many places. Two definitive examples: in the Lord’s Prayer Jesus tells us to address God as our Father, and in Romans 8:14-16 Paul tells us that the Holy Spirit moves us to pray to him as Father:

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,

The Old Testament has few references to God as our Father. Deuteronomy 14:1 reads:

You are the sons of the LORD your God.

The prophet Isaiah cries out in Isaiah 63:16:

You are our Father, though Abraham does not know us,
and Israel does not acknowledge us;
you, O LORD, are our Father,
our Redeemer from of old is your name.,

And in 64:8 he says:

But now, O LORD, you are our Father;
we are the clay, and you are our potter;
we are all the work of your hand.

Jeremiah 31:9 reads:

I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn.

Malachi 2:10 reads:

Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us?

The Old Testament certainly speaks of God's love and concern for his people, of his tender care for them. He is their God and they are his people. But why not more references to his fatherhood? Perhaps the intimacy of calling God Father is one of the spiritual blessings in the heavenly places we have in Christ (v. 3). The Old Testament saints knew of a coming Redeemer, the Messiah, and believed in him, but God's people did not possess all the blessings of Christ until he appeared. Surely one of those blessings is being able to address God as our Father.

4. “God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

This phrase and others like it are common in Paul's writings. Some commentators have suggested that such language indicates Paul conceived of Jesus as a divine being of lower rank than God the Father; in other words, that Paul held a view of Jesus like that of the fourth-century Arians, the early Unitarians, and modern Jehovah's witnesses.

A careful reading of Paul's letters proves these commentators wrong. Although Paul always makes a clear distinction between the *Person* of Christ and the *Person* of the Father, those who interpret his many references to God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ in a non-trinitarian way fail to take into account other Pauline statements affirming the full deity of Christ: see, for example, his magnificent hymn to Christ in Philippians 2:6-11; see also Colossians 1:15-19 and 2:9.

Paul also followed the practice of other New Testament writers in applying Old Testament statements about Yahweh to Jesus Christ. Compare Romans 10:13-16 with Joel 2:32; 1 Corinthians 1:31 with Jeremiah 9:23 ff.; 1 Corinthians 2:16 with Isaiah 40:13; Ephesians 4:7 with Psalm 68:18; Hebrews 1:8-12 with Psalm 45:6-7 and Psalm 105:25-27.¹ Paul was definitely trinitarian. He viewed the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as separate Persons, each fully divine (see 2 Corinthians 3:17-18 *re* the divinity of the Holy Spirit) yet as comprising one God (Romans 3:30).

5. God chose us.

Paul affirms that before the foundation of the world God chose some people,

¹ Bible scholars believe the personal name of God was probably pronounced Yahweh. Later scholars sometimes rendered his name Jehovah, but they usually substituted Lord for the divine name out of reverence. In our English Bibles the divine name is written in upper case letters, LORD, to distinguish it from Lord, meaning master.

Gentiles as well as Jews, to be holy and blameless before him, that is, to be saved. The Bible calls God's choice *election* and those chosen are the *elect* (Romans 9:11; 1 Peter 1:1). If we are willing to read the inspired Word of God with an open mind we must accept election as a fact. What Christian would deny that it was God who brought him or her to repentance and faith in Christ? Who would dare to deny that if God had not awakened us we would still be living in unbelief and under the just condemnation of God? And what Christian would deny that many men and women who go to their graves unrepentant and unbelieving, lost forever, are no worse, perhaps even better, than we were before God spoke faith into our hearts? We have no choice but to conclude that God elected some undeserving sinners to eternal life and appointed others, no worse, to suffer justly the wrath their sins deserve.

Nevertheless, many people, Christians as well as unbelievers, object to that truth for several reasons.

a. Wouldn't God be unjust to favor some sinners above others? Did not Paul himself affirm that God is no respecter of persons and that he judges all by the same standard (Romans 2:6-16)? Did he not conclude that none is righteous, that all are sinners, and that none will have a word to offer on his own behalf before the judgment seat of Christ (Romans 3:9-20)? On what basis can a just and loving God choose to grant repentance and faith to some and not to others?

Paul's answer is that God exercises *sovereign grace*:

(1) *Grace*: God has mercy on whomever chooses to have mercy.

(2) *Sovereign*: his choice depends only on the good pleasure of his will (v. 5).

Note: the Greek word translated *purpose* in vs. 5 and 9 in the ESV and NIV literally means *pleasure*, as in the KJV. See chapter 9 of Paul's letter to the Romans for a full discussion of objections to the doctrines of sovereign grace and election.

b. Many earnest Christians object to the doctrine of election for another reason. They admit that God has the right to exercise sovereign grace, but they find it hard to accept that a loving God would actually do so. If salvation is ultimately a matter of God's choice rather than man's choice, must we conclude that God's love is limited because all are not saved? Is there not some other reason some people are lost?

Some of these objectors believe in *decisional regeneration*. They say we are saved when *we* decide for Christ. They say, let men be lost because of their own choice, but never because God did not love them enough to want to save them! They declare that God has given man free will and honors a person's free choice., even his rejection of God They place human election over divine election.

I have never seen scriptural evidence to back up belief in that kind of free will. "The wish is father to the thought."

Those who contend for the doctrine of election also admit they don't have all the answers, but they maintain that is no reason for denying a truth the Scripture plainly

teaches and Christian experience so positively confirms. They contend that the doctrine of election is entirely consistent with the love of God. Apparently Paul thinks so too! (v. 4). Let us patiently wait while Paul shows that the working out of God's purpose in election brings about the salvation of an innumerable host in Christ drawn from every land and people (vs. 9-10).

6. Adoption as sons of God.2

Jesus Christ is the Son of God from eternity, one of the three persons of the Trinity. Scripture also identifies Adam, the first man, as a son of God (Luke 3:38), but he was not a son of God in the same sense as Christ is. Adam did not exist from eternity and did not have the same divine nature as Christ. He was not, as the Nicene Creed puts it, "God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God." Adam was sinless until he fell, but was not God by nature as Christ is.

Moreover, Adam's body, soul, and spirit were corrupted when he fell into sin (Genesis 3:17-24). Our nature and our status are likewise corrupted. Many of your friends, neighbors, and relations will claim that everyone is a child of God, but this is not so. As descendants of Adam, we are by nature children of wrath (2:3), not children of God. Jesus said of the Jews who rejected him, "You are of your father the devil" (John 8:44).

But God has adopted us as his sons and daughters through Christ. We are now *in Christ*. Paul uses the phrase *in Christ* extensively throughout his letters. The phrase *in Christ* refers to the spiritual union believers have with Christ. Believers are identified with Christ in his life, death, resurrection, and ascension. In chapter 2 Paul tells us that God "raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (2:6). It is *in Christ* that we are reckoned not only righteous, but also sons and daughters of God.

7. Predestined.

God works in the lives of those he chose to be in Christ (v. 4; see study note 5) so as to bring them to repentance and faith, making them alive in Christ. His work in carrying out his purpose is called *predestination*; the verb is *predestine*. Paul describes the sequence of God's work in Romans 8:29-30:

For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those

whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

The word *foreknew* means the same as *chose* or *elected*. Those God foreknew or chose he also predestined or acted in their hearts and lives so as to bring about his choice.

In predestining his elect God may use means - faithful Christian parents, the

witness of a friend, the reading or hearing of the Bible, hard experiences that make us reflect on our sins and our future prospects, and/or too many other means to enumerate. In the case of Paul himself, God used a vision of Jesus Christ. But whether God uses natural means or acts miraculously, he effectually calls his elect to faith.

8. Purpose or good pleasure?

Verses 5 and 9 in the ESV refer to the *purpose* of God. The Greek word translated *purpose* there actually means *pleasure* or *favor*. Some English versions, such as the ESV, render the Greek word *purpose*; others, like the KJV, NASB and NIV, render it *pleasure* or *good pleasure*. Based on lexicons and commentaries, I conclude that *pleasure* or *good pleasure* is preferable to *purpose*. I have no idea why the ESV renders the word *purpose*.

The word *purpose* in v. 11 is a different Greek word that does mean *purpose*.

LESSON 2: EPHESIANS 1:6-14***STUDY QUESTIONS***

1. What should result from God's adopting us as sons and daughters? *v. 6*
2. Who is the Beloved? *v.6*. See Matthew 3:17, 17:5; Colossians 1:13.
3. What does *redemption* mean? *v. 7*. See a dictionary.
4. How are we redeemed? What was the price of our redemption? *v. 7*
5. Tell two things in vs. 7-9 we receive in Christ as part of the riches of God's grace.
6. What does the wisdom and insight God gives us reveal to us? *v. 9*
7. What is the mystery of God's will and purpose? *vs. 9-10*
8. Who is the *we* in vs. 11-12? Who is the *you* in v. 13?
9. What is the guarantee that we will receive the promised inheritance? *vs. 13-14*

10. God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ. Review vs. 3-14 and list the blessings Paul mentions.

ANSWERS TO THE STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What should result from God's adopting us as sons and daughters? v. 6

We should praise God for his glorious grace.

2. What does *redemption* mean? v. 7. See a dictionary.

Redemption is the act or result of redeeming. Redeeming is freeing from captivity (in this case, captivity to sin and death) by the paying of a price. *Ransom* is almost a synonym.

3. Who is the Beloved? v. 6

Jesus Christ, God's Son.

4. How are we redeemed? What was the price of our redemption? v. 7

We are redeemed by the death of Jesus Christ. His death (blood) was the price of our redemption.

5. Tell two things in vs. 7-9 we receive in Christ as part of the riches of God's grace.

- a. We receive the forgiveness of our trespasses.
- b. We receive wisdom and insight into the mystery of his will.

6. What does the wisdom and insight God gives us reveal to us? v. 9

It reveals what is the mystery of God's will.

7. What is the mystery of God's will and purpose? vs. 9-10

God wills or purposes to unite all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth.

8. Who is the *we* in vs. 11-12? Who is the *you* in v. 13?

We are those who first trusted in Christ after his resurrection and ascension. They were Jews. *You* are the Ephesians, who were Gentiles. Both Jews and Gentiles are being united in one body whose head is Christ (v. 10). Paul will expound on this unity later in the letter.

9. What is the guarantee that we will receive the promised inheritance? vs. 13-14

We have received the Holy Spirit as the earnest or guarantee of our inheritance.

10. God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ. Review vs. 3-14 and list the blessings Paul mentions.

- a. election – God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, v. 4.
- b. holiness and blamelessness – God finds no fault in those who are in Christ, v. 4.
- c. predestination – God ordered and brought about the circumstances and events that led us to faith in Christ, v. 5
- d. redemption, the forgiveness of sins through the blood of Christ, v. 7.
- e. wisdom and knowledge of the mystery of God's will set forth in Christ, v. 9.
- f. an inheritance – we have an inheritance in heaven through Jesus Christ, who is the heir of all things, v. 11.
- g. the Holy Spirit – the earnest of our inheritance, until we obtain full possession of it, v. 14.

STUDY NOTES

1. *Trespasses.*

Going beyond the boundary of another person's land when it is forbidden is trespassing. Similarly, in the Bible the word *trespasses* denotes going outside the boundaries of God's law. A trespass, then, is an act of lawlessness, which means that *trespass* is a synonym for sin: "Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness" (1 John 3:4).

2. *True wisdom.*

One of the many blessings of the grace God pours out on his sons and daughters is wisdom. God's wisdom is a gift of grace, something the world does not have. The world has what it views as wisdom, but it is not a wisdom that enables men to find God. Paul puts it well in 1 Corinthians:

For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

The mystery of God's will is his wisdom (vs. 8-9). It is centered on Christ, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles. Paul will elaborate on the mystery of the gospel later in the letter.

3. *The fullness of time.*

When is "the fullness of time" (v. 10)?

Jesus began his public ministry by proclaiming, "The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe the gospel" (Mark 1:15). The time that was fulfilled was the history of the human race up till Christ. Now we are in the fullness of times and the gospel era has arrived.

The gospel era begins the last days:

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. (Hebrews 1:1-2)

4. All things headed up in Christ.

English has no exact synonym for the single Greek word which the ESV renders, “to unite all things in him” in v. 1:10. The NKJV has, “gather together in one,” the NIV has, “to bring unity to,” and the NASB has, “summing up all things.” Perhaps the most literal translation of the Greek word would be, *to bring or sum up under one head*.

The various renderings given above all bring out the truth that God’s plan is to put the whole universe, things in heaven and things on earth, under the lordship of Christ, thereby making them all parts of a single, unified body with Christ as its head. Paul identifies this body as the church in vs. 21-22. We will consider that in Lesson 6.

5. Our inheritance.

God has appointed Christ the heir of all things (Hebrews 1:2), and we inherit because we are in him (v. 11). Our inheritance in Christ includes “every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places” (v. 3).

When we are first saved we think primarily, perhaps entirely, of the forgiveness of our sins (v. 7) and of the place in heaven prepared for us (John 14:2-3). But there is more! Paul does not specify what; instead, he prays in vs. 15-19 that the eyes of believers will be enlightened so that they will know the riches of Christ’s inheritance in the saints. We will explore those riches in Lesson 3.

6. The promise of the Holy Spirit.

The outpouring of God’s Spirit upon his people was promised by the Old Testament prophets:

For I will pour water on the thirsty land and streams on the dry ground;
I will pour my Spirit upon your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants.
Isaiah 44:3

And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. Ezekiel 36:27

“And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit. Joel 2:28-29

Before his ascension into heaven Jesus told his disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the coming of the Spirit, who would clothe them with power to be his witnesses to all nations. (Luke 24:46-49). Ten days later, on the day of Pentecost, the Spirit was poured out on the assembled disciples, and they began speaking in various languages. A crowd gathered, and Peter preached to them that what they heard was the fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel - read the full story in Acts 2. Acts goes on to tell of other instances of the Spirit falling on new believers.

The Spirit was promised to *all flesh*, that is, not just to the apostles, but to all who would believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Nowadays some of the gifts of the Spirit have ceased, but all who trust in Christ receive the promised Spirit.

Paul says the Ephesians have been *sealed* with the Holy Spirit. A notary seal on a document guarantees it is was really issued by the signer. Thus Paul calls the Spirit a guarantee by God the Father that we will receive all the other blessings we have in Christ when we are fully redeemed, bodies as well as spirits.

The Spirit works in our lives and gives evidence we truly are in Christ - see Romans 8:4-17.

LESSON 3: EPHESIANS 1:15-23***STUDY QUESTIONS***

1. Why does Paul continue to give thanks and pray for the saints in Ephesus? *vs. 15-16*
2. What does he ask God to grant them? *v. 17*
3. What three things do the Ephesians (and we) need new eyes to see and know? *vs 18-19*
4. How great is God's power? To put the question another way, how did God show how great his power is? *v. 20*
5. Where is Christ now? *v. 20*
6. What is Christ's relationship to the powers and authorities of this age? *v. 21*
7. What is Christ's relationship to the church? *v. 22.*
8. Compare v. 23 with vs. 1:10. Is God's purpose to unite all things in Christ fulfilled in the church, which v. 23 is described as "the fullness of him who fills all in all"?

ANSWERS TO THE STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Why does Paul continue to give thanks and pray for the saints in Ephesus? vs. 15-16

He has heard of their faith and love. See study note 1.

2. What does he ask God to grant them? v. 17

A spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him.

3. What three things do the Ephesians (and we) need new eyes to see and know? vs 18-19

- a. The hope to which God has called us.
- b. The riches of his glorious inheritance, the inheritance he mentioned in v. 14.
- c. The immeasurable greatness of his power toward us.

See study notes 2, 3, and 4 for a discussion of these three blessings.

4. How great is God's power? To put the question another way, how did God show how great his power is? v. 20

God showed the greatness of his power by raising Jesus from the dead. There is no power in heaven or earth greater than that power.

5. Where is Christ now? v. 20

He is seated at the right hand of God the Father.

6 What is Christ's relationship to the powers and authorities of this age? v. 21

He is far above them. They are under his feet, a position of complete submission.

7. What is Christ's relationship to the church? v. 22.

God the Father has made him the head of the church, and the church is the body of Christ. See study note 5.

8. Compare v. 23 with vs. 1:10. Is God's purpose to unite all things in Christ fulfilled in the church, which v. 23 is described as "the fullness of him who fills all in all"?

Yes, God purposes to unite all things in heaven and earth in Christ through the church, such that the church will contain the fullness of God. This is a truth that can be wrongly interpreted - see study note 6 for an expanded discussion.

STUDY NOTES

1. “I have heard of your faith”: When did Paul write Ephesians?

In Acts 19:1-10 we read that Paul spent two years in Ephesus preaching and teaching while on his third missionary journey. In his letter to Ephesians he says he has heard of the Ephesians' faith and love. It appears that at the time of writing his knowledge of the Ephesians' faith and love was second-hand (v. 15). We must conclude that Paul wrote Ephesians quite some time after residing in Ephesus, when the church in Ephesus contained people he had not known when he was there. At the time of writing Paul was a prisoner in chains in Rome (3:1, 6:20). Commentators believe he ministered in Ephesus in 54-55 AD and that he was imprisoned in Rome in 60-63 AD, five to eight years later.

2. The hope to which God has called us.

Paul prays that God will give his readers a spirit of knowledge and revelation to know three things in particular. The first is the hope to which God has called us.

In the Bible the word *hope* has a different meaning from what people today usually mean when they use the word. Nowadays *hope* generally expresses a wish for an outcome that is doubtful or uncertain at best: “I hope my sick kitty gets well.” “I hope I win the lottery.” On the other hand, in the Bible *hope* expresses faith directed towards a promised future. Paul writes of Abraham, “In hope he believed against hope that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told” (Romans 4:18). Abraham’s hope was his faith in the promise of God, not yet fulfilled, but certain.

In Romans 5:2 Paul writes, “We rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” That is the hope to which God has called us. We will attain that hope when Christ returns. Meanwhile we are “waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing in glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13). We will share in that glory; we will be like our glorious Lord on that day:

Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. 1 John 3:2-3

That is the hope to which God has called us, to share the glory of God in Jesus Christ. All our blessings are in him who is seated at the right hand of God.

3. The riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.

The second thing Paul wants us to know is “the riches of *his* glorious inheritance in the saints” (emphasis added). The word *his* refers to Jesus: the heir of this rich

inheritance is the Lord Jesus Christ. The Book of Hebrews tells us, “in these last days he [God the Father] has spoken to us by his Son, whom he has appointed the heir of all things” (Hebrews 1:2).

What are “all things” that the Son is heir to? What are the riches of his inheritance? The messianic prophecies of the Old Testament tell us some of those blessings. Read, in particular, Psalms 45, 72, and 89. Bear in mind that those prophecies do not refer to a future Jewish kingdom, but are to be understood of Christ and his church (compare Isaiah 65: 17-25 with Revelation 21:1-22:5).

Scripture says that we who believe in Christ share in his inheritance as co-heirs:

The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may be also glorified with him. Romans 8:16-17

The wonders of the new heaven and the new earth described in Revelation 21:1-22:5 are blessings for us as well as Christ. That fact suggests an alternative interpretation to the phrase, “the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.” Are the saints themselves the riches of Christ’s inheritance?

We are not a very rich inheritance for Christ now. But even now we are being changed from glory into glory, and when we are with him we will be purified and conformed to his image.

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. 2 Corinthians 3:18

Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. 1 John 3:2

The saints will be like him when he appears. Then the glorified church will be the fullness of him who fills all in all, worthy to be considered a rich inheritance

4. The immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe.

The third thing Paul wants us to know is “the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe” (v. 19). Let us note two things:

a. Although God’s power is immeasurable, we do know it is greater than any other power on earth or in heaven. God’s power raised Jesus Christ from the dead on the third day and made him to sit at his right hand. No other power could do that. Modern medicine has power to cure many ills, but it cannot raise the dead to life.

b. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is at work in us. First of all, God made us alive when we were spiritually dead. Secondly, he works in us to sanctify us and conform us to the image of his Son. This work also requires nothing less than the

power of God. Human efforts to reform inevitably fall short: We do not have the power to remake ourselves (or others) into spiritually alive, holy beings.

Paul expounds on this work in 2:1-10. See Lesson 4.

5. *The body of Christ.*

What does Paul mean in referring to the church as the body of Christ? The church as the body of Christ is a metaphor picturing the church as a body made up of many members, limbs and organs as it were, all with God-given talents - gifts of the Holy Spirit – which, when functioning correctly, act in coordination to carry out on earth the will of their Head, Christ. In doing this they serve each other as well as their Master.

Paul expounds the metaphor of the body and the head in 1 Corinthians 12. Read that exposition to better understand how the church is considered a body.

6. *The fullness of him who fills all in all.*

The fullness mentioned in v. 23 is the sum of all the perfection of God. In v. 23 it refers to the fullness of Jesus Christ, who is fully God as well as fully man. Here Paul tells us that the church, the spiritual body of Christ, contains that fullness. The body derives this fullness from its head.

Indeed, since Christ dwells in each believer, we may say that each of us has received a measure of that fullness. John 1:16 says, “from his fullness have we all received, grace upon grace.” However, Paul's stress here is on the church, not the individual believer. He is emphasizing the completeness of the body of Christ with respect to its spiritual make-up., its glory, and its powers. The church, under its head, is fully furnished with all graces needed to reign with Christ in glory.

Paul is *not* saying that the church has attained a divine nature; much less that the individual believer has become divine. He will flesh out this reference to the fullness of Christ as he proceeds with his letter. See 2:21-22, 3:19, and 4:13-15.

LESSON 4: EPHESIANS 2:1-10***STUDY QUESTIONS***

1. What was our state before we believed in Christ? *vs. 1, 5*
2. Who led us to walk in the way of the world? *v. 2*
3. Who is the prince of the power of the air? *v. 2*
4. How does Paul describe those who follow the prince of this world? *vs.2-3*
5. What motivates our conduct before we are saved? *v. 3*
6. What motivated God to make us alive in Christ? *v. 4*
7. Review question: What is *grace*?
8. How does v. 6 relate to 1:3?
9. How are our good works related to God's grace? *vs. 8-9*
10. How are our good works related to God's purpose for us? *v. 10*

ANSWERS TO THE STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What was our state before we believed in Christ? vs. 1, 5

We were dead in our trespasses and sins. See study note 1.

2. Who led us to walk in the way of the world? v. 2

The prince of the power of the air.

3. Who is the prince of the power of the air?

Satan. He is the spirit that now works in the world. See study note 2.

4. How does Paul describe those who follow the prince of this world? vs.2-3

a. They are “sons of disobedience.”

b. They are “children of wrath,” that is, they are deserving of God’s, wrath as is their ruler, Satan.

5. What motivates our conduct before we are saved? v. 3

The desires of our body and our mind.

6. What motivated God to make us alive in Christ? v. 4

His great love.

7. Review question: What is grace?

Grace is God’s undeserved favor towards us.

8. How does v. 6 relate to 1:3?

Verse 1:3 says that God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. Verse 2:6 tells us that those blessings are ours in Christ, who is seated at God’s right hand in heaven.

9. How are our good works related to God’s grace? vs. 8-9

Trick question! There is no causal relation at all. If our works were good we would be able to earn his favor, but Scripture tells us they are like a polluted garment (Isaiah 64:6), worthy of being cast away, deserving punishment, not reward. God’s grace is unearned and undeserved. We are saved by trusting in Christ apart from anything we do. Good works follow grace, they do not precede it.

10. How are our good works related to God’s purpose for us? v. 10

There is a place for good works in the plan and purpose of God. When we are made alive in Christ we are new creations, created to do good works.

STUDY NOTES

1. Dead in our sins.

Adam lived 930 years after he died. Let me explain. When God placed Adam in the Garden of Eden he warned him not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the middle of the garden:

of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for *in the day you eat of it* you shall surely die. *Genesis 2:17*, emphasis added.

Everyone in the Western world, even non-christians, knows that Adam and Eve ate of the tree. God found them hiding in the garden, confronted them in their sin, pronounced woes upon them, and expelled them from the garden. But God did not strike them dead that very day. Adam lived to the ripe age of 930 years (*Genesis 5:5*)! Still, Adam and Eve did die the day they ate of the forbidden tree. They died spiritually that day.

What does that mean?

The essence of death is *separation*, whether it be physical or spiritual.

When one dies physically he or she is cut off from the world and everything in it. The deceased can no longer interact with people or things, and the living cannot interact with the deceased. We cannot communicate with the dead, and they cannot communicate with us.³ They are no longer part of our world.

Spiritual death is separation from God. Sin is what causes spiritual death.

Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned. 5:12

Before Adam and Eve sinned they walked and talked with God in the garden (*Genesis 3:8*). After they sinned, God cast them out of the garden, no more to have fellowship with him. Physically they were still alive, but spiritually they were dead, separated from God. It is in that sense that we were dead in our trespasses and sins before God made us alive in Christ (v. 1). We were without God in the world (2:12), separated from him:

your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you. *Isaiah 59:2*

Physical death will come to all; it too is part of the death brought upon all his descendants. But we are all dead spiritually from conception. Until we are brought to

³ The case of Samuel and the medium of Endor (*1 Samuel 28*) is debated by Bible commentators. Some maintain that God permitted the medium to bring Samuel back from the dead to pronounce Saul's doom, others deny that she did bring him back (noting that she was surprised and terrified to see Samuel). Whatever the case, it was a special case and does not take away from the basic truth that we cannot communicate with the dead.

life through faith in Christ we are separated from God. That is the death Paul is referring to in v. 1.

Another aspect of death is powerlessness. The dead cannot do anything. They cannot act or respond to stimuli. This aspect of death applies to spiritual death also. The spiritually dead cannot respond to gospel. They cannot believe. They cannot do anything to please God. Only when God gives the dead life and faith can they understand, repent, and believe the gospel.

2. The power of the air.

It's clear that v. 2 refers to Satan. Jesus refers to Satan as the ruler of this world (John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11).⁴ But what does the phrase, "the prince of the power of the air" tell us about Satan? What does the air have to do with him?

We can but guess. The air covers the whole earth; perhaps the phrase means that Satan and his minions hover over all mankind, surrounding them like the ambient air. His presence looms over all Adam's race; mankind cannot escape it anymore than they can escape the air. Perhaps Paul means what the Apostle John means when he says. "the whole world lies in the power of the evil one" (1 John 5:19). Satan is the prince of the *power* of the air. Like the air, Satan's power extend to every place that the man dwells. He works in the sons of disobedience.

The ubiquity and power of Satan should not cause Christians to fear. John, who tells us that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one, also assures us that "he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4). James and Peter tell us to resist the devil in the confidence that he will flee from us (James 4:7. 1 Peter 5:8-9). Paul makes the same point to the Ephesians. He prays that God will give his elect spiritual insight to know the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, power that raised Jesus from the dead (1:19-21). As Paul continues on in chapter 2 he reminds the Ephesians and us that when we were spiritually dead and powerless, God made us alive in Christ. Satan was powerless to stop him, just as he was powerless to keep Jesus in the tomb.

3. Faith is a gift.

Verse 8 is a bit ambiguous. What is it that Paul calls the gift of God? Is it our salvation? Is it grace? Is it faith? All three are gifts of God. Salvation is indeed a gift; it is not of works. Grace, by definition, is an undeserved gift. And faith also is a gift of God (Romans 12:6, 1 Corinthians 12:9). That follows from the fact that before we were made alive in Christ we were spiritually dead., as discussed in study note 1. We

⁴ The Greek word translated *ruler* in John 12:31 is the same word translated *prince* in Ephesians 2:2.

were unable to respond to the gospel call in faith. The dead cannot respond to anything. This is true of the spiritually dead as well as the physically dead. It is not

that the spiritually dead exercise faith and so are born again; rather, when we are born again, God gives us faith when he gives us life.

4. Grace past, present, and future.

God's grace is not a one time act of favor. He was gracious to us in the past, choosing us in Christ before the foundation of the world (1:4). By grace we have been saved (2:5). He is gracious to us in the present. We are now seated with Christ in the heavenly places, blessed with every blessing in the heavenly places (1:3). We are now part of his holy people, being built into a holy temple to the Lord. And in the coming ages he will show us the immeasurable riches of his grace (2:7). It was grace even before we were born, grace while we live on this earth, and grace for eternity. It's grace all the way.

Many in the world who want to be acceptable to God think they have to earn God's favor. Some Christians, too, think we begin with grace but maintain our right standing with God by our works. Not so. They need to read Ephesians, especially chapter 2. Then let them read Galatians:

we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified. Galatians 2:16

Paul goes on to ask, "Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?" (Galatians 3:3)

It's grace all the way.

LESSON 5: EPHESIANS 2:11-22***STUDY QUESTIONS***

1. What is a Gentile? How are Gentiles physically different than Jews? *v. 11*
2. What suggests that Paul attaches no spiritual significance to circumcision? *v. 11*
3. What was the spiritual state of the Gentile Ephesians prior to coming to Christ? *v. 12*
4. What was the spiritual state of the Jews prior to coming to Christ? *v. 12*
5. In 1:7 Paul said that the blood of Christ secures our redemption, the forgiveness of our sins. What does 2:13 say that the blood of Christ does for Gentile believers?
6. What peace is Paul referring to in vs. 14, 15, and 17?
7. What constituted the wall of hostility between Jew and Gentile? *vv. 14-15*
8. What reconciled Jew and Gentile and brought hostility to an end? *v. 16*
9. What does it mean to have access to the Father? How do we have access to God the Father? *v. 18*

10. Paul likens the church to a holy temple in vs. 19-22.
 - a. What is the foundation of that temple? *v. 20*
 - b. What is the place of Christ in that temple? *v. 20*
 - c. What constitutes the structure erected on the foundation? *vs. 21-22*

ANSWERS TO THE STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is a Gentile? How were Gentiles physically different than Jews? v. 11

Male Gentiles were uncircumcised while male Jews were circumcised.

2. What suggests Paul attaches no spiritual significance to circumcision? v. 11

He refers to circumcision as (merely) a physical act done by human hands, not a spiritual work done by God. See Romans 2:29.

3. What was the spiritual state of the Gentile Ephesians prior to coming to Christ? v. 12

- a. They were separated from Christ.
- b. They were alienated from the commonwealth of Israel.
- c. They had no hope and were without God.

4. What was the spiritual state of the Jews prior to coming to Christ? vs. 1-2

They were just as separated from God as the Gentiles; they just didn't know it

5. In 1:7 Paul said that the blood of Christ secures our redemption, the forgiveness of our sins. What does 2:13 say that the blood of Christ does for Gentile believers?

It brings them near to God; it also brings them into one body with Jews who also believe in Jesus Christ.

6. What peace is Paul referring to in vs. 14, 15, and 17?

Verses 14 and 17 probably refer to our peace with God; v. 15 refers to peace between Jew and Gentile.

7. What constituted the wall of hostility between Jew and Gentile? vs 14-15

The Law of Moses with its commandments and ordinances. Circumcision and the Jewish dietary laws in particular created a wall of hostility between Jews and Gentiles..

8. What reconciled Jew and Gentile and brought hostility to an end? v. 16

Christ abolished the Law that made for a hostile separation between Jew and Gentile, so Jews and Gentiles in Christ are now reconciled to each other in one body.

9. What does it mean to have access to the Father? How do we have access to God the Father? v. 18

We can come to him in prayer. Our access is by the Holy Spirit, who helps us to pray when we don't know how to pray as we ought (Romans 8:26-27).

10. Paul likens the church to a holy temple in vs. 19-22.**a. What is the foundation of that temple? v. 20**

The apostles and prophets who delivered the gospel message. See study note 4.

b. What is the place of Christ in that temple? v. 20

He is the cornerstone of the temple.

STUDY NOTES

1. *The significance of circumcision.*

Circumcision is cutting off the foreskin of the penis. God instituted it as a sign of the covenant he made between himself and Abraham and his descendants. The institution of God's covenant and its sign is recorded in Genesis 17:

When Abram was ninety-nine years old the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless, that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly." Genesis 17:1-2

And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. Genesis 17:7

And God said to Abraham, "As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you" Genesis 17:9-11

Like baptism for Christians, circumcision was a sign and seal of the Jews' covenant relationship with God. It was a marker that showed their membership in the people of God. It denoted a common identity as God's chosen ones.

Circumcision also served to set the Jews apart from other peoples around them.⁵ The Jews showed their contempt for Gentiles, not so much by calling them idolaters as by calling them uncircumcised (see 1 Samuel 11:26).

In Paul's day Jews still looked to their circumcision as a sign they were God's chosen people, set apart from the uncircumcised Gentiles. When Paul and Barnabas returned from their first missionary journey and told the Jerusalem church about the Gentiles who had believed in Christ, some Jewish Christians insisted that for Gentiles to become Christians they must undergo circumcision:

some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, "It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses." Acts 15:5

The apostles and elders held a council in Jerusalem and judged that Gentile believers did not need to be circumcised or keep all the precepts of the Law of Moses, but the Judaizers (as they are called today) didn't give up their attempt to force circumcision on the Gentiles; they gave Paul trouble in several churches, particularly

⁵ The Jews were not the only people in the ancient Near East who practiced circumcision. The Egyptians, Phoenicians, Ethiopians, and Syrians also circumcised their males. However, the Jews were the only people in Palestine who circumcised their male infants. All the peoples in Palestine whom God commanded to be destroyed were uncircumcised.

the churches in the province of Galatia.

2. *Without hope, without God.*

The Gentiles of the Greco-Roman world truly were without hope or God. Jesus himself affirmed that in talking with the Samaritan woman:

Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” John 4:21-24

To be sure, our Lord also held out future hope for the Gentiles. But at the time he spoke with the Samaritan woman (a Gentile) it was true that salvation was of the Jews.

The Gentiles of the ancient world were without the true God. They worshiped a variety of gods. They did not view their gods as loving and merciful; their gods were capricious, vain, loving flattery and praise. “Worship” was intended to placate the gods and obtain help by flattery and gifts, bribes if you will.

To obtain what they desired, the Gentiles resorted to magic as well as formal worship. The Ephesian Christians had practiced magic before they came to know the truth. When they came to realize that their magical practices were evil (and useless) they burned their magic books:

And a number of those [Ephesian believers] who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. Acts 19:19-20

The Gentiles were without hope. They feared death. They didn’t believe their gods or their magic would help them in the hour of death. They believed that the dead were but frightened, gibbering “shades,” disembodied spirits who inhabited a dark, gloomy underworld (Greek: *hades*).

What was true of the Gentiles in Paul’s day is true of all people today who do not know Christ. Some are outright atheists, others agnostics, and others think they know God through a false religion or because they have a warped idea of what Christian faith is. In truth, they all are without God. They are also without real hope. Hope to many people means wishful thinking infused with a lot of doubt: “I hope I win the lottery.” “I hope I don’t run out of gas before I reach town.” “I hope my sick puppy doesn’t die.” Atheists of course have no hope of heaven. Many others have a false hope of heaven based on a false view of God.

Truly, as Paul writes, apart from Christ men have neither the true God nor true hope.

3. Christ our peace.

Christ has secured peace for us, peace with God. Paul wrote to the Romans:

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Romans 5:1

At this point in Ephesians the peace Paul writes of is peace between Jew and Gentile. It too is through our Lord Jesus Christ.

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace,

Not only circumcision (see study note 1) but also the Law of Moses, with its regulations regarding foods and holy days, constituted a barrier between Jew and Gentile, a barrier that created hostility (antisemitism is not a new thing.) The blood of Jesus abolished that barrier. Now, in the church of God, Jewish believers and Gentile believers are “one new man.”

The peace between believers extends beyond peace between Jew and Gentile. All believers constitute “one new man.” This peace extends to peace between black and white, American and Russian, and all believers where peace does not exist naturally. The early church sometimes struggled to maintain that unity and peace, as does the church today. Later in his letter Paul urges the Ephesians to be “eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (4:3). Our unity is a fact, and peace between believers is a relationship we must struggle to maintain. More on this in a later lesson.

4. The church, God’s temple.

Paul likened the church of Christ to a body earlier in his letter. He intended by that figure to show that all Christians fit together into a unified whole with Christ as its head. No one limb or organ – not any single Christian – is the fullness of Christ’s presence now. Here in chapter 2 he likens the church to a temple. By this figure Paul intends to show that it is in the church that God dwells in a special way, established and growing on the teaching of the apostles and prophets. Their teaching bases the church on Jesus Christ himself as the cornerstone that orients and orders everything so that God is worshiped and glorified aright. Indeed, he lives and dwells in the church!

Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the LORD. This is the gate of the LORD; the righteous shall enter through it. I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation. The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. Psalm 118:19-22

LESSON 6: EPHESIANS 3:1-13***STUDY QUESTIONS***

1. What did God entrust to Paul to be delivered to the Gentiles? *vs. 1-2*
2. What did Paul's stewardship result in for him? *v. 1*
3. How did Paul obtain knowledge of the mystery of Christ? *v. 3*
4. Was the mystery of Christ known to mankind before God revealed it to his apostles and prophets? *v. 5*
5. How did God reveal the mystery of Christ to Paul and the apostles and prophets? *v. 5*
6. What is the mystery of Christ? *v. 6*
7. Is that mystery part of the gospel message? *v. 6*
8. Did God reveal the mystery of the gospel to Paul because of his high status among the apostles? What did Paul view his status to be? *v. 8*
9. What is the role of the church in making the wisdom of God known to the rulers and authorities? *v. 10*

10. The rulers and authorities Paul mentions are not the kings and authorities of this world. Who are they, and where do they rule? *v. 10.*

11. What is “the eternal purpose that he [God] has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord”? See 1:9-10.

12. Why do the the rulers and authorities in heavenly places (v. 10) need to know the eternal purpose of God? *v. 11*

13. Why can we boldly and confidently come to God in faith that he will hear us? *vs. 11-12*

14. Why might the Ephesians lose heart when they heard that Paul was in prison? How should they react to that news? *v. 13*

ANSWERS TO THE STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What did God entrust to Paul to be delivered to the Gentiles? vs. 1-2

The message of God's grace.

2. What did Paul's stewardship result in for him? v. 1

He was a prisoner. Paul probably wrote Ephesians while imprisoned in Rome (see also 6:20).

3. How did Paul obtain knowledge of the mystery of Christ? v. 3

God revealed it to him. He did not learn it from his study of the Old Testament Scriptures or from the other apostles.

4. Was the mystery of Christ known to mankind before God revealed it to his apostles and prophets? v. 5

No. See study note 3.

5. How did God reveal the mystery of Christ to Paul and the apostles and prophets? v. 5

By the Holy Spirit.

6. What is the mystery of Christ? v. 6

It is the truth that Gentile believers in Jesus are fellow heirs with Jewish believers; that they belong to the same body and partake of the same promise in Christ Jesus. In Christ the Jewish believer and the Gentile believer have equal standing. Paul expounded on this precious truth in 3:11-21, the passage studied in Lesson 5.

7. Is that mystery part of the gospel message? v. 6

Yes. While we often think on the truth of individual salvation through faith in Christ, especially when we first were born again and justified by grace alone, the truth that we are more than a set of saved individuals, that we are one body, one temple, parts of a whole - that truth is also part of the gospel, God's good news for mankind.

8. Did God reveal the mystery of the gospel to Paul because of his high status among the apostles? What did Paul view his status to be? v. 8

Paul deemed himself the very least of all the saints. He is not spouting false humility here. See 1 Corinthians 15:9.

9. What is the role of the church in making the wisdom of God known to the rulers and authorities? v. 10

The very existence of the church, containing Gentiles as well as Jews, proclaims the

manifold wisdom of God to the rulers and authorities. None of them would have conceived that this was God's eternal plan until the church was brought into being by Jesus Christ.

10. The rulers and authorities Paul mentions are not the kings and authorities of this world. Who are they, and where do they rule? v. 10

They are rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. See study note 5 and Lesson 11, study note 2..

11. What is “the eternal purpose that he [God] has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord”? See 1:9-10.

God's eternal purpose is to unite all things in Christ. See study notes 2 and 3.

12. Why do the the rulers and authorities in heavenly places (v. 10) need to know the eternal purpose of God (v. 11).

They need to know that their dominion over the nations will end. They will have no authority whatsoever when Christ completes making up his bride, his body, his church. God will unite all things in Christ.

13. Why can we boldly and confidently come to God in faith he will hear us?

We can be confident God will hear us because of the truth Paul has told us: we are seated in the heavenly places, at God's right hand, where we have every spiritual blessing in Christ (1:3, 2:6); we have access through the Spirit to the Father (2:18)

14. Why might the Ephesians lose heart when they heard that Paul was in prison? How should they react to that news? v. 13

a. It would be natural for them to be discouraged. Was God unable or unwilling to deliver his faithful apostle from the powers of evil? If so, what about them?

b. Paul tells the Ephesians that his imprisonment is all for their glory. In writing to the church in Philippi Paul explained why:

I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

STUDY NOTES

1. An interrupted prayer.

In verse 1 Paul begins a sentence he does not finish: “*For this reason* I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles . . .” He does not finish the sentence, but takes it up again in verse 14: “*For this reason* I bow my knees before the Father . . .” The material in between, vs. 2-13, constitutes a digression expanding on his stewardship of the mystery of God, which he just wrote about in 2:13-22 and we learned of in Lesson 4. Paul is so excited about the mystery of the gospel that he wants the Ephesians to grasp the glory of God’s grace in uniting all things in Christ. He knows that repetition is the key to learning!

2. The mystery of the gospel further revealed.

As stated in 1:9-10, the mystery of God’s will is his plan is to put the whole universe, all things in heaven and things on earth, under the lordship of Christ, thereby making them all parts of a single, unified body with Christ as its head (see Lesson 2, study note 4). Paul identifies this body as the church in 1:21-22. Here in 3:10-11 he brings out a corollary of that plan. The “all things” of 1:10 means that Gentile believers in Christ are “fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise of Christ Jesus through the gospel” (3:6).

3. The mystery hidden from earlier generations.

The Old Testament made it clear that God will bless the Gentiles when the Messiah establishes his reign. When the Lord made his covenant with Abraham, he told him

And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”
Genesis 12:2-3

Psalm 72 prophesied of David’s heir, Messiah (Christ)

May all kings fall before him, all nations serve him! Psalm 72:11

Isaiah spoke of a Redeemer who would turn Israel back to the Lord and proclaimed that the nations would join Israel in living in the light of God’s glory

A Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who turn from transgression, declares the LORD. Isaiah 59:20

And nations shall come to our light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. Isaiah 60:3

That God would bless the Gentiles with Israel was not a mystery. The Jews expected that. But they thought the Gentiles would be second-class citizens in Messiah’s

kingdom. What was a mystery hidden from earlier generations was that God would make the Gentiles “fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise.”

4. The holy apostles and prophets.

Paul does not claim to be the only apostle to whom God revealed the mystery of the gospel. In v. 5 he says it was revealed to the apostles and prophets.⁶ It seems the Apostle Peter was the first one to whom God revealed that the gospel was for the Gentiles as well as the Jews. You can read of God’s revelation to Peter in Acts 10:1-16. Peter summarizes what God showed him then in speaking to the Jerusalem council of apostles and elders in Acts 15:7-9:

The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter. And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, “Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith.”

The apostles and elders knew that God made no distinction between Gentile believers and Jewish believers. It seems that what God revealed to Paul was that it was God’s plan to unite all things in heaven and earth in Christ, such that in the one body, with Christ as its head, might dwell the fullness of God.

5. Rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

Scriptural evidence is scanty, but it is sufficient to conclude that the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places of which Paul writes are angels, both good and bad. Consider Daniel 10:10-14 and 18-21:

And behold, a hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees. And he said to me, “O Daniel, man greatly loved, understand the words that I speak to you, and stand upright, for now I have been sent to you.” And when he had spoken this word to me, I stood up trembling. Then he said to me, “Fear not, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand and humbled yourself before your God, our words have been heard, and I have come because of your words. The prince of the kingdom of Persia withheld me twenty-one days, but Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I was left there with the kings of Persia, and came to make you understand what is to happen to your people in the latter days.”

Again one having the appearance of a man touched me and strengthened me. And he said, “O man greatly loved, fear not, peace be with you; be strong and of good

⁶ The prophets Paul has in mind are likely not the Old Testament prophets, but the prophets God appointed in the church in the early years of the apostolic age. See 4:11.

courage." And as he spoke to me, I was strengthened and said, "Let my lord speak, for you have strengthened me." Then he said, "Do you know why I have come to

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you? But now I will return to fight against the prince of Persia; and when I go out, behold, the prince of Greece will come. But I will tell you what is inscribed in the book of truth: there is none who contends by my side against these except Michael, your prince.

Michael is an archangel; he is the chief of princes of the Lord. Apparently he fights for God and God's people - see also Jude 9. The person speaking to Daniel contends alongside Michael, so he too is an angel of some sort. The princes of Persia and of Greece are angels, "patron angels" of two nations. The fact that they fight against Michael leads us to conclude that they are angels under the command of Satan.

The evil angels that Michael contended with were warring against God's people in the time of Daniel. Towards the end of Ephesians Paul tells us they war against us too in our day:

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Ephesians 6:12

In chapter 6 Paul tells us how to stand against these supernatural powers. But here in chapter 3 he tells us that God's plan for the fullness of time manifests his wisdom toward them. They already know that they are beaten, that God is uniting all things in heaven and earth in Christ (except the wicked, both angels and men, who will undergo eternal punishment in eternal fire and outer darkness).

Scripture does not tell us much about the powers and authorities in the heavenly places. Nevertheless, some Christians like to speculate about them: Frank Peretti's best seller, *This Present Darkness*, is a witness to interest in this subject.⁷ We will not speculate here..

⁷ I have not read the book and have no opinion about its contents. I try to avoid speculating about things the Bible doesn't say much about.

LESSON 7: EPHESIANS 3:14-4:16***STUDY QUESTIONS***

1. What is Paul's prayer for the Ephesians? *vs. 3:14-16*
2. What will result when we are strengthened by the Spirit? *vs. 3:17-19*
3. How well do we understand the power of God within us as believers? *v. 3:20*
4. What attitudes are necessary to walk in a manner worthy of our heavenly calling? *vs. 4:1-2*
5. Why should we be eager to maintain Christian unity? *vs. 4:3-6*
6. Unity does not mean uniformity. What differences has God ordained in the body of Christ? *vs. 4:7-11*
7. Which of the gifts listed in v. 11 exist in the church today and which have ceased?
8. What is God's purpose in gifting the church with apostles, prophets, pastors, and teachers? *vs. 4:12-13*

9. What is the danger of not having or listening to pastors and teachers that God has given to the church? *v. 4:14*
10. How is knowledge of the truth related to Christian growth? *v. 4:15*
11. What happens when each part of the church - each member - is working together in harmony as it should? *v. 4:16*

ANSWERS TO THE STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is Paul's prayer for the Ephesians? vs. 4:14-16

He prays that they may be strengthened with the power of the Holy Spirit.

2. What will result when we are strengthened by the Spirit? vs. 17-19

- a. Christ will dwell in our hearts by faith.
- b. Rooted and grounded in love, we will have strength to comprehend the love of Christ, which passes knowledge.
- c. We will be filled with all the fullness of God.

3. How well do we understand the power of God within us as believers? v. 20

Not fully at all: God is able to do in us abundantly more than we can ask or think.

4. What attitudes are necessary to walk in a manner worthy of our heavenly calling? vs. 4:1-2

Humility, gentleness, patience, and eagerness to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

5. Why should we be eager to maintain Christian unity? vs. 4-6

We all are one body. We all have one Spirit. We have one hope, one faith, one baptism, one God.

6. Unity does not mean uniformity. What differences has God ordained in the body of Christ? vs. 7-11

God has given different gifts to the members of his the church to be exercised for the good of the whole body.

7. Which of the gifts listed in v. 11 exist in the church today and which have ceased?

- a. The church still has evangelists, pastors, and teachers. See study note 6.
- b. God has not ordained apostles or prophets since the apostolic era.

8. What is God's purpose in gifting the church with apostles, prophets, pastors, and teachers? vs. 12-13

- a. Apostles and prophets were given to lay the foundation of the church, as we learned in 2:20 (see Lesson 5, study note 4).
- b. The role of pastors and teachers is to equip Christ's church for the work of ministry, that is, service. See study note 6.

9. What is the danger of not having or listening to pastors and teachers that God has given to the church? v. 14

New Christians (especially) are in danger of following false teachers and being “tossed to and fro and carried about by every wind of doctrine.” See study note 7.

10. How is knowledge of the truth related to Christian growth? v. 15

Our unity is a “unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God,” v. 13. We grow into that unity as we grow in knowledge of the truth of Christ. With faith but no knowledge we cannot grow “to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (v. 13).

11. What happens when each part of the church - each member - is working together in harmony as it should? v. 16

The church (the body) grows and builds itself up in love.

STUDY NOTES

1. Families in heaven?

In 3:14-15 Paul tells us that every family in heaven and earth receives its name from God the Father. What does the phrase, *family in heaven* mean?

It surely doesn't mean what Mormons think. They believe "families are forever," at least, a family can be forever if its members are sealed in a Mormon temple by the Mormon priesthood. Their belief rests on the teaching of their founder, Joseph Smith. Smith was a false prophet and his teachings are satanic lies.

But many true Christians wonder, "Will the circle be unbroken?" They hope to see mother, father, spouse, children, and other loved ones in heaven, not because they have gone through some religious ceremony on earth, but because they believe a loving God wants to give his children the desires of their heart. This verse, speaking of families in heaven, may give hope that we will see our loved ones there.

On the other hand, the Jewish Sadducees, who did not believe in the resurrection (and, therefore, did not believe that the dead live again in heaven), asked Jesus a trick question about a woman who had had seven husbands during her life:

In the resurrection, therefore, of the seven, whose wife will she be? For they all had her." Matthew 22:28

Jesus' answer suggests there will be no marriage (and so no families) in heaven:

Jesus answered them, "You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. Matthew 22:29-30

A Christian can hope to see his or her believing loved ones in heaven, where there will be no sorrow – and the parting from loved ones by death is sorrowful – but marriages as such will not persist.⁸ We will be like the angels in heaven, unmarried.

But this should not be a source of unhappiness. Our focus in heaven will be on our glorious risen Savior more than on a family reunion on the other side. Let us trust our loving God, who blesses us with every spiritual blessing in Christ, and not seek knowledge he has not given in his Word.⁹

2. "the Father, from whom every family . . . is named"

Paul's remark here involves a play on words in Greek. The Greek word for father is *pater* and the Greek word for family is *patria*. However, Paul has a point to make

⁸ If they did, the Sadducees' question would pose a legitimate concern.

⁹ Let us not do what God forbids in his Word, let us not try to communicate with the dead by means of a séance, a ouija board, or a medium.

beyond mere wordplay. Many earthly families (or clans, or tribes, like the tribes of Israel) are named for their fathers. For example, every Johnson family takes its name from some ancestral father named John.

God is the first father, the Father of all. In preaching to the men of Athens Paul said:

And he [God] made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, for “In him we live and move and have our being,” as even some of your own poets have said, “For we are indeed his offspring. Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man.

Acts 17:26-29

All people on earth are God's offspring in some sense and constitute his original family - “the family of man.”¹⁰ In that sense the many earthly “fathers” of families, clans, etc. are copies or types of the original Father, and all their families are types of his original family. Their names look back to their fathers, whose names look back to God.

3. Amen (v. 21). The end of Part I.

As is true of some of Paul's other letters, the first section of Ephesians is doctrine, the second section is application. Verse 21 concludes the first half of Ephesians with praise to God for his eternal plan and purpose to unite all things in heaven and earth under Christ. He ends chapters 1-3 with *Amen*, a Hebrew word meaning “so be it” - very appropriate. Chapter 4 begins a new section, which lays out how we are to think and live in the light of God's plan.

4. Living to maintain the unity of the Spirit.

Chapter 4 begins with an exhortation to live worthily of our calling. He leads off with a plea to live humbly, gently, and patiently in the church, bearing with our brothers and sisters in love. In chapters 1-3 he wrote of our being one body in Christ. Here he tells us to be eager to maintain the unity of the body. It is only by practicing these particular graces that we can maintain the unity of the body.

Several things can break the unity of the church on earth. One of them is believers thinking they are more important than their fellow Christians. Chapters 1 through 4 of 1 Corinthians reveal that the church in Corinth had competing factions. The

¹⁰ Although all human beings are in this sense members of the family of man, Scripture tells us that many are estranged from our heavenly Father and are now children of the devil (John 8:44, 1 John 3:10).

source of those factions was Christians thinking they had more wisdom and insight than their fellow Christians. The Apostle John wrote to Gaius, a beloved brother, telling him how a fellow member of his church was disfellowshipping other members because he wanted to be first:

I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority. So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing, talking wicked nonsense against us. And not content with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers, and also stops those who want to and puts them out of the church. 3 John 9-10

Humility on the part of all is the antidote to this kind of disunity.

Disunity can also result from impatience with our brothers and sisters. Someone rubs us the wrong way or just can't see what seems plain to us. He is so dense! She is so stubborn! Perhaps we complain about them to others. Perhaps we speak brusquely, rudely, or angrily to them. That makes matters worse, but we are too fed up to care. We write them off and distance ourselves from our brothers and sisters. There is no effort to forbear them in love and maintain unity.

Let us try to practice humility, gentleness, and patience with each other. Sometimes it takes effort, but Paul tells us to *strive eagerly* to maintain unity and peace in the body.

Scripture extols the blessings of unity

Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!
 It is like the precious oil on the head, running down on the beard,
 on the beard of Aaron, running down on the collar of his robes!
 It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion!
 For there the LORD has commanded the blessing, life forevermore.

Psalm 133:1-3

The Lord Jesus said that the unity of his people would be a witness to the world, that by our unity and love the world would know that the Father had sent him:

"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.

There are other sources of disunity – false doctrine is a prime example. Paul takes up false teaching in v. 14.

5. What binds us together.

In vs. 4-6 Paul reminds the Ephesians and us of what binds us together in the bond of peace.

- a. First, we are one body. We may be in different congregations, even in different denominations. But all the faithful constitute one body.
- b. All believers are indwelt by the one Holy Spirit (1:13, Romans 8:9-11).
- c. We have one hope, the hope of our heavenly inheritance in Christ (1:12-14).
- d. We all bow to one Lord, our Savior Jesus Christ.
- e. One faith. Our churches may have doctrinal statements that differ, but all faithful churches profess a common faith as to the essentials.¹¹ However, the word *faith* also means our trust in Christ as the Scriptures present him. That too is common to all Christians.
- f. One baptism. All true churches baptize in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, regardless of mode (sprinkling or immersion), regardless of whether infants are or are not legitimate subjects for baptism.
- g. One heavenly Father.

6. Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers.

God has given each of us gifts to be used for the benefit of the whole church. v. 7. In v. 11 he mentions the higher gifts (1 Corinthians 12:31).

a. Apostles: Apostles were personally appointed by Jesus. They were men who had seen him, either in the flesh, or as in the case of Paul, by direct revelation. They were sent out into the world to proclaim the message of Christ. They laid the doctrinal and organizational foundation of the church (2:20).

b. Prophets: Paul is referring to New Testament prophets here, not the prophets of the Old Testament. Prophets spoke the truth God gave them directly by divine revelation. Acts 11:27-29 tells of one instance of prophecy in the apostolic era:

Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world (this took place in the days of Claudius). So the disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea.

God does not give the church apostles or prophets today, though some people falsely claim to be apostles or prophets. These study notes are not the place to prove that those two gifts have ceased; there are books aplenty on the subject for those interested.

c. Evangelists: These are men and women who are gifted in communicating the gospel effectively to the lost in the power of the Holy Spirit. Some serve as

¹¹ The various creeds of the early church, such as the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed, express that basic, common faith.

missionaries; some serve their own people group. All of us are told to be ready to witness to Christ as God gives us opportunity, but evangelists are full time, whether paid or not.

d. Pastors and teachers: These are familiar to us. Like evangelists, they do not receive direct divine revelation, but pass on what they have learned from other faithful teachers and from their study of the Word. They are gifted in understanding the Word and in communicating it (at least, they are supposed to be!)

7. *False teachers.*

The church has been beset by false teachers from the beginning. Paul encountered them throughout his ministry: in Corinth (2 Corinthians 11:3-4, 13-15), in Galatia (1:6-9), and in Colossae (Colossians 2:4 and 16-19). They also had appeared in Crete, where Paul warned Titus against them (Titus 1:10-16). They were already a threat to the church in Ephesus. Paul had left Timothy in charge of the Ephesian church, and he warns Timothy about them (1 Timothy 1:3-7, 6:3-5 and 1 Timothy 3:1-9).

Paul does not go into the details of what false teaching to look out for. He takes the approach that the best antidote against false teaching is knowledge of the truth. Ignorance of the truth opens the door to false teaching; grounding in the truth keeps that door shut.

And so it is true today. There is a lot of false teaching abroad in 21st century America. Lack of biblical knowledge and spiritual immaturity is where it takes root. False teaching is best thwarted by pastors and teachers speaking the truth in love (v. 15).

LESSON 8: EPHESIANS 4:17-31***STUDY QUESTIONS***

1. What controls the Gentiles' manner of life? *v. 17*
2. What are the characteristics of the unsaved mind? *vs. 17-18*
3. All people live because Christ their Creator gave them life: "In him [Christ the Word] was life, and the life was the light of men," John 1:4. What is the relationship of men to the life of God now? *v. 18*
4. Why are people darkened in their understanding and alienated from the life of God? *v. 18*
5. What is the source or cause of man's ignorance? *v. 18*
6. What does callousness toward God produce in man? *v. 19*
7. What is true of our old nature? *v. 22*
8. The mind of the old nature is futile, dark, and ignorant. What is true of the mind of the new self? *vs. 23-24*

9. What are the characteristics of the likeness (or image) of God? v. 24

10. Paul commands us to *put off* our old nature (v. 22) and to *put on* the new self (vs. 23-24). He tells us what that means in practical terms in vs.25-32. In the left hand column below, list the behaviors we are to put off or put away, and in the right hand column, list the opposite behaviors we are to put on or to practice.

Put off

Put on

ANSWERS TO THE STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What controls the Gentiles' manner of life? v. 17

Their futile minds. The Greek word translated *futile* can also be translated as *empty, meaningless, ephemeral*.

2. What are the characteristics of the unsaved mind? vs. 17-18

Besides being empty and meaningless it lacks understanding

3. All people live because Christ their Creator gave them life: "In him [Christ the Word] was life, and the life was the light of men," John 1:4. What is the relationship of men to the life of God now? v. 18

The unsaved are alienated from the life of God.

4. Why are people darkened in their understanding and alienated from the life of God? v. 18

Ignorance of the truth.

5. What is the source or cause of man's ignorance? v. 18

Hardness of heart. People harden their hearts against knowledge of God.

6. What does callousness toward God produce in man? v. 19

Sensuality and every kind of evil practice.

7. What is true of our old nature? v. 22

It is corrupt by deceitful lusts. Corrupt means degraded from human nature as God originally created it in Adam and Eve. Their desire (lust) for the forbidden fruit was incited by the serpent – Satan, the great deceiver.

8. The mind of the old nature is futile, dark, and ignorant. What is true of the mind of the new self? vs. 23-24

It is renewed after the likeness of God. See the next answer.

9. What are the characteristics of the likeness (or image) of God? v. 24

True righteousness and holiness.

10. Paul commands us to put off our old nature (v. 22) and to put on the new self (vs. 23-24). He tells us what that means in practical terms in vs. 25-32. In the left hand column below, list the behaviors we are to put off or put away, and in the right hand column, list the opposite behaviors we are to put on or to practice.

Put off

Falsehood, lying

Lasting anger

Theft

Corrupt speech

Bitterness, wrath,
slander, malice

Put on

Speaking truth

A mind at peace at the end of the day.
see Psalm 4:4

Working honestly so as to have
enough to share with the needy

Gracious talk, good and fitting to
the occasion, talk that builds up
the listeners

Kindness, sympathy and empathy,
forgiveness

STUDY NOTES

1. Who are the Gentiles in 4:17?

The Ephesian church was largely if not entirely of non-Jewish origin. In that sense they were Gentiles. However, when Paul speaks of Gentiles in 4:17 he uses the word in a more restricted, spiritual sense. He means the Ephesian Christians' unsaved neighbors. The Ephesian believers were no longer spiritually Gentiles, but members of spiritual Israel.

2. The futile mind of the unbeliever.

Paul describes the mind of an unbeliever as subject to futility (Greek: *(mataioteti)*). The KJV has *vanity*. Vanity in the Bible does not refer to conceit regarding one's good looks. In the Bible, futility or vanity refers to having failed to obtain the good – having sought in *vain*. Paul expands on this theme elsewhere in his letters:

For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, Romans 1:21-22

And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. Romans 1:28-29

For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.” Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. 1 Corinthians 1:18-21

An unbeliever would likely feel insulted to know that Christians consider his mind futile. After all, an unbeliever may be intelligent, perceptive, and logical regarding things important to him. In business, science, and other pursuits of this life he may function well and accomplish what he wants. The futility of his thinking lies in his desired object. He wants the good things of this life, not the better things of eternity. He may be religious, but if he is religious he seeks not the true God, but a false god concocted by his own mind. In this sense what he seeks is futile and vain.

3. The old self and the new self. 12

Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away, behold, the new has come” (2 Corinthians 5:17). When a person trusts in Christ he is born again as a new creation/self/man or woman. However, the old person/self that we were still hangs around. It will not be done away with until we enter heaven.

In the eyes of God - and what God sees is the true reality - the old self is dead; it died with Christ on the cross. Yet it is like a zombie, the living dead. It is dead, but we are still tempted to follow its desires and think its thoughts. Paul tells us to reckon the old self dead in our mind and put to death its thoughts and actions in our life. The most extensive discussion of this reckoning and doing is found in Romans 6:1-13; it is worth reading, pondering, and doing.

In Ephesians Paul emphasizes the practical doing. He says what we are to do is like putting off the old self like a garment and putting on the new self like a new garment. In practical terms that means rejecting temptation and consciously obeying the Lord’s commands in the power of the Holy Spirit.

4. The likeness of God.

Is there a legitimate likeness of God? Is not constructing a likeness of God idolatry? Idolatry is making and worshiping an idol, an image or likeness of a god. The idol is usually a physical image of stone, metal, or wood. Idolatry is a heinous sin Idolatry is forbidden in the third commandment:

“You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments. Exodus 20:4-6

Not all idols are physical objects. There are idols of the mind and heart. Christians may fall into this kind of idolatry. When I was a small child I pictured God in my mind as looking very much like my grandfather: unsmiling, with white hair and a white mustache. That was actually idolatry! Money can be an idol even for those who don’t have it but covetously think on it (Colossians 3:5).

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In the preface to the ESV the translators say. “In the area of gender language . . . ‘people’ rather than ‘men’ is regularly used where the original languages refer to both men and women.” They followed the same principle in other cases: “brothers and sisters” for “brothers,” and here, “self” for “men”.

Is there any likeness of God that Christians can think upon that does not amount to idolatry? Yes, not a mental image, but a consideration of his attributes or characteristics. Paul tells us in v. 24 that the likeness of God is seen in his true righteousness and holiness. In Colossians 3:10 he associates knowledge with the likeness of God, and John 4:7 tells us that God is love. Thinking of God as having these attributes is not idolatry, quite the contrary. We should meditate on what God is like, not what he looks like.

5. Anger, when and why.

Anger is not always a sin. The Lord Jesus was angry on several occasions:

Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there with a withered hand. And they watched Jesus, to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him. And he said to the man with the withered hand, "Come here." And he said to them, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?" But they were silent. And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. Mark 3:1-5

The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. And he told those who sold the pigeons, "Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade." His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." John 2:13-17

In the first instance Jesus was angry because of the people's hardness of heart. In the second instance he was incensed at their disregard for the holiness of God's house. With such behavior it is well to be angry.

But we are often angry for lesser reasons. Someone insults or disrespects us. Our child willfully disobeys. A co-worker fails to carry through on a task that affects our work. We hit the nail wrong. The plane is delayed and we miss our flight. We wait a half hour at the restaurant until the server finally comes for our order. Is anger in such situations sinful?

Anger that results from personal inconvenience can be an expression of sinful selfishness; anger that results from inability to do what we ought to do may not be. It's not always easy to tell if our anger is justified and blameless or if it is unjustified and sinful. Here a robust conscience is the best guide. But justified or not, Paul says we should not nurse our anger. Commit resolution of the situation to the Lord and then consciously put it out of mind at the end of the day.

6. Grieving the Holy Spirit.

To grieve someone is to cause that person suffering and sorrow. The Holy Spirit is a

person, not an impersonal force. He is one of the three Persons of the Trinity. As a person, the Spirit can be grieved.

Our sin is what grieves the Holy Spirit. The Spirit indwells every child of God (Romans 8:9-11) and seals us for the day of redemption (v. 30). We are to be led in our walk by the indwelling Spirit. When we commit the sins Paul condemns in 4:25-31, the Holy Spirit sorrows over our rebellion, over our rejection of his leading.

If we habitually practice those and other sins and do not turn back to God in repentance, we have no reason to call ourselves Christians; we are self-deceived. Paul tells us in Romans that living such that we habitually grieve the Spirit is impossible for a real Christian:

So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. Romans 8:12-

All of us grieve the Spirit at times, for Christians still sin (1 John 1:8-10). Let us seek the aid and power of the Holy Spirit in living after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness (v. 34)

LESSON 9: EPHESIANS 5:1-20***STUDY QUESTIONS***

1. How does 5:1 relate to the previous verse, 4:32?
2. In addition to not practicing immorality, impurity, and covetousness, how else are we to treat those sins? v. 3
3. What kind of talk are we to avoid, and what kind of talk are we to practice? v. 4
4. Why does Paul think it necessary to remind the Ephesians that those who practice sexual immorality, impurity, and covetousness will not inherit the kingdom of God? Shouldn't that be obvious? vs. 5-6
5. How are we to deal with immoral, impure, and covetous people? v. 7
6. What does it mean to walk in the light? v. 8
7. We are to take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness. What else are we to do regarding the unfruitful works of darkness? v. 11
8. The ESV translators chose to print part of v. 14 indented, in two stanzas. Why do you think they did that?

9. What aspects of living wisely does Paul mention in vs. 15-18a? Why is it important to heed this admonition?

10. When we sing praises to God, in what manner should we do it? *vs. 18b-20*

ANSWERS TO THE STUDY QUESTIONS

1. How does 5:1 relate to the previous verse, 4:32?

Verse 5:1 tells us to be imitators of God, and v. 4:32 tells us what to imitate. God forgives out of love, and we should imitate him in forgiving others.

2. In addition to not practicing immorality, impurity, and covetousness, how else are we to treat those sins? v. 3

We are not even to talk about them. We ought not to gossip or criticize others for these sins. We may condemn them in our minds and pray for repentance, but we ought not to talk about them with others.

3. What kind of talk are we to avoid, and what kind of talk are we to practice? v. 4

In addition to avoiding gossip and criticism of others for their sins (see answer 2), we must avoid filthy, lewd, suggestive talk, foolish, empty, meaningless talk, and crude, dirty jokes. Instead, we should look for opportunities to give thanks to God and praise him with our mouths.

4. Why does Paul think it necessary to remind the Ephesians that those who practice sexual immorality, impurity, and covetousness will not inherit the kingdom of God? Shouldn't that be obvious? vs. 5-6

Maybe some believers in Ephesus had listened to deceitful teachers who taught that they could never lose their salvation no matter how they lived after baptism or confession or decision. That error seems to be widespread today. See study note 1.

5. How are we to deal with immoral, impure, and covetous people? v. 7

We are not to associate with people who live that way and claim to be Christians. See study note 2.

6. What does it mean to walk in the light? v. 8

It means to live a holy life governed by knowledge of God's will. See study note 3.

7. We are to take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness. What else are we to do regarding the unfruitful works of darkness? v. 11

We are to expose them. See study note 4.

8. The ESV publishers chose to print v. 14 indented, in two stanzas. Why do you think they did that?

The translators meant to indicate that they considered those stanzas poetry; indeed, a fragment of a Christian hymn of the apostolic age. See study note 5.

9. What aspects of living wisely does Paul mention in vs. 15-18a? Why is it important to heed this admonition?

a. Making the best use of our time. The time we have before we die or the Lord returns is all too short, and the days of our lives are evil. It is so easy to waste the time God has allotted to us or conform our lives to the evil age rather than standing against it..

b. Endeavoring to know what is the will of the Lord. Christians can be mistaken as to what God wants them to accomplish in this world.

c. Not getting drunk. Drunkenness can lead to debauchery. Even if it doesn't, it wastes time and befuddles the mind so that we cannot discern the will of the Lord

10. When we sing praises to God, in what manner should we do it? vs. 18b-20

We should sing to the Lord with all our heart, with a thankful heart. See study note 5.

STUDY NOTES

1. True and false assurance.

Is the phrase “once saved, always saved” true? The answer is both yes and no.

Yes, it gives genuine assurance to the believer who struggles, not always successfully, to put the old self to death. The struggle is evidence that he or she is one of Christ’s sheep.

For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Romans 7:22-8:1

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. John 10:27-29

No, for those who live immoral, impure, covetous lives, those who know that God forbids and hates their sin but are confident that, “faith for a moment brings life for eternity,” no matter how they live. Paul says that we may be sure that those who live careless sinful lives have no inheritance in the kingdom of God.

True faith in Christ is the product of a new self (4:24), and the new self produces the fruit of righteousness (5:9). Jesus said that by their fruits you will know what manner of people we are (Matthew 7:15-21).

Sadly, tragically, the false sense of “once saved, always saved” is taught by too many pastors and teachers who want to encourage people to accept Christ. So easy to get a ticket to heaven, without having to change one’s lifestyle! Of course, the convert is encouraged to live a righteous life, but if he or she chooses to live a “carnal” life, the worst that will happen is the loss of reward¹³. One’s place in heaven is still secure.

Paul says that those who teach this heresy deceive their hearers with empty words (5:6). Don’t be taken in by this false, damnable teaching! To repeat, Paul assures us that those who live careless sinful lives have no inheritance in the kingdom of God (5:5).

2. Shunning the wicked..

Paul’s admonition not to associate with the “sons of disobedience” should be interpreted by his similar admonition to the Corinthian church:

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This teaching is based on a misinterpretation of 1 Corinthians 3:13-

I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? God judges those outside. Purge the evil person from among you. 1 Corinthians 5:9-13

Paul is not speaking of those who make no claim to be Christian. He is admonishing the Ephesians to have *nothing to do with someone who claims to be a Christian* but shows by his lifestyle that he is not.

What Paul says we must do is not easy to do. The person may be a family member or a member of one's church. Before we cut off relations with the person we ought to try to bring them to repentance and true faith in Christ. If those efforts fail, we should arrange an "exit interview" where tell them why we can't hang out with them or talk with them or do business with them any more.

We know ahead of time that our decision will be misconstrued and not well received. We may be accused of being holier than thou.

If the person is a member of a church, the church ideally will know of the situation and will carry out the disciplinary process Paul commanded in 1 Corinthians 5:1-5. Sadly, few churches carry out their responsibility to discipline their members, and some which do exercise discipline do it badly.

3. Light and darkness.

Throughout the Scripture light is a metaphor for good things and darkness for bad things. Light represents the knowledge of God (Psalm 27:1, John 8:12), life (Psalm 36:9, John 1:4, John 8:12), direction for living (Psalm 43:3, Psalm 119:5, Isaiah 2:5)), holiness and sinlessness (1 John 1:5). Darkness is a metaphor for the opposite: ignorance (Romans 1:21, Ephesians 4:18, 1 Thessalonians 5:4), death and hell (Matthew 22:13, 2 Peter 2:17), aimless, directionless living (1 John 2:10-11), and wickedness. While hell is described as outer darkness, we note that there will be no night in heaven, no darkness.

4. Exposing the unfruitful works of darkness (5:10-13).

How do we expose the unfruitful works of darkness if we are not even to speak of them? God commissioned prophets in the past who denounced and exposed the sins of his people, including those of rulers and religious authorities. Today he does not provide the church with prophets. How then are the wicked, shameful deeds of men to be laid open and bare in the present age?

The answer is that we are to let the light of God's Word shine. It will make hidden sins visible. Preachers in their sermons and all Christians in their private capacities are

to make the truth known. If we let others know what the Bible says about what righteousness is and what God condemns as sin, we can trust the Holy Spirit to open minds and hearts to expose the sins in our own lives and the lives of others. Jesus said that that is (part of) the Spirit's work in this world (John 16:8).

5. Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.

Protestant churches are singing churches. In our country, churches sing a variety of songs. Some churches sing mostly hymns, some sing mostly contemporary praise songs, and some sing a blend of the two. Does v. 19 provide any help in knowing what we should sing?

Yes:

- a. The lyrics should be *full of thanksgiving* to God, thanking him for all he has done for us and given to us. They must be Christ-filled.
- b. The music should be *melodious*. We should sing the best tunes. The church father John Chrysostom asked, "Why should the devil have the best tunes?"¹⁴
- c. The music should be *singable*. If the congregation struggles with following the melody it will not be able to sing heartily, as Paul directs us.
- d. Our music must be *congregational*. We are to sing to each other as well as to God. Paul says nothing about individuals, ensembles, or choirs singing to the congregation. If a church service features special music, it should not take the place of congregational singing, which should predominate. The musicians need to take care that their music is an offering to God on behalf of the whole congregation and not a performance for an audience.

A small number of Christian denominations practice only *á capella* singing of the psalms. Paul says nothing about the use of musical instruments or about singing only the psalms. It is worth considering, however, that Paul's apparent quotation of an early Christian hymn in v. 14 shifts the burden of proof to the exclusive psalm singers. They need to explain v. 14 if they can. However, this note is not the place to delve into a discussion about exclusive psalm singing. There is plenty of material on the Internet and elsewhere to read and evaluate if one is interested

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In my opinion, the Gregorian chants of an earlier era (though centuries after Chrysostom) were not melodious.

LESSON 10: EPHESIANS 5:21-6:9***STUDY QUESTIONS***

1. Why are we to submit to one another? 5:21
2. In what manner are wives to submit to their husbands? 5:22, 24. See study note 1.
3. How is the relation of husband to wife similar to the relation of Christ to the church? 5:23. See study notes 2 and 3.
4. In what manner are husbands to love their wives? 5:24, 28
5. Why does Christ nourish and cherish the church? 5:29-30
6. How does Paul sum up the way a husband and wife should interact? 5:33
7. Give two reasons children should obey their parents. 6:1-3
8. Why do you think the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write 6:4?
9. How does 6:5-6 apply to us today? None of us is a slave, as many were in Paul's day.
10. Who are equivalent to *masters* in our day? 6:9

11. Give two reasons we should “render service with a good will.” 5:8.

12. Why should a master/boss/employer treat his underlings kindly and forebear from threatening them? 6:9

ANSWERS TO THE STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Why are we to submit to one another? 5:21

We do it out of reverence for Christ. He taught mutual submission. See study note 1.

2. In what manner are wives to submit to their husbands? 5:22, 24. See study note 2.

They are to submit to them as they are to submit to the Lord.

3. How is the relation of husband to wife similar to the relation of Christ to the church? 5:23. See study notes 2 and 3.

The husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church.

4. In what manner are husbands to love their wives? 5:24, 28

They are to love them as Christ loved the church. (They should be ready to give their lives for them!) They are to nourish and cherish them as they nourish and cherish their own bodies.

5. Why does Christ nourish and cherish the church? 5:29-30

It is his body. See Lesson 3, study note 5.

6. How does Paul sum up the way a husband and wife should interact? 5:33

The husband is to love his wife; the wife is to respect and reverence her husband.

7. Give two reasons children should obey their parents. 6:1-3

- a. It is right that they do so. It is commanded in the 5th commandment.
- b. Long life is promised to those who honor their parents. See Exodus 20:12

8. Why do you think the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write 6:4?

There are too many clueless fathers who treat their children harshly, even among Christians. See study note 4.

9. How does 6:5-6 apply to us today? None of us is a slave, as many were in Paul's day.

Most of us are employees at one time or another in our lives.

10. Who are equivalent to *masters* in our day? 6:9

Our bosses. For most of us they are our employers or managers. For those in the military, they are the officers above us.

11. Give two reasons we should “render service with a good will.”

- a. We are actually serving Christ when we serve others. See study note 1.
- b. We will receive back the good we did others as a reward. This will occur at the final judgment.

12. Why should a master/boss/employer treat his underlings kindly and forbear from threatening them? 6:9

Bosses too have a Master, the Lord in heaven. He will show no partiality at the judgment. He will not treat those who were masters or bosses on earth more favorably or more leniently than those who were their underlings.

STUDY NOTES

1. Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ (5:21).

What does “submitting to one another“ mean? And how does our submission show reverence for Christ?

Submitting to one another in general does not mean doing whatever anyone else tells us to do. We are to submit in that sense to some people, as Paul goes on to elaborate in 5:22 to 6:9. But 5:21 seems to denote a more general submission. What does that look like?

Jesus gives us the meaning:

And Jesus called them to him and said to them, “You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Mark 10:42-45

To submit in the general sense is to live to serve others, not to lord it over others and demand our own way, but to live as a servant of others, to seek their good before our own. It is living humbly, putting others before self.

One may agree that a Christian should live this way, but disagree that that lifestyle should be called submission. But the Merriam-Webster online dictionary defines submission this way:

submission: the condition of being submissive, humble, or compliant

The word *or* indicates that any one of the three words qualifies as submission. Humility, esteeming others better than one’s self, is submission. And Paul urges it on us:

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Philippians 2:3-4

Paul gives an example of submission out of consideration for others in 1 Corinthians 10. Corinthian Christians with a firm grasp of the truth had no problem eating meat that had been offered to idols in pagan temples before being sold in the meat market. They knew, even though the pagans did not, that the gods they worshiped did not exist. Eating food offered to idols means nothing to those with this knowledge. Paul agrees that the idols are nothing, no matter what some think. But Paul knows that eating such food was dangerous for Christians with a weak conscience (Romans 14:1-4, 6b-8, 13-21). Paul says the less knowledgeable Christians could be *destroyed* by so doing! .We are not to allow the exercise of our own freedom to become a stumbling block to those with a

weak faith or conscience. By not eating meat in the presence of the weaker brothers and sisters, by not insisting on their own way because they are superior in knowledge, more mature Christians are to submit to their weaker brothers – out of love.

Submission in this sense does show reverence for Christ. He is our Lord, and we show reverence for him when we seek to live according to his commands.

2. Wives and husbands: submission and love in marriage.

God established an order of authority in creation. Man, the male, is subject directly to Christ, his Creator and the source of his life (John 1:3-4). Although Christians, are a new creation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17), they are still subject to God's original creation ordinances.¹⁵ God first created man, the male; then the woman out of the man and for him. Woman is subject to the man's authority in marriage (Genesis 2:18-24).

The subordination of woman to man in *any* social relationship is an especially unpopular doctrine today. Feminists vehemently attack the notion that women are subordinate in marriage by God's creation decree. Even the evangelical church has a "biblical feminist" movement. These notes are not the place to argue against "biblical feminism." At this point it is sufficient to note that, for those who accept the Bible as God's inspired Word, the burden of proof is on people who deny the subordination of wives to their husbands.

Feminists reject 6:1 on ideological grounds, but they are not the only ones who reject it. Many non-ideological women, including not a few Christian women, struggle to submit to their husbands. It's not hard to see why. Some are married to immature men, some are married to men prone to violent outbursts, some are married to men not nearly as smart as themselves, some are married to impractical men, some are married to lazy men – the list could be extended.

Christian women who struggle to submit may bring up the case of Abigail in 1 Samuel 25. Abigail was married to a stubborn, cheap, ungrateful jerk. His name, Nabal, meant *fool* in Hebrew, and Abigail acknowledged that he lived up to his name. Nabal refused to give David food for his men even though David had protected Nabal's flocks and herds from robbers. David was ready to kill him.

Unbeknownst to her husband, Abigail took matters into her own hands and sent David food, though she knew Nabal would have forbidden it if he had known. In doing so she saved the lives of Nabal and his servants. David (and by implication, the Lord) approved of her disobedience, her lack of submission.

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The first sin of both angels and men was rebellion against God's authority. There is evidence in Paul's letters to the Corinthians that some were violating the order of authority instituted at creation, both in marriage and in the church..

Is the church to brush off the struggle of women married to men like Nabal by simply repeating 6:1 to them? No. What the church needs to do is impress upon husbands Paul's words to them in vs. 25-33. Husbands are commanded to love their wives as they love and care for their own bodies. Jesus said, "where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matthew 6:21). If men treasure and care for their wives like they do their bodies, they will love their wives.¹⁶ Christ, who died for the church, his bride, is to be their example. What woman would not respect and love a man who would die for her?¹⁷

3. The obedience of children.

Parents, non-Christian as well as Christian, will agree heartily with Paul that children should obey their parents. But Paul is not addressing parents in 6:1-4. He is speaking to children, who do not always obey their parents.

Paul is speaking to Christian children, so he cites the Word of God in vs. 2-3. God commands us to honor our parents, and obedience is a form of honor. Moreover, in light of the fifth commandment, to obey them is to obey God. Indeed, "we must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). If a child is told to do something sinful he or she must decline to do so, but generally this is not the issue when a child disobeys..

One reason children may not obey their parents is that their parents are not good at parenting. Paul addresses one common parenting failure in v. 4. Parents may provoke their children to anger.¹⁸ By threatening, demanding harshly, not explaining (when the child is old enough to understand the reason), a father (or mother) can leave a child speechless but angry. The child may obey, but the episode may leave a root of bitterness. The cumulative effect of many peremptory, provocative incidents may permanently affect a child's attitude towards his parent.

¹⁶ The German word *schatz* means both treasure and sweetheart. It's too bad English doesn't have a similar word with both meanings.

¹⁷ Women are not bound by Scripture to be submissive to all men. Like men, they are to obey their husbands and the officers of the church, but they are not obligated to submit to other men simply because they are men. Indeed, women may exercise authority over men in areas of life such as the workplace, social organizations, and government.

¹⁸ The NIV renders the phrase, "do not exasperate your children." The Greek word rendered *provoke* or *exasperate* literally means *make angry*.

Paul suggests that proper nurture in the discipline and instruction of the Lord may ward off disobedience and prevent internalized anger. Still, sometimes a child disobeys simply because he or she is strong-willed. Nothing personal here, Dad, but

the question is, who is going to get their way? The parent of a strong-willed child may do everything in a loving way but still meet with active or passive disobedience. What can avail then, but continued love, consistent teaching and discipline, and constant prayer?

4. Working for the man.

Although we are not slaves, most of us have an earthly master. We may have an employer or boss. As with wives and husbands, the master may be wise, understanding, and kind, or he may be overbearing, harsh, arbitrary, and threatening; he may play favorites; he may be inconsistent; he may not be very competent. We may wish someone else gave the orders. Nevertheless, Paul says we must work for them as if we were working for Christ, our Master in heaven, for we really are. Paul assures us that Christ will repay us for good, sincere, whole-hearted service.

As in the other specific cases of submission he discusses, Paul has a word for both the superior and the inferior partner in the relationship. In this case he has a word for masters/employers/bosses. They too have a Master in heaven who will settle accounts with them. What they were on earth will not gain them extra favorable treatment. God shows no partiality (Romans 2:11).

Our situation today is different than that of slaves in Paul's day in that we have the option of quitting or resigning if our boss makes things intolerable. But if we find that impossible or unwise for whatever reason, we are to serve whatever person has authority over us as though we were working for Christ. We do not call him *Lord* for nothing.

LESSON 11: EPHESIANS 6:10-24***STUDY QUESTIONS***

1. Why are we to be strong in the Lord? *vs. 10-12*
2. Why does Paul use the metaphor of putting on armor? *vs. 12 24.*
3. With whom are we fighting? *v. 12*
4. Where is the realm of these enemies? *v. 12.*
5. What is the evil day of *v. 13?*
6. Why do we need each of the pieces of armor listed in *vs. 14-17*
 - a. belt of truth
 - b. breastplate of righteousness
 - c. shoes of the readiness of the gospel
 - d. shield of faith
 - e. helmet of salvation
 - f. sword of the Spirit, the word of God

7. How many times does Paul use the word *all* in v. 18?
8. What in particular does Paul ask prayer for? *v. 19*
9. Why might Paul feel in need of that prayer? *v. 20*
10. What does Paul hope that the news Tychicus brings will do? *v. 22*. Why might his news have that effect?
11. Compare Paul's final benediction in vs. 23-24 with his initial blessing in 1:2. How are they similar?

ANSWERS TO THE STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Why are we to be strong in the Lord? vs. 10-12

We wrestle with evil spiritual powers. We need the Lord's strength to prevail.

2. Why does Paul use the metaphor of putting on armor? vs. 12 24.

We are in a battle and we need protection and a means of fighting. That was what armor provided warriors in Paul's day.

3. With whom are we fighting? v. 12

The rulers, authorities, and cosmic powers who have power over the present dark world.

4. Where is the realm of these enemies? v. 12

The heavenly places. See 1:3 and study note 2.

5. What is the evil day of v. 13?

Probably any day we find ourselves battling temptation and satanic oppression. On such a day we must fight and win.

6. Why do we need each of the pieces of armor listed in vs. 14-17?

a. belt of truth

The belt holds the rest of the armor in place (think of how your belt holds your pants up.) If we don't have a firm hold on the truth of the gospel, the rest of our spiritual armor will not help us enough.

b. breastplate of righteousness

The righteousness of Christ protects our heart. We must trust in it and not in our own righteousness. See Isaiah 59:17.

c. shoes of the readiness of the gospel

We need to be able to stand fast in the truth. A Roman soldier's shoes allowed to stand his ground without slipping. See Isaiah 52:7.

d. shield of faith

We need faith in the truth of Christ to quench all the flaming darts of Satan, which are the doubts he tries to subdue us with.

e. helmet of salvation

We need to protect the mind as well as the heart. If we lack assurance of our

salvation we will be vanquished in our daily fight with Satan. See Isaiah 59:17.

f. sword of the Spirit, the word of God

The word of God is both a defensive and offensive weapon. Jesus used Scripture when Satan attacked him, tempting him in the wilderness. See Matthew 4.

7. How many times does Paul use the word all in v. 18?

Four times: praying at all times, all prayer and supplication, all perseverance, for all the saints.

8. What in particular does Paul ask prayer for? v. 19

He prays that words may be given him to proclaim boldly the mystery of the gospel.

9. Why might Paul feel in need of that prayer? v. 20

He was in prison in chains. That would be enough to sap anyone's zeal and boldness.

10. What does Paul hope that the news Tychicus brings will do? v. 22. Why might his news have that effect?

He hopes it will encourage the Ephesians, who may well have been discouraged knowing Paul was in prison.

11. Compare Paul's final benediction in vs. 23-24 with his initial blessing in 1:2. How are they similar?

In both his final benediction and in his initial blessing he wishes them peace and grace through God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

STUDY NOTES

1. Spiritual warfare.

In the final section of Ephesians Paul calls us to prepare for spiritual warfare with the Satan and his angels.

Satan was defeated by Christ when he took on human nature, lived a sinless life on our behalf, died to atone for our sins, rose triumphantly from the grave., and ascended to the right hand of God the Father. We are in Christ by faith and possess every spiritual blessing, both now and in the world to come. Satan can do nothing to change that. Why then does he make war upon us, and what does that war consist of?

I believe Satan refuses to accept that he is defeated and that we who have been born again are eternally safe and secure in our Savior. He is so proud that he is unable to believe that he cannot ultimately win. That is why he makes war on Christ by attacking God's people. However, maybe Satan does know that he has lost and that his end is eternal torment in the lake of fire (Revelation 20:5). In that case, his aim in waging war against the church is to take down as many Christians as he can with him out of rage and spite. Whatever motivates the "prince of the power of the air" (2:2), the fact is that he hates God's people and seeks to destroy them.

Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings. 1 Peter 5:8

Satan wants to keep us unaware that he seeks to overthrow our faith. We must wake up and recognize that we are engaged in battle, in cosmic spiritual warfare. Paul here tells us how to wage both defensive and offensive warfare. See note 3.

2. Evil in the heavenly places.

Our struggle is with wicked spiritual beings who exist in the heavenly places (v. 12). But wait! At the beginning of his letter Paul wrote "God . . . has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places" (1:3). How can Christ and the forces of Satan both inhabit the heavenly places?

Perhaps the best way to think of the heavenly places is as a spiritual realm separate from our four-dimension physical world, a world populated with spiritual beings: God, angels of various ranks, the "spirits of the righteous made perfect" (Hebrews 12:23), and also Satan and his minions, also of various ranks and titles and the spirits of the wicked bound in darkness. Recall that in the book of Job, "there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also

came among them” (Job 1:6)¹⁹ Both God, the angels, Satan, and his angels live in a spiritual realm we cannot see.

The word *heaven* in the singular seems to refer only to that region of the heavenly places where God, his holy angels, and the saints who have gone on to glory dwell. Satan at one time had access to heaven to accuse God’s people, but has been cast out (Revelation 12:9-11, Luke 10:17-18).

3. Stand: defending against Satan’s attacks.

Our spiritual warfare is, first of all, defensive. Satan attacks us, and we are to resist and repel his attacks. He attacks by tempting us to sin, and also by seeking to create doubt in God’s word, in his goodness, and in his willingness to forgive our sins (yet one more time!). He whispers that God has lost patience with us or interest in us. He suggests that our faith is childish, that people smarter than we have seen through it. He insinuates that our faith is the product of psychological weakness of immaturity. He tells us resistance is futile – we don’t know enough, we aren’t holy enough to offer any defense. In these and other ways he seeks to destroy our faith, or if not that, to destroy confidence that we can speak to others about Christ.

Against these flaming darts of the evil one we must stand and fight. We may be tempted to withdraw and flee, but we are to resist the evil one’s attacks. Paul tells us to stand and Peter tells us to resist.

God has given us the means to resist. Paul likens those means to a soldier’s armor: see the answer to study question 6. Also, we must keep alert to pray at all times in the Spirit. The Spirit prays for us when we don’t know how to pray for ourselves:

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God’s people in accordance with the will of God. Romans 8:26-26

4. On the offensive with the sword of the Spirit.

Our battle with Satan is not only defensive. Jesus said that the gates of hell will not prevail against his church (Matthew 16:18). The church is to be battering down the gates of the enemy’s stronghold. That is offensive warfare.

Our offensive weapon is the sword of the Spirit, the word of God. A sword is used in defense, yes: Jesus cited Scripture in defeating the devil in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11). A sword parries the blows of the enemy. But a sword also attacks the enemy. A soldier in New Testament times could not go on the offensive without a sword; with a sword he could go after the enemy and make him retreat or wound or kill him.

¹⁹ The term “sons of God” here refers to created spiritual beings, that is, angels.

We are not all evangelists, but if we know the Scripture we all can “demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5).

The hymns and songs of the church recognize that we should be on the offense and not only fight to ward off the devil’s onslaughts: From the nineteenth century we have the following:

Soldiers of Christ, arise,
And put your armor on,
Strong in the strength which God supplies
Through His eternal Son.
Strong in the Lord of hosts,
And in His mighty pow’r,
Who in the strength of Jesus trusts
Is more than conqueror.

Stand then in His great might,
With all His strength endued,
And take, to arm you for the fight,
The panoply of God;
That, having all things done,
And all your conflicts passed,
Ye may o’ercome through Christ alone,
And stand entire at last.

Leave no unguarded place,
No weakness of the soul,
Take every virtue, every grace,
And fortify the whole.
From strength to strength go on,
Wrestle and fight and pray,
Tread all the pow’rs of darkness down
And win the well-fought day.

- *Soldiers of Christ Arise*

A modern hymn with the same theme is, O Church Arise, by Stuart Townsend and Keith Getty. (Copyright laws prohibit copying the lyrics here; they can be found on the Internet. They are worth looking up – and singing!)

5. Paul’s great theme, the mystery of the gospel

Paul asks prayer that he might be given an opening to proclaim the mystery of the gospel even while he is in chains. He says not simply the gospel, but the mystery of the gospel. The mystery of the gospel was the overarching theme of Paul’s preaching. It is the theme of Ephesians. The mystery of the gospel, expounded in 1:1-4:16, is

that God purposes to bring all things in heaven and earth into a unity under Christ as Head.²⁰

²⁰ Paul does not go into the fate of those who finally reject Christ or of the devil and his angels.. In Ephesians he has in mind everything in the new heaven and the new earth headed up in Christ.