

**The Church Catholic**  
**The Book of Ephesians**

by  
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## **Preface**

The Book of Ephesians has legitimate claim to being the New Testament document which addresses the nature and character of the Christian church more than any other. In general, Paul's various letters have themes. The Thessalonian letters revolve around the second coming of Christ. Romans and Galatians emphasize the content and implications of the Christian gospel. The Corinthian letters contain extensive ethical discussions. Of course, any given letter might have several of these elements, but usually one subject seems programmatic. If this is so, then the central theme of the Ephesian letter is the Christian church, planned by God before the beginning of history, effected through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and brought to unity and maturity by the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit.

Of course, many modern scholars do not attribute the Ephesian letter to Paul, but rather, to one of his disciples. We dissent from this opinion. Nevertheless, even for those scholars who credit the final form of the letter to someone after Paul, they must concede that the Pauline character of the letter is obvious. (Usually those who attribute the letter to a Pauline disciple also suggest that much of the material is actually Pauline, either borrowed from his undisputed letters or containing fragments of correspondence not published elsewhere). For this author, such extended explanations are unnecessary. The quick resort to pseudepigraphical explanations of Paul's signature seem premature. At the same time, it is not unlikely that Paul may have used a secretary (*amanuensis*) in the composition of the letter. Some amount of freedom in final drafting by such a person may explain unusual vocabulary or other exceptional grammatical constructions.

After all the critical issues have been addressed, however, the fact remains that the Ephesian letter is a powerful example of apostolic literature. If the literary genius Samuel Taylor Coleridge could say that Ephesians is "one of the divinest compositions of man," we cannot disagree, but only add that it is far more than merely a human composition.

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## THE CHURCH CATHOLIC

### The Book of Ephesians

It is unfortunate that the wonderful word "catholic" has often been relegated to a denominational title. In America, at least, the term has become so closely associated with the Roman Church that the average person does not realize it is not the franchise of the Roman Church. Of course, the Orthodox Church, the Anglican Church and others also make use of the word catholic, and it is rightfully found in the *Book of Common Prayer*, not to mention the Apostles' Creed. Still, in the popular mind, the word is mostly associated with a single denomination.

If there is one book in the New Testament which dispels this sectarian notion, it is the Ephesian letter. Though it does not contain the personal asides to be found in the Corinthian and Philippian correspondence, this letter contains one of Paul's most profound themes--the eternal purpose of God through Christ and his church. In that purpose, the Christian church is to be seen as God's new society, a catholic and unified body of believers who have found common ground in Christ and his love. The first half of the letter addresses the theological side of this theme, and the latter half addresses the practical implications to be lived out in the Christian lifestyle.

The letter is not a particularly easy one. The theology is deep and the literary style complex. (The book contains the longest sentence in the New Testament, a whopping 258 words in the Greek text!) Nevertheless, no student of Ephesians can study this epistle and remain unchanged.

#### Introductory Matters

There are several introductory matters that should be addressed briefly. Various critical questions have been raised over the past century and a half, such as, why is the letter so impersonal, especially since Paul spent two years in Ephesus? Also, why does he say so little about false teachings (as opposed to his other letters).

Certainly we know from Acts, 1 Timothy and the Apocalypse of John that the city of Ephesus was not devoid of heresies. Furthermore, why do some of the earliest manuscripts (including the very earliest one) omit the title "to the Ephesians"?'<sup>1</sup>

## Authorship

It is commonly known that the most severely critical scholars ascribe to Paul only seven of the thirteen letters bearing his name.<sup>2</sup> Ephesians is frequently thought to be post-Pauline.<sup>3</sup> Against this position, of course, is the strong attestation of the early church that Paul was indeed the author.<sup>4</sup> Conservative scholars have offered defenses for Pauline authorship which provide answers to the standard objections.<sup>5</sup> First, it is always hazardous to decide authorship on the basis of style and vocabulary.<sup>6</sup> That Paul should write two letters with similar vocabulary and themes which yet show marked differences, such as Colossians and Ephesians, is certainly not insurmountable. H. J. Cadbury's question is worth repeating: "Which is more likely-- that an imitator of Paul in the first century composed a writing ninety or ninety-five percent in accordance with Paul's style, or that Paul himself wrote a letter diverging five or ten percent from his usual style?"<sup>7</sup> The various arguments for and against

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<sup>1</sup>The earliest copy of Ephesians, p46 in the Chester Beatty papyri housed at the University of Michigan, simply begins, "Paul an apostle of Christ Jesus through God's will to the saints who are [ ] and faithful in Christ Jesus." This lacuna is also to be found in the codices Sinaiticus and Vaticanus.

<sup>2</sup>These seven are 1 Thessalonians, Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Romans, Philippians and Philemon, cf. W. Meeks, ed., *The Writings of St. Paul* (New York: New York, 1972) vii. The other six, 2 Thessalonians, Colossians, Ephesians, 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus, are credited to a Pauline school, that is, to a circle of his disciples who wrote in his style, possibly including some fragments of genuine Pauline material, and borrowing his name due to their close association with the great missionary.

<sup>3</sup>Various reasons are given. The letter uses language which suggests a later period in church history than the middle of the first century by referring to the apostles as a closed group (2:20; 3:5). The distinction between ministries implies a developed ministerial organization (4:11). The literary style, in which Paul piles up repeated synonyms, is different from his others letters. Some of Paul's favorite vocabulary is missing, while other vocabulary which is not typically Pauline is to be found. Ephesians and Colossians have striking parallels, many of them almost identical (cf. Ep. 1:4//Col. 1:22; Ep. 1:15//Col. 1:4; Ep. 2:13//Col. 1:20; Ep. 4:2-3//Col. 3:12-13; Ep. 6:21-22//Col. 4:7-8), which in turn is thought to suggest a literary dependency. While some of the theological terms used in Ephesians are the same as in other Pauline letters, they are sometimes used in different ways. For instance, in Ephesians, the term *ekklesia* (= church) is a cosmic term more than a local, congregational term as found elsewhere in the Pauline correspondence. For more details about the case against Pauline authorship, see W. Kummel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, rev. ed., trans. H. Kee (Nashville: Abingdon, 1975) or R. Fuller, *A Critical Introduction to the New Testament* (London: Duckworth, 1971). If Paul did not write the letter, other suggestions have been Onesimus, cf. E. Goodspeed, *The Meaning of Ephesians: A Study of the Origin of the Epistle* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1933) and Luke, cf. R. Martin, *New Testament Foundations* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978) II.230-232.

<sup>4</sup>Even Kummel, who does not believe Paul wrote it, concedes that Ephesians is "extraordinarily well attested in the early church," Kummel, 357.

<sup>5</sup>Probably the best is that of D. Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1970) 479-508.

<sup>6</sup>See, especially, the pertinent comments in L. Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986) 368-369.

<sup>7</sup>H. Cadbury, "The Dilemma of Ephesians," *NTS* 5, (Jan. 1959) 91-102.

Pauline authorship can be followed in detail in the introductions and academic commentaries. In the end, this author concurs with scholars such as Archibald Hunter that the traditional opinion of Pauline authenticity has not been overthrown.<sup>8</sup>

### **Destination**

But to where was the letter written and under what circumstances? One of the most popular explanations of the missing address in the early manuscripts is that the letter was an encyclical. To this suggestion may be added the fact that the letter is sufficiently general to discourage locating it in one of the clearly known Pauline churches (cf. 1:15; 3:2; 4:21). The only name in the letter, other than Paul's, is Tychicus, the courier (6:21), whereas in most of Paul's letters there are greetings to any number of specific resident Christians. The suggestion, then, is that the letter was composed for several congregations, possibly all of them in Asia, and to at least some of them, Paul was not personally known. Enough objections have been raised against this hypothesis to render it questionable, while other theories have been advanced also. In the mid-second century, the heretic Marcion contended that Ephesians was actually the missing epistle to Laodocia (cf. Col. 4:16). Edgar Goodspeed and John Knox developed the hypothesis that it was a composite of Paul's major ideas drawn up by a disciple as an introduction to the rest of his letters. Such an introduction, it was speculated, was necessary to introduce the Pauline collection, especially for those Christians who were not yet familiar with his thought. If the letter was not composed by Paul, a date of about AD 90 is usually given.<sup>9</sup> None of these theories has proved generally convincing, and so the question of destination must be left open.

That Paul was in prison when he wrote Ephesians seems clear enough (3:1; 4:1). The close affinities with the Colossian letter and the common courier for both suggests that the two were written near the same time (6:21-22; Col. 4:7-9). Traditionally, Paul's house arrest in Rome is the locus for both letters (cf. Ac. 25:9-12; 28:16, 30), though we know that he was also incarcerated in Caesarea for two years (cf. Ac. 23:23-35; 24:27). In general, we may assign the letter to the period of about 57-64 A.D.

### **Theology**

While the Ephesian letter brings together many strands of Pauline teaching found in his various other letters, the central theme is the church catholic as it stands within God's eternal purpose. The church is God's masterpiece of reconciliation within present history (2:14; 3:6), and ultimately, it shall be the paradigm for God's reconciliation of the entire universe (1:9-10; 2:7).<sup>10</sup> Competing against God's eternal

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<sup>8</sup>A. Hunter, *Introducing the New Testament*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972) 126.

<sup>9</sup>Since the letter is quoted by Clement of Rome in about 95 A.D., Ephesians cannot be dated later.

<sup>10</sup>F. Bruce, *The Message of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972) 40.

purpose are the powers of evil (6:10-12), and before them, God displays the splendors of his sovereign purpose through his church (3:10-11). The church, then, is God's showpiece to the universe (3:20-21). Though hidden in his inscrutable purposes before the creation of the world (1:4; 3:4-5), now it is revealed in the preaching of the gospel (3:8-9).

Of course, Paul is interested not only in the majesty of this truth for its own sake but also in the implications of this truth for life. Thus, the glory of what God is doing in his church should issue forth in Christian lives that measure up to this high calling (4:1). If God intends to reconcile the universe to himself, and if the church is the arena in which this reconciliation is to be worked out, it follows that the church itself must be unified (4:3-6). Those who claim Christianity must live lives which reflect God's glorious purpose (4:17; 5:1-2, 8).

## The Address (1:1-2)

It is now well-known that Paul adapted the stereotypical opening of Greco-Roman letters in his epistles, replacing the more common word *chairein* (= greeting) with *charis* (= grace) and adding additional words full of Christian meaning, such as, *eirene* (= peace).<sup>11</sup> This letter is no exception. After identifying himself by his Greek name, *Paulos*, to which he attaches the title of his divine calling, *apostolos* (= apostle, missionary), he addresses his correspondence to the holy<sup>12</sup> and faithful believers.<sup>13</sup> If the phrase "in Ephesus" is not part of the original text (see Introductory Matters), then the address might read, "Paul, a missionary of Christ Jesus by God's will, to the saints who are also faithful in Christ Jesus."<sup>14</sup> As usual, Paul includes both God, the Father, and the Lord, Jesus Christ, in his greeting (cf. 1 Co. 8:6).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>W. Doty, *Letters in Primitive Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973) 11-27. The word *eirene* also corresponds to the Jewish *shalom*.

<sup>12</sup>Lit., "the holy ones," a designation usually rendered by the English word "saints."

<sup>13</sup>The word *pistois* (= to the believers, to the faithful) is capable of meaning either those who have faith (i.e., "believers") or those who demonstrate fidelity (i.e., "faithful"). These possibilities arise because the verbal form *pisteuo* (= to believe) and the noun form *pistis* (= faith) have the same root. It is unlikely that Paul would quibble over which rendering is his intention, since both ideas identify the members of the Christian community equally well.

<sup>14</sup>Here, the conjunction *kai* should be taken in the sense of "also" (so RSV, NAB, JB).

<sup>15</sup>Paul is both consciously and unconsciously trinitarian. He includes references to the Holy Spirit less frequently than the simple combination of the Father and the Son, probably due to the assumption that if Christians accepted the Father and the Son, they would hardly reject the Spirit. Still, even in this letter, Paul does have triadic references to Father, Son and Spirit (2:18; 4:4-6). In the long blessing following the address, Paul seems deliberately to have structured the blessing in a triadic way (1:3-14).



## The Blessing (1:3-14)

### The Father's Plan (1:3-6)

Paul usually gives a thanksgiving and blessing in the opening of his letters, as was typical of most letters in the Greco-Roman world. However, in Ephesians this section is particularly lengthy, occupying the remainder of the first chapter. As mentioned in the introduction, 1:3-14 is a single sentence in the Greek text, some 258 words. Virtually all translations break up this lengthy sentence into several shorter sentences. The sentence is structured along the trinitarian lines of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, first describing the work of the Father who planned (1:3-6), then the Son who performed the atoning work (1:7-12), and finally the Holy Spirit who seals those who believe (1:13-14). The blessing also resembles the Jewish *berakah*, sharing its threefold structure in which God is blessed, the reasons for this blessing are recounted, and a response of praise is offered.<sup>16</sup> In this blessing, Paul weaves in the major themes of the entire letter.

The blessing begins by praising God for his gracious choice of the community of faith as his own children (1:3-6). To be part of this corporate, chosen body of holy ones is to be seated with Christ in the heavenly realms and to share the spiritual blessings of this exalted position. Several times in this letter, Paul uses the expression *en tois epouraviois* (= "in the heavenlies," cf. 1:3, 20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12). The designation refers to an invisible, spiritual realm which exists alongside the visible, natural realm. Not only is it the place of believers who have been resurrected to new life with Christ, it is also the place where cosmic powers, some in opposition to God, inhabit the universe (3:10; 6:12). Here, Christ has been exalted as the risen Lord, and here believers gain victory over the spiritual forces of evil while they exhibit God's wisdom to the spirit-world. Spiritual blessings in the heavenlies are the counterpart to the temporal blessings promised to Israel in the covenant of Torah.<sup>17</sup> The heavenlies are consonant with the New Testament concept of inaugurated eschatology, that is, the belief that Christians have already become participants in the age to come while they are still living in the present age.<sup>18</sup> The spiritual blessings of the heavenlies include the triumphs of Christ's resurrection and exaltation as Lord (1:20) and the new spiritual life which he gives to believers (2:6).

Elsewhere in his letters, Paul describes this divine choice and its implications as election, calling, salvation, perseverance and glorification. From this Pauline paradigm has arisen the sharp debate between Calvinists and Arminians (and earlier,

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<sup>16</sup>Johnson, 374.

<sup>17</sup>F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1961) 27.

<sup>18</sup>G. Ladd, *The Presence of the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974) and O. Cullmann, *Christ and Time*, trans. F. Filson (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964).

the similar debate between Augustine and Pelagius). At issue is the tension between the sovereignty of God and the freedom of human will.<sup>19</sup> There is no question but that Paul uses words like foreknowledge, predestination<sup>20</sup> and election, but what does he mean when he uses them? This is the question.

	<b>Romans 8:28–39</b>	<b>Ep. 1:3-14</b>	<b>2 Th. 2:13-17</b>
<b>Election</b>	Foreknowledge & predestination	God chose us first & predestined us to be sons	God chose you from the beginning
<b>Calling</b>	Called according to God's purpose	God revealed to us his will in the Word of Truth	God called you through the gospel
<b>Salvation</b>	Justification	Redemption through Christ's blood & forgiveness of sin	Sanctification by the Spirit & belief in the truth
<b>Preserverance</b>	Inseparable from Christ's love	The Spirit--a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance	Stand firm & hold to the teachings
<b>Glorification</b>	Glorification	Final redemption of believers who are God's possession	You will share in the glory of our Lord

One of the assumptions lying behind this debate has been the notion of individualism. Both sides have worked out their theological conclusions from the standpoint of the salvation of a single person, usually without any discussion of the presupposition. This assumption may in itself have been faulty, and there is a strong case to be made for the idea that Paul (and others in the New Testament) did not employ the same assumption. Rather, he (and they) shared a basic understanding that the language of election to salvation was corporate, not individual. Whereas God had formerly chosen Israel, in the messianic era he has chosen the church in Christ.<sup>21</sup> A corporate understanding of election to salvation avoids some of the pitfalls, frustrations and embarrassments of the Calvinist-Arminian debate from either of its sides, such as, the caricature of God as a despot (the Arminian charge against Calvinists) and a pseudo-gospel of salvation by works (the Calvinist charge against Arminians). Especially important is the fact that the position of corporate election, as espoused here, is worked out in the arena of biblical theology (as opposed to

<sup>19</sup>Church history abounds with scholars and theologians lined up on either side of this controversial issue. A recent examination of the issue from four perspectives can be found in J. Feinberg, N. Geisler, B. Reichenback and C. Pinnock, *Predestination & Free Will*, ed. D. and R. Basinger (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1986). In this treatment, each scholar gives his own viewpoint and a response to the others.

<sup>20</sup>The Greek verb *proorizo* (Ep. 1:5, 11) means "to decide in advance."

<sup>21</sup>W. Klein, *The New Chosen People: A Corporate View of Election* (Grand Rapids: Academie, 1990) 21.

systematic theology).<sup>22</sup>

Given the assumption of corporate election, it makes a significant difference to read, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...even as he chose *us* in him before the world's creation...." Here, the plural "us" can have its full value instead of the truncated value in the traditional Calvinist-Arminian debate which argues as though it said, "He chose me." The plural "us" refers to Christians as a body. God chose the church in Christ, that is, Christ is the principal elected one, and "God has chosen a corporate body to be *included in him*."<sup>23</sup>

That there would be a church was God's choice before the creation of the world. The church of the redeemed was not an afterthought, but rather, it was the purpose of God's plan all along. Those who make up that church were to be holy and blameless. They were predestined to be adopted as God's sons through the redemptive work of Christ. God's purpose that the members of his church were to be holy and blameless presupposes the possibility of disobedience and God's desire to be worshiped by creatures who were free not to do so. The idea of the holy without the possibility of the unholy is meaningless. The motive behind God's plan was his love.

Because of his love, God decided in advance that he would adopt the church as his own children. This adoption has its precedent in the Old Testament covenant, when God adopted Israel as his firstborn son in Egypt (cf. Ex. 4:22-23; Ho. 11:1). In the ancient choice of Israel as his son, it was God's love which lay behind the choice (cf. Dt. 7:7-8; 10:15). So now, his choice of the church was also prompted by divine love.<sup>24</sup> God's redemptive plan, his choice of the church and his adoption of the Christian community as his sons all worked together to demonstrate the excellence of his glorious grace. The phrase "to the praise of his glory" appears three times, once in each section of the blessing (1:6, 12, 14). God's glory, which is demonstrated through his grace, has been freely bestowed upon the church through God's beloved Son.

### **The Son's Redemptive Work (1:7-12)**

If it was the Father's purpose and will to choose the church and graciously adopt the community of believers as his children, it was the Son's role to effect this redemption in human history. The Father's plan from before creation was formed "in love," and its benefits were to be "freely given in the One he loves." The purpose was to dispense every spiritual blessing "in Christ."<sup>25</sup> Thus, when Paul makes the

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<sup>22</sup>William Klein works out his theology in terms of the Old Testament, the synoptic gospels, the Acts, the Johannine literature, the Pauline literature, Hebrews and the catholic epistles. His conclusions, in the view of this author, are compelling.

<sup>23</sup>Klein, 180.

<sup>24</sup>Ridderbos is probably correct in warning the exegete not to put too much emphasis on the Greco-Roman customs of adoption, but rather, to seek the concept in the Hebraic thought of the Old Testament, cf. H. Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, trans. J. DeWitt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) 197ff.

<sup>25</sup>The hymn "Such Love" by Robert Harkness (1880-1961), which undoubtedly reflects upon the letter to the Ephesians,

transition to the redemptive work of the Son, he emphasizes repeatedly that God's plan was fulfilled in Christ Jesus. It was accomplished "in him" (1:7); the Father's good purpose and will was "in Christ" (1:9); "in him" we were chosen (1:11), and "in him" we were included (1:13)!

As is true in the Four Gospels and in the sermons in the Book of Acts, the center of the Christian good news is the cross, resurrection and exaltation of Jesus. The metaphor of redemption, which describes deliverance and emancipation from servitude, is one of Paul's word pictures which he uses to describe the spiritual blessings of salvation (1:7).<sup>26</sup> The shed blood of Christ is a metonymy for the redemptive death of Jesus,<sup>27</sup> and because of his death, God has granted forgiveness of sins as an expression of his rich grace.

In the writings of Paul, the word *charis* (= grace) has tremendous theological

describes this divine work extremely well:

*That God should love a sinner such as I, (1:4-5; 2:4)*

*Should yearn to change my sorrow into bliss (1:3)*

*Nor rest till He had planned to bring me nigh (2:13, 17)*

*How wonderful is love like this. (3:18-19)*

*That Christ should join so freely in the scheme, (1:7-8)*

*Although it meant his death on Calvary, (2:14-16)*

*Did ever human tongue find nobler theme (3:8-12)*

*Than love divine that ransomed me? (1:7; 5:25)*

*That for a wilful outcast such as I, (2:11-12)*

*The Father planned, the Saviour bled and died; (1:4-8)*

*Redemption for a worthless slave to buy, (1:8)*

*Who long had law and grace defied. (2:1-5)*

*And now he takes me to His heart a son, (1:5)*

*He asks me not to fill a servant's place; (2:19)*

*The "Far-off country" wand'rings all are done. (2:13, 17)*

*Wide open are his arms of grace. (2:8)*

<sup>26</sup>The word *apolytrois* (= redemption; 1:7, 14) means "to set free for a ransom." In the Koine Period, it was used to describe the release of war prisoners, the manumission of slaves, and the pardon of condemned criminals, F. Buschel, *TDNT* (1967) IV.351ff. Paul uses the word in a past tense to describe what happened in the cross (1:7), and he uses it in a future tense to describe what will happen in the future at the end of the age (1:14; 4:30). For Paul, redemption is both a past event and a future hope, cf. A. Hunter, *The Gospel According to St. Paul* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966) 14ff., 50ff.

<sup>27</sup>While there has been some theological controversy over whether the word "blood" in Scripture refers to the offering of life as opposed to the act of death (or 'life released' rather than 'death inflicted'), there is a substantial case that the term "blood" is a metonymy for death, similar to the metonymy of the "cross," cf. L. Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965) 112-128.

weight.<sup>28</sup> It is often coupled with the word *pistis* (= faith), and together these two words stand as the antithesis of works.<sup>29</sup> Salvation is by grace through faith, and therefore, it is not by works (2:5, 8-9). Grace is the undeserved kindness and mercy which God shows toward sinners through the death of Jesus for their sins. The first action toward salvation was not of sinners moving toward God, but rather, of God lavishly acting in their behalf (1:8).<sup>30</sup> In the Christ event, God revealed what Paul will later describe as the divine "eternal purpose" (1:9; 3:11). Here, Paul calls it the *mysterion* (= mystery).<sup>31</sup> We should immediately disassociate ourselves from the more conventional meaning of the word mystery as something not capable of explanation. What Paul has in mind is not a puzzle, but rather, the unveiling of something that previously had been hidden or obscure.<sup>32</sup> From before the creation, this hidden purpose of God had been behind the movement of history. This means also, of course, that God's redemptive purpose in his Son was fixed prior to the sin of our original human parents.

In the end, the Father's divine good purpose was to "head up" all things, celestial and terrestrial, under Christ (1:10).<sup>33</sup> This theme of Christ's ultimate lordship over all creation is familiar in Pauline literature (cf. Phil. 2:9-11; Col. 1:19-20). In the new coming order, there will be complete harmony between all the discordant elements of the universe. Those who refuse God shall be banished (2 Th. 1:7-10), and those intractable dominions which oppose God shall be destroyed (1 Co. 15:24-26).<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>The word appears a dozen times in this short letter alone.

<sup>29</sup>In fact, while there is some distinction between the words grace and faith, their relationship is so close that at times they are virtually interchangeable, especially in their antithesis with works as a method of salvation, cf. Ridderbos, 173.

<sup>30</sup>It is not immediately clear whether the phrase "with all wisdom and understanding" refers to God's attributes, which he demonstrated through his grace (so RSV, NASB, Weymouth), or human insights which result from the experience of God's grace (so NIV, NEB, NAB, Phillips). Grammatically, either is possible.

<sup>31</sup>Paul will use the word five more times in this letter (3:3-4, 9; 5:32; 6:19).

<sup>32</sup>It is also worth mentioning that Paul does not use the word in the conventional sense of the mystery religions of the Greco-Roman world, where the term *mysterion* was employed to describe the possession of some secret knowledge available only to members of a secret society. Rather, the "mystery of God's will," which is his ultimate purpose for the human race, has now been disclosed to the world in Jesus Christ. It is a closed secret no longer, cf. C. Mitton, *Ephesians [NCBC]* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973) 54.

<sup>33</sup>The verb *anakephalaioo* means "to sum up," cf. BAG (1979) 55-56.

<sup>34</sup>The Pauline theme of universal reconciliation has given rise to various interpretations, of which three are worth mentioning. The evangelical position, based upon the teachings of Jesus and the warnings of the apostles, has been that the Lordship of Christ will be finally consummated so that all opposition against him will be banished to a place of punishment (cf. Re. 20:10-15). This belief drives the missionary effort, as Soren Kierkegaard well said, "Everyone who believes that there is a hell and that others go to hell is *eo ipso* a missionary, that is the least he can do." However, throughout Christian history, there has been a controversy between those who affirm this position and those who espouse universalism, the position that all entities in the universe will eventually be redeemed, including all humans and even Satan himself. Also, there are those who espouse the doctrine of annihilation, that is, that all opposition to God will not merely be banished, but extinguished from existence. The scope of this short commentary does not allow for further discussion, but the interested reader may wish to consult the discussion in Bloesch, "Heaven and Hell," II.211-234 and

So, God's magnificent plan called for his choice of the church "in Christ" (1:11). The church was predestined, and the eternal purpose of God was carried out in space-time history. Since God is the Lord of history, he sovereignly worked in history to bring about the fulfillment he desired.<sup>35</sup> The apostles and the first Christian believers had become living praises, exalting God's eternal purpose in them (1:12).

### **The Spirit's Seal (1:13-14)**

Inclusion in God's great purpose came through the preaching of the good news about Jesus (1:13a). Those who make up God's redeemed community are the ones who "heard the word of truth, the gospel" and who "believed" and who "were sealed with the Spirit" (1:13b). This passage describes, in its simplest form, how a person is "included in Christ." While baptism, the ritual associated with salvation, is important, it is not in itself the core of salvation. Otherwise, salvation would be by works. Baptism as a sacrament is an outward ritual which describes the spiritual reality of salvation, but as Paul will shortly say, this spiritual reality is effected, not by works, but "by grace through faith" (2:8). It comes by hearing the message of Christ (cf. Ro. 10:17) and responding to that message in faith (cf. Ro. 10:8-13). The consequence of this "hearing" and "believing" is the seal of the Spirit,<sup>36</sup> the gift God promised to all who would believe. This seal guarantees the future consummation of redemption at the end, certifying that believers do indeed belong to God (1:14).

It should be apparent that the seal of the Spirit is integral to salvation itself. Paul cannot conceive of a person belonging to Christ without this seal (cf. Ro. 8:9). Rather, he assumes that all who have "gained access to this grace" have been given the gift of the Spirit (Ro. 5:2, 5; 8:15-16; 14:17). One cannot even make the basic confession, "Jesus is Lord," except through the Spirit (1 Co. 12:3). This being so, then the Pentecostal doctrine of subsequence (i.e., that the gift of the Spirit is subsequent to salvation) cannot be correct.<sup>37</sup> Paul never treats the Christians in his

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the articles "Universalism," "Apokatastasis," "Annihilationism," and "Conditional Immortality" in *EDT* (1984). My own position, which is the traditional evangelical position, is best described by Don Bloesch, when he says of Ep. 1:10, "This unity is not a fusion and absorption, however, but a mixture of disparate elements that coexist in an ultimate harmony," 233, n.57.

<sup>35</sup>God's sovereignty need not be defined in such a way as to eliminate any freedom in history. God is not the prisoner of his own power. He is free to allow history to take its course. At the same time, he has the power to enter history whenever he wishes to accomplish his good purpose.

<sup>36</sup>The metaphor of "sealing" is drawn from property transactions where an owner sealed his property or documents concerning his property with a signet to verify his ownership. The Holy Spirit, then, is God's divine signet which indicates his ownership of the believer, *TDNT* (1971) VII.939ff.

<sup>37</sup>The older renderings of 1:13 in translations such as the KJV, "...after that ye believed, ye were sealed," has been used to buttress the notion of subsequence, but this is not the force of the temporal participle in the Greek text. Rather, the force is one of coincident action, and much better in this regard are newer translations which read, "having believed, you were marked with a seal" (NIV), "you, when you had heard the message...and had believed it...received the seal" (NEB), "when you heard the glad tidings of salvation...and believed in it...you were sealed" (NAB), see also, RSV, TEV, Weymouth, Phillips, Williams.

churches as existing in two groups, the "haves" and the "have nots." Rather, he considers *all* the believers to have been baptized by one Spirit into one body, and *all* to have been given the one Spirit to drink (1 Co. 12:13). This is not to deny that Christians may experience subsequent infillings of the Spirit on particular occasions (cf. Ac. 4:8, 31; 13:9, 52), but rather, it is to affirm that the bifurcation of the church into "Spirit-filled" and "non-Spirit-filled" categories is inappropriate.

### **The Thanksgiving (1:15-23)**

The thanksgiving and prayer which follows the blessing is not quite as long as the previous sentence, but it is long nevertheless (170 words in the Greek text). Once more, as in 1:3-14, the versions break up this long sentence into shorter units.

It is both remarkable and instructive that Paul manages to include so much theological content in his prayer. He begins by commending the faith of his readers and their demonstrations of love for those within the Christian fellowship (1:15).<sup>38</sup> Years later, John would write that the Ephesians had "left their first love" (Re. 2:4). That Paul should say he has "heard" about their faith is often taken as a strike against Pauline authorship, since we know from the Book of Acts that Paul knew the Ephesians personally. However, if the letter was an encyclical intended for several churches, such language is quite understandable. Paul may have known the Ephesians, but he may not have known members in the other churches to whom he wrote (cf. Col. 1:6-8).

Paul's prayers of thanksgiving for these Christians were ongoing (1:16). Unlike the typical prayers for health, emotional well-being and economic security that are frequently offered in a society preoccupied with its own comfort, Paul's prayers were deep with theological content and the supplication that the Christians might come to know better the spiritual truths of the gospel. He prayed that God, the Father,<sup>39</sup> might give to them wisdom and insight so as to understand him better (1:17).<sup>40</sup> He wanted them to be enlightened as to their hope, their heritage and God's

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<sup>38</sup>There are four variants in the manuscripts concerning this verse, two of which can be dismissed almost immediately because they are late and have limited attestation. The English versions are divided between the other two, which are as follows:

*...and the love which you show toward all the saints (so KJV, RSV, NEB, ASV, NIV, NASB, NAB, Weymouth)*

*...and which you show toward all the saints (so RV, TCNT, Phillips)*

The external manuscript evidence favors the latter reading, but the internal evidence as to how the discrepancy may have arisen (as an unintentional homoiteutron) favors the former.

<sup>39</sup>The expression that the Father is "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ" demonstrates the logical priority of the first and second persons in the Trinity. It is a phrase that is incompatible with modalism, and it harmonizes with Jesus' own words about the Father as being "his God" (Jn. 20:17).

<sup>40</sup>Since there is no capitalization in the Greek text, words like *pneuma* (= Spirit, spirit) are ambiguous. Only if the word *hagios* (= holy) is added is the ambiguity completely eliminated. Thus, most scholars understand the "spirit of wisdom

power. The hope to which God had called them was their ultimate conformity to the character of Christ as sons of God (1:18a; cf. 1:4-5; 4:4). The Christian hope was, for Paul, eschatological. It focused upon the afterlife in heaven (Col. 1:5), when salvation would be completed (1 Th. 5:8) and the conferring of Christ's righteousness upon the believer would be judged acceptable forever (Ga. 5:5; cf. Tit. 1:2; 3:7). This eschatological hope centered upon the return of the Lord Jesus (Tit. 2:13), when the glory of God would be displayed in his redeemed people (Ro. 5:2; 8:18-25; 2 Co. 3:11-12; Col. 1:27).

Closely associated with this hope is the idea that God's people are his inheritance (1:28b). If the inheritance of God's people is God himself, they are equally his inheritance. If the saint's possession is God, they are his possession as well (cf. 1:14). The future holds not only fulfillment for the church, but also fulfillment for God, who in the church has chosen to display his wisdom to the spiritual powers of the universe (cf. 3:10-11). F. F. Bruce has well stated, "We can scarcely realize what it must mean to God to see His purpose complete, to see creatures of His hand, sinners redeemed by His grace, reflecting His own glory."<sup>41</sup>

Finally, Paul prays that the Christian community would understand better God's incomparable power which is exercised in behalf of his church. He describes this divine power in four categories:

- 1) Christ's resurrection from the dead
- 2) Christ's enthronement in the heavenlies at the Father's right hand
- 3) Christ's lordship over the world and all its powers
- 4) Christ's headship over all things for the church

In describing God's power, Paul uses four synonyms (1:19). God's power is *dynamis* (= personal ability, often a technical word in the Koine Period for supernatural power), *kratos* (= strength, might, supremacy), *ischus* (= power, actuality of power) and *energeia* (= power in action). This divine power was most directly displayed in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead and his ascension into the heavens where he has been established as the Lord over every spiritual entity in the heavenly realms (1:20).<sup>42</sup> In his ascension, Jesus is almost always depicted as "seated at the Father's right."<sup>43</sup> This description denotes his exaltation based on the common cultural picture in Paul's day of a great king on his throne with his favorite son at his

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and revelation" to refer to the human spirit's insight into spiritual matters (so NEB, KJV, NASB, NAB, RSV, ASV). Others take the word to refer to an endowment of the Holy Spirit (so NIV).

<sup>41</sup>Bruce, *Ephesians*, 40.

<sup>42</sup>For more information on the "heavenly realms," see discussion at 1:3.

<sup>43</sup>The only exception in the New Testament is in the vision of Stephen, where the risen Lord stood to receive the spirit of his faithful martyr (cf. Ac. 7:55).



right side.<sup>44</sup> It expresses the truth that Jesus has been exalted to the highest position in heaven or earth, and it recalls the messianic prediction in Psalm 110:1. Theologically, the imagery of being seated at God's right hand expresses Jesus' heavenly kingship and priesthood.<sup>45</sup> Thus, the position "at the Father's right" is not so much a matter of geography as it is a matter of authority.

The exaltation of Jesus puts him superior to all the spiritual entities in the heavenlies (1:21). The terms *archon* (= ruler), *exousia* (= authority), *dynamis* (= power) and *kyriotes* (= ruling power, lordship) are drawn from the Hellenistic world with which Paul's readers were familiar.<sup>46</sup> They refer to spiritual entities which are opposed to God (6:12; cf. Col. 1:15) and which seek to separate believers from God's love (Ro. 8:38-39). These entities, which probably include the demons who masquerade as the gods and goddesses of the pagan pantheons (cf. 1 Co. 10:20-21), were disarmed in the cross and the resurrection of the Lord (cf. Col. 2:15; 1 Co. 2:8). Jesus has been exalted above them all, no matter what titles of authority might be claimed for them (cf. Phil. 2:9-11; 1 Co. 15:25). His lordship is supreme, and it is effective in both the present and the future. In the present age, Christ will continue to reign until "he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power" (1 Co. 15:24). The present age is rapidly deteriorating (1 Co. 7:31), and the final defeat of Satan is imminent (Ro. 16:20). The benefits of the future age have already been bestowed in some measure in the present age (cf. 1:4), and the consummation is on the horizon. It is this consummation which is the Christian hope (cf. 1:18).<sup>47</sup>

Everything has been placed under Christ's sovereignty, or in the language of the ancient psalm, "Yahweh said to Adonay, 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet'" (Ps. 110:1). Christ is now the head over everything for the church (1:22; cf. Col. 1:18).

The concept of headship is currently under debate. The traditional viewpoint is that the term *kephale* (= head) is a metaphor for rulership, and as such, Christ is the ruler of the church. This definition, however, has been contested on linguistic grounds.<sup>48</sup> According to many scholars, the word may well mean "source" or "beginning" rather than "chief." If so, then the headship of Christ over the church refers to him as the source of the church's existence and the sustainer of her spiritual life.

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<sup>44</sup>P. Toon, *The Ascension of Our Lord* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984) 16.

<sup>45</sup>Toon, 33-71.

<sup>46</sup>M. Barth, *Ephesians 1-3 [AB]* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974) 154-155.

<sup>47</sup>See the insightful discussion concerning the future age impinging upon the present age in G. Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology* (1930 rpt. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979) 36-41.

<sup>48</sup>See S. Bedale, "The Meaning of *Kephale* in the Pauline Epistles," *JTS* 5 (1954) 211-215. Bedale, followed by F. F. Bruce, C. K. Barrett and others, argue that the Greek notion of head means "source," not "chief." Since then, rebuttals have occurred, and rejoinders to the rebuttals, so that as one person described it, there is a "battle of the lexicons."

The church is Christ's mystical body on earth, even though in his resurrection and ascension he is beyond the boundaries of physical limitation (1:23). As the head of the church, Christ gives to it his life and power (cf. 5:23, 25, 29-30). As a complement to his headship, the church is the fullness of Christ in the universe. The complete "man" is both the head and the body, and each fulfills the other. The church in the world, as it draws its life and source from the risen and exalted Christ, is the full expression of Christ in the world.<sup>49</sup>

## Grace, The Gift Of Life (2:1-10)

### In the Kingdom of Death (2:1-3)

The transition between Paul's prayer and his theological exposition in the book is almost imperceptible. While the apostle has already introduced his primary theme, the church catholic (1:22-23), he is not quite ready to develop it. First, he emphasizes the importance of personal salvation. Mitton is quite correct in saying that it is almost as though the writer wanted to disclaim the notion that membership in the church is "the be-all and end-all" of the Christian life. The only way to become a member of the church is to first of all become a Christian. Personal faith has priority. One does not join the church in order to come to faith, but rather, one becomes part of the church by first becoming a believer.<sup>50</sup>

Paul uses the metaphor of death to describe the plight of his readers before they became Christians (2:1). At one time they were lifeless toward God as they filled their days with transgression and sin.<sup>51</sup> They were dominated by the powers of evil, following the sinful course of the age<sup>52</sup> and Satan's rebellion against God (2:2).

Satan is described by the two intriguing titles "ruler of the authority of the air" and the "spirit now working in the sons of disobedience." The first of these titles, the "ruler of the authority of the air," implies that the forces of evil are organized into a

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<sup>49</sup>F. Foulkes, *The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians [TNTC]* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956) 66-67; Bruce, *Ephesians*, 45-46.

<sup>50</sup>Mitton, 80.

<sup>51</sup>The two near synonyms, transgressions and sins, have slightly different meanings. *Paraptoma* (= transgression) refers to a false step or a deviation, possibly even a deliberate one. *Harmartia* (= sin) means to miss the mark. It may be that Paul has in mind both intentional as well as unintentional sins, somewhat along the lines of the confession from the Book of Common Prayer, "We have sinned...in what we have done and in what we have left undone." On the other hand, Paul multiplies synonyms repeatedly in Ephesians as a stylistic feature, and the two words may be no more than that.

<sup>52</sup>Lit., Paul's phrase is "the age of this world." The phrase probably means something on the order of "this era's world system." The *aeon* (= age) refers to temporal existence, and the *kosmos* (= world) refers to spatial existence. Both describe the sphere of unredeemed life which is dominated by sin. Thus, Paul can speak of the "present evil *aeon*" (Ga. 1:4) and of Satan as the "god of this *aeon*" (2 Co. 4:4). Equally, he can speak of the *kosmos* as holding humans in bondage under its principles (Ga. 4:3; Col. 2:20).

kingdom whose domain is between the earth and heaven, the spiritual domain which earlier Paul called "the heavenlies" (1:3, 20; 3:10; 6:12).<sup>53</sup> The powers of evil are those same spiritual entities which earlier he called "rulers, authorities, powers and lordships" (1:21). They belong to the "authority of darkness" (cf. Col. 1:13). Biblical Christianity, then, speaks of these two kingdoms as in irrevocable conflict, the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan.<sup>54</sup> The kingdom of Satan is the realm of death, and all humans belong to it until they put their faith in the cross and resurrection of Christ Jesus. The other title for Satan, the "spirit now working in the sons of disobedience," indicates that Satan is the spiritual force which motivates the human race's rampant acts of transgression and sin. The idiom "sons of disobedience," here and in 5:6, is a Semitism which denotes character rather than origin.<sup>55</sup>

Within this lifestyle of transgression and sin, dominated by the forces of evil, all humans lived at one time (2:3a).<sup>56</sup> Though physically alive, they were spiritually dead towards God. They spent their time indulging the passions of the flesh. With his description of "the flesh," Paul completes the trilogy of forces which work against us--the world, the flesh and the devil (2:2-3b). For Paul, the *sarx* (= flesh) is not merely the physical body. Rather, it is a domain of power, a sphere of influence in which one lives. This understanding is rooted in the Old Testament concept of flesh as the whole transitory self in distinction from God.<sup>57</sup> Paul does not take his definition of flesh from Greek culture, where it connotes the lower nature,<sup>58</sup> but rather, he views the flesh as the arena of human weakness. The flesh is morally neutral, not necessarily good or bad; it is finite and susceptible to sin precisely because it is weak.<sup>59</sup> Because it is weak, it has no power to resist any whim, regardless of how destructive. So, all humans live "in the flesh" until, as Paul says elsewhere, they are empowered by Christ to live "in the Spirit" (cf. Ga. 5:16-17).

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<sup>53</sup>For more on "the heavenlies," see comments on 1:3.

<sup>54</sup>D. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979) II.131ff.

<sup>55</sup>There are a number of Hebraisms in the Bible with the idiom "son of...." For instance, James and John are called the "sons of thunder" (Mk. 3:17), evidently indicating their bombastic character. Jesus can speak of "sons of this world" as opposed to the "sons of light" (Lk. 16:8), while Paul uses the same expression in "sons of the light" and "sons of the day" (1 Th. 5:5). In the Old Testament, the idiom is particularly apparent in the expression "sons of Belial" (Jg. 19:22; 1 Sa. 1:16; 2:12; etc.).

<sup>56</sup>Paul almost unconsciously switches from the second person "you" to the first person "we." What was true for his readers was equally true for Paul himself. This shift, which Paul will now follow for some time, expresses the collective experience of both his Gentile readers as well as his own Jewish constituency.

<sup>57</sup>H. Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, trans. M. Kohl (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974) 26-31.

<sup>58</sup>Unfortunately, the Greek culture has influenced some translators. The NEB, for instance, renders *sarx* as "lower nature," and the NIV as "sinful nature." As Leander Keck has bluntly stated, "This is precisely what Paul does *not* mean," cf. L. Keck, *Paul and His Letters* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979) 105.

<sup>59</sup>Keck, 105-108; Ridderbos, 64-68.

As transgressors, all humans also deserve judgment (2:3c; cf. 5:6).<sup>60</sup> They are "children of wrath." This idiom, like the previous idiom "son of....," is a Semitism meaning that all humans are marked for divine retribution, and if left to themselves to follow their natural inclinations, they will certainly receive it (Ro. 2:5-8; Col. 3:6; 1 Th. 1:10).

### **Alive with Christ in the Heavens (2:4-7)**

If the metaphor of death described the Christians' former life, the metaphor of being resurrected with Christ describes their present status. As those who were dead, they could hardly have found their way back to God on their own. Corpses have no initiative! Rather, their redemption required divine initiative. God acted first! Motivated by his own nature of altruistic love and his compassion toward the powerless (2:4), God acted in their behalf through the resurrection of Christ (2:5a).<sup>61</sup> He made all believers, both Gentile and Jew, alive together in Christ (cf. Col. 2:13).<sup>62</sup> The verb *syzoopoieo* (= to make alive together) is apparently a Pauline coinage.<sup>63</sup> It appears in no literature outside the Pauline corpus and post-apostolic Christian writings. God's redemptive action was solely at his own initiative, for it occurred in spite of the human condition of spiritual deadness (2:5b). To the Romans, Paul said, "When we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly" (Ro. 5:6), and then, "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Ro. 5:8). Clearly, then, salvation is entirely due to God's grace! Earlier, Paul said that the forgiveness of human sin was due to the abundance of God's grace (1:6-7), and shortly he will enlarge on this theme of grace in 2:8-10.

In giving to believers new life, God not only has resurrected them with Christ but also enthroned them through the triumph of his ascension into the heavens (2:6). Though in one sense they are still in the present world, in another sense they live in a higher spiritual reality. Though part of the present age, they are already participating in the age to come. Though on earth, they are viewed by God as already seated with Christ where he is. This spiritual exaltation of the believer with Christ has an eschatological goal. In the consummation of the ages, Paul anticipates that God will be glorified in the holy people of his church, while they, in turn, will stand in awe of his presence (cf. 2 Th. 1:10). This glorification will not be a momentary event, for

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<sup>60</sup>The NIV rendering "all of us" may not indicate as clearly that Paul is here thinking of both Gentile and Jew as he writes. The "you" (2:1) refers to his Gentile readers; the "we, also" (2:3) refers to his own Jewish community. Elsewhere, of course, Paul will say that both Jew and Gentile alike are under sin (Ro. 3:9).

<sup>61</sup>The NIV reverses the order of the phrases. The Greek text reads, "Even when we were dead in trespasses," then "he made us alive in Christ."

<sup>62</sup>The textual variant "in Christ" has both early and wide textual support, while the variant "with Christ" occurs only within the Alexandrian family at any early date. Thus, the former reading is more likely the correct one.

<sup>63</sup>It is formed by the words *syn* (= with), *zoe* (= life) and *poieo* (= to make).

Paul says that throughout the limitless future, as age succeeds age, the crowning display of God's grace will ever be his kindness to his redeemed people.<sup>64</sup>

### **By Grace Through Faith to Do Good Works (2:8-10)**

Given this triumphant goal, Paul underscores the nature of God's redemptive grace. He has already said that the church is to be a living praise to God's glorious grace (1:6) and that all believers have been saved by this same grace (2:5). Now, he explains the theme of grace in a more complete way.

Salvation by divine grace through faith is at the heart of the Christian gospel (2:8). Salvation is not an achievement of righteous men and women, nor is it the culmination of the human quest for God; rather, salvation is an act of God on behalf of the sinner. Since salvation is by grace through faith, it cannot be by human merit or effort (2:9), for as Paul says elsewhere, "If by grace, it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace" (Ro. 11:6). Salvation depends, "not on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy" (Ro. 9:16).

Grace, then, describes God's initiative in salvation. Faith is the human response to God's grace. It is what appropriates salvation in the sense that it is the means by which a person accepts God's free gift. It must be immediately noted, however, that faith is not merely a humanly generated response, for the entire process of salvation, faith included, is God's gift (cf. Phil. 1:29).<sup>65</sup>

The gospel of salvation by grace through faith was the touchstone of the Protestant Reformation. *Sola Gratia* (grace alone) and *sola fide* (faith alone) stand at the heart of evangelical religion.<sup>66</sup> Salvation does not issue from faith *and* works, but rather, faith *apart from* works.<sup>67</sup> This does not mean, of course, that works are

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<sup>64</sup>Bruce, 51. This theme of eternal glorification has been captured admirably in the hymn "Jesus is Coming" by William Pettengill, where the refrain resounds with the triumphant vision of Ephesians:

*Jesus is coming, our Savior and Lover divine;  
Soon in His glory the ransomed of ages will shine;  
Ages on ages we'll reign with the King on His throne;  
Wonderful story! We'll share in His glory  
Redeemed by His mercy alone.*

<sup>65</sup>The question has been posed as to whether Paul's statement, "And this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God," refers to faith or to the entire process of salvation by grace through faith. The *Living Bible*, which takes it in the former sense, reads, "Even trusting is not of yourselves; it too is a gift from God." It is true that the word *pistis* (= faith) is the immediate antecedent of the demonstrative pronoun *touto* (= this). However, *pistis* is a feminine noun while *touto* is neuter. Normally, a pronoun should agree in gender with its antecedent. Therefore, most scholars regard the demonstrative pronoun as referring to the entire sentence, not to the word "faith" exclusively. Grammar seems to be on their side.

<sup>66</sup>Bloesch, II.250.

<sup>67</sup>Some expressions within the Christian family must recognize the danger of a "both-and" theology, that is, salvation by faith *and* works. This sort of synergism does not take seriously the sovereignty of God or the depravity of humans. It ends up making the cooperative action of God and humans in salvation such that the total effect is greater than the sum of

unimportant. It means that grace and faith come first, while good works are the natural result of genuine faith. Good deeds may, in fact, demonstrate whether or not a person has experienced divine grace and responded with true faith (cf. Ja. 2:14-26). But good deeds can never be the ground of salvation. Rather, as Paul again says, the promise of salvation "comes by faith so that it may be by grace" (Ro. 4:16). It cannot be by works, else one could boast about his or her personal contribution to salvation (2:9), and such boasting Paul absolutely will not allow (Ro. 4:2; 1 Co. 1:26-31; 4:7; Ga. 6:14-15). At the same time, the salvation which is by grace through faith aims at producing a life filled with good deeds. Good works may not be how God saves people, but good works are certainly the end in view (2:10)!

## **THE CHURCH CATHOLIC (2:11--22)**

Now Paul is ready to develop more fully the theme toward which he has been building since the beginning--the church catholic. *If* the church was chosen in Christ before the creation of the universe (1:4, 11), and *if* this church was predestined to be adopted as God's intimate family (1:5), and *if* God's eternal purpose is to unite under the lordship of Christ every entity in heaven and on earth (1:9-10), and *if* Christ has been raised from the dead and exalted in the heavenlies as the source of life for the church (1:22-23), and *if* every person in the church has been saved by grace through faith apart from works (2:8-10), *then* the church can be nothing less than catholic. Prejudices and artificial divisions can no longer be maintained. What God intends to do in all the universe, he will first do in his church (cf. 3:10-11).

### **What You Once Were (2:11-12)**

In the Hebrew Bible, there are hints of God's universal purpose in various places. The creation accounts depict God as the maker of all humans, not just Israel. God's ultimate purpose in choosing Abram was that in his progeny all the nations would be blessed. When God called the Israelites out of Egypt, he chose them to be a nation of priests for the world, a calling which they never fulfilled during their long national history. Nevertheless, through the voices of his prophets, God still demonstrated that he was the sovereign Lord over all history. He was as responsible for the migration of the Philistines from Crete to Palestine as he was for the exodus of

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the parts. However, neither human free will nor human free reason can ever be the ground of salvation, else salvation is not by grace alone through faith alone. There are voices within Christian groups as diverse as the Churches of Christ, the United Pentecostal Church, and the Roman Catholic Church which articulate salvation in ways which are in conflict with Paul's gospel of salvation by grace alone through faith alone. These expressions must be resisted, for they issue in misunderstanding as to "how" people are saved as well as "why" people are saved. According to Paul, the question "how" is answered "by grace through faith." The question of "why" is answered by "to do good works." This priority must not be reversed!

Israel from Egypt to Canaan. All the nations were accountable to him. The Book of Consolation in the Scroll of Isaiah points out that the failure of national Israel to be Yahweh's servant did not mean the failure of God's eternal purpose. Rather, another Servant would be called, one who would not falter until he had established justice among the nations, and all of the nations would look to him as their hope for salvation. Finally, the prophets anticipated that in the messianic age the nations of the world would worship Yahweh, the great King, for in that day he would be King over all the earth. Surely these Old Testament themes could not have been far from Paul's mind as he composed this letter.

In spite of God's universal redemptive purpose, the division between Israel and the nations had long been a sharp and impassable rift. The holiness code in the Torah, which called the Israelites to be set apart from the false religion and moral degradation of the pagans, gradually hardened into an irreconcilable difference. The symbol of this difference was the sacred ritual of circumcision, a mandate for all Abraham's male descendants (Ge. 17). If God was willing to kill Moses for failing in this ritual (Ex. 4:24-26), he surely would not pass over the failure of anyone else! Furthermore, the Israelites had learned the hard way that to indulge in the ways of the pagans meant reaping the whirlwind of the inexorable Deuteronomic code (Dt. 28; Da. 9:4-19). They had gone into exile for their sins, and centuries later, by the time of Paul, they had not yet regained their freedom from the domination of foreigners. Jewish distaste for non-Jews was proverbial.<sup>68</sup>

So, when Paul calls attention to the state of alienation between the "circumcision" and the "uncircumcision" (2:11),<sup>69</sup> he describes a well-known fact. Spiritually, the division could hardly have been greater. Gentiles were alienated from the Messiah, who by every account was to be Jewish (Ro. 9:5). Gentiles had no citizenship in the community of Israel (Ro. 9:4).<sup>70</sup> They had no standing in the covenants, for the covenants had been made with "Abraham's progeny" (cf. Ge.

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<sup>68</sup>The effort to maintain racial purity resulted in a rigid caste system. Even among those in the national community there was a strict tripartite division of society. First came the priests, levites and full-blooded Israelites of pure ancestry. Then came those Israelites whose status had been tarnished, people such as slaves, proselytes, and those whose occupations were sullied (i.e., camel-drivers, shepherds, dung-collectors, etc.). Finally, there were bastards, eunuchs, foundlings, and so forth. Of course, all these people were within the Jewish community. Lower than them all were Gentiles, cf. J. Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, trans. F. & C. Cave (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969) 271ff.

<sup>69</sup>The terms *akrobestia* (= foreskin, uncircumcision) and *peritomes* (= cutting around, circumcision) are metonymies for Gentiles and Jews (cf. Ac. 10:45; 11:3; Ro. 2:25; etc.).

<sup>70</sup>From the point of the Rabbis, Palestine was "the land," and all other countries were "outside the land." Palestine was holy; everything else was darkness and death. The very dust of a heathen country was unclean, and it was believed to defile a Jew by contact so that it was regarded in the same sense as a grave or the corruption of death. All contact with Gentiles was to be avoided, and every trace of heathen dust was to be shaken off. Milk drawn from a cow by Gentile hands was unclean. Food prepared by Gentiles was unclean. If a Gentile entered a Jewish house, he could not be left alone in the room else every article of food and drink was defiled. If a Jew bought a knife from a Gentile, the blade had to be ground anew, cf. A. Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life in the Days of Christ* (rpt. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 14-29.

13:14-17; 15:2-5; 17:7-11, 19-21; 26:2-5; 28:13-15; 38:11-12; Ex. 24:1-11).<sup>71</sup> As Gentiles, they had no hope of salvation. They were completely alienated from God (2:12).

### **What You Now Are (2:13-18)**

Once more Paul uses his famous phrase "in Christ." In Jesus, the Messiah, the ancient hostilities had come to an end. Gentiles, who once were far away from God, had now been brought near to God through the death of Jesus (2:13).<sup>72</sup>

One symbol of the alienation of Gentiles from God was the barrier in the temple precincts which separated the outer Court of the Gentiles (which was not part of the temple proper) from the inner courts (where Jewish worship was conducted). Gentiles might not proceed beyond this barrier on pain of death.<sup>73</sup> Fastened to the barrier were inscribed notices of warning in Greek and Latin, some of which have been uncovered by archaeologists.<sup>74</sup> The barrier of alienation between Jews and Gentiles, a barrier which permitted Jews access to God but forbade the same for Gentiles, had been nullified in the redemptive work Christ. The two factions, Jew and Gentile, had been brought together into a single entity (2:14).<sup>75</sup> F. F. Bruce has well said, "Those who enter into peace with God must have peace with one another."<sup>76</sup> The received interpretation of the commandments and regulations in the holiness codes of Torah, which had given rise to a total alienation between Jew and Gentile, had been abolished in the earthly ministry of Jesus (2:15a).<sup>77</sup> Jesus' purpose was to create a new entity, the church, in which the old animosities had vanished. Using a figure of

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<sup>71</sup>Paul's usage of the word *diatheke* (= covenant) is derived from the Hebrew, not the Greek, understanding. The Greeks used the word almost exclusively to refer to a last will and testament, but the Hebrew understanding is of a unilateral alliance which a superior makes with someone under him. In this sense, the "covenants" are those binding agreements initiated by God with the people of Israel.

<sup>72</sup>For the use of the word "blood," see comments and footnote at 1:7.

<sup>73</sup>So anxious were the Romans to conciliate the Jews that they even sanctioned the execution of Roman citizens for this offense, cf. Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, VI.ii.4.

<sup>74</sup>One such notice, uncovered in 1871, reads, "No foreigner may enter within the barricade which surrounds the temple and enclosure. Anyone who is caught doing so will have himself to thank for his ensuing death," F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable*, 5th ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983) 93-94 and *The Book of Acts* [NICNT] (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979) 433-434. It may be remembered that Paul's arrest and trial stemmed from the accusation that he had brought a Greek beyond this very barrier (Ac. 21:27ff.).

<sup>75</sup>Elsewhere, Paul extends this reconciliation of alienated categories, especially dominant-submissive categories, to gender and class (Ga. 3:26-29; Col. 3:11).

<sup>76</sup>Bruce, *Ephesians*, 54.

<sup>77</sup>The expression "in his flesh" probably refers to the entire earthly life of Jesus from incarnation to death (cf. 1 Ti. 3:16). Death, of course, was the culmination of his life's ministry, but the true interpretation of the law of Moses involved not only his death but his entire ministry. For Christians, Jesus' interpretation of the law of Moses as well as the way Jesus lived out the law of Moses was a true fulfillment of the law (cf. Mt. 5:17-20). It is in this sense that he abolished "in his flesh" the old way of understanding the law. In this passage, then, Paul will use the words *sarx* (= flesh) and *soma* (= body) to distinguish between the earthly life of Jesus and the mystical expression of Christ's body in the church.



speech in which he depicts the Jewish community and the Gentile community as two persons, Paul shows that Christ has now created out of the two a single community.<sup>78</sup> Instead of there being two, a Jewish person and a Gentile person, there is now one new person--the Christian (2:15b). This new person was a new creation, just as was Adam in the beginning. In himself, Christ Jesus brought both the Jew and the Gentile to God by dying on the cross for their sins,<sup>79</sup> and in doing so, he killed their former hostilities (2:16). Through faith, both now belong to a single body, the mystical body of Christ.

That behind Paul's thought were the wonderful Servant passages in Isaiah is clear from his allusion to Isaiah 52:7 and 57:19. The ancient prophet anticipated the proclamation of peace, both to those "far and near." For Paul, Jesus was the Servant of Yahweh who came to preach the gospel of peace (2:17). Both the Jew and the Gentile come to God through Jesus Christ by one Spirit (2:18; cf. 1 Co. 12:13).<sup>80</sup> Jesus said much the same thing when he described himself as the "door" and the "way" to the Father (Jn. 10:7; 14:6). Since the Christian community is one body, it is energized by one Spirit. This is that same Spirit which sealed the believers when they accepted the gospel (cf. 1:13) and which indwells them corporately as the church (cf. 2:22; 4:4).

### **One Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church (2:19-22)**

So, the church is one! Gentiles are no longer foreigners and aliens, but they are members of God's intimate family (2:19). Paul uses three metaphors to describe this unity, the metaphor of a citizen, the metaphor of a household, and the metaphor of a temple. The *politeia* (= city community) was the well-known Greek city-state. Among its ideals were the full democratic participation of its citizens through the regular, popular assembly. Public service was donated with enthusiasm by the members of the community.<sup>81</sup> The term *sympolites* (= fellow-citizen) in 2:19 appears only here in the New Testament.<sup>82</sup> The *oikonomia* (= household community) was a large inclusive and socially cohesive unit composed of a number of families and/or

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<sup>78</sup>This concept of corporate personality, in which the entire community can be portrayed as a single individual, is a particularly Hebraic way of thinking, cf. H. Robinson, *Corporate Personality in Ancient Israel*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980).

<sup>79</sup>In the letter to the Romans, Paul explained that both Jews and Gentiles were equally sinners before God. That the Gentiles were sinners was well known, for even though they did not have the Torah, they had some inkling of God's moral truth in the very creation itself, a truth they rejected (Ro. 1:18ff.). The Jews were sinners because, even though they did have the law of Moses, they had repeatedly violated it (Ro. 2:1-27). So, both were equally under sin (Ro. 3:9-20).

<sup>80</sup>Once more, the trinitarian language is implicit (see comments and footnote at 1:2). Sinners come to the Father, through Jesus the Son, by one Holy Spirit.

<sup>81</sup>D. Tidball, *The Social Context of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Academie, 1984) 76-79.

<sup>82</sup>J. Moulton and G. Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament* (rpt. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) 612.

individuals who engaged in common enterprise, such as farming or merchandising, and who practiced a common religion. There was no limit to the size of such a household, providing the householder was able to support its members.<sup>83</sup> When Paul says that Christians are "members of God's family," it is to this social structure that he compares the church.

Finally, Paul says that the new Christian community is built upon a foundation which has a cornerstone. Upon this cornerstone rests the edifice of the entire building. His use of the word *naos* (= temple) in 2:21 makes clear that he is reflecting upon the Jewish temple. The church is, in fact, a new temple. As the new temple, it has for its foundation the apostles and prophets (2:20).<sup>84</sup> They are the gifts which the Lord has given as the first and second ranking of ministries in the establishment of the new community (cf. 4:11; 1 Co. 12:28).<sup>85</sup> They served as the first link between Jesus and the ongoing Christian church (cf. 3:5).<sup>86</sup> The cornerstone, Jesus Christ himself, ties the structure together and serves as a test to ascertain whether or not it has been built to the architect's specifications.<sup>87</sup> Paul here has in mind Isaiah's prediction about the "tested stone" in Zion (Is. 28:16). The entire temple complex,<sup>88</sup> then, is fitted to Christ. As it continues to grow, it rises to become a holy temple in the Lord (2:21). Just as Solomon's temple had been the place where Yahweh "put his name" when he took up residence in the Most Holy Place (cf. Dt. 12; 2 Chr. 5), now the church has

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<sup>83</sup>Tidball, 80-86.

<sup>84</sup>The way Paul uses the word *themelios* (= foundation) seems to reflect a common usage found in both classical and Koine Greek, that is, the metaphorical idea of elementary teachings and/or the basis of a system of thought, cf. *LS*, *BAG*, *TDNT* and *NIDNNT*.

<sup>85</sup>It seems most likely that Paul has in mind here New Testament prophets rather than those of the Hebrew Bible, else he would have said "prophets and apostles," J. Stott, *God's New Society: The Message of Ephesians* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1979) 107.

<sup>86</sup>The limits of this commentary do not provide adequate space to treat the vexed question as to whether the ministries of apostles and prophets are ongoing in the post-apostolic church. Suffice it to say that those who see these offices as limited to the apostolic era usually connect their ministries with the composition of the canonical books of the New Testament, cf. Stott, 107. Those who see these ministries as ongoing in the church do not necessarily attempt to connect them to the canon of the New Testament, cf. J. Motyer, "Prophecy, Prophets," *NBD* (1982) 985. It can at least be said that both titles seem to have a restricted sense (in some usages) and a more general sense (in others). The "twelve apostles" are certainly not the same as the "apostles of the congregations" (2 Co. 8:23). Similarly, while in a broad sense every believer is potentially a prophet because of the gift of the Spirit (cf. Ac. 2:17-18), here Paul surely has in mind a special group.

<sup>87</sup>Bruce, 57.

<sup>88</sup>Evidence for the textual variants "every building" (without the definite article) and "the whole building" (with the definite article) has a fairly even distribution, both internally and externally. Versions are also evenly split in omitting the article (so RV, ASV, TCNT, JB, UBS, Nestle, Phillips, Goodspeed) and retaining it (so NIV, NAB, NASB, KJV, NEB, RSV, Weymouth, Williams). If it is omitted ("every building"), then the metaphor is that the temple is the aggregate of several buildings. If the article is retained, then the metaphor is of a single building. The former metaphor would be appropriate to the Jewish temple and its various surrounding buildings, even though it is a single complex. The undivided testimony in the Western Text along with Vaticanus and Sinaiticus seem to swing the balance in favor of omission.

become the new temple inhabited by the Spirit (2:22). Elsewhere Paul uses the metaphor of the temple in ways that may apply to the individual (cf. 1 Co. 6:19-20), but here he is definitely speaking of the corporate body of Christians.<sup>89</sup>

So, the Christian community is just as the Nicene Creed states: it is "one holy, catholic and apostolic church." These four "marks" of the church should be evident in the expression of every local Christian assembly as well as every Christian denomination. No Christian congregation, denomination or group is, in itself, the church. Rather, every Christian congregation, denomination and group is called to assess itself by the marks of unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity.<sup>90</sup>

### **Paul, A Servant of The Gospel (3:1-13)**

Now that he has described the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church which was established through the death of Jesus, Paul proceeds to enlarge on his own unique role in God's eternal purpose for that church.

#### **The Unfinished Sentence (3:1)**

Paul understood himself to have a unique role in God's eternal purpose. If God had destroyed the barrier between Jews and Gentiles in the death of Jesus, thus creating a single body of believers incorporated together on the common ground of God's grace, then Paul had been chosen as God's special ambassador to proclaim this truth and establish it through his missionary efforts in Asia Minor and Greece.

Paul considered his imprisonment to be part of his mission. On his last trip to Jerusalem, a trip which Paul had hurried to complete before the Jewish celebration of Pentecost (Ac. 20:16),<sup>91</sup> he had told the Ephesian elders that he felt compelled by the Holy Spirit to return to the holy city (Ac. 20:22a). He frankly explained to them that while he did not know exactly what was to transpire in Jerusalem, at every intermediate stop he had received warnings that prison and hardships were awaiting him (Ac. 20:22b-23; cf. 21:4, 10-12). Still, in some unexplained way, he believed that the coming events in Jerusalem would significantly figure in his commission to testify about God's grace (Ac. 20:24; cf. 21:13-14). He also knew that in some way this trip was to be final, and that he would never see his friends again (Ac. 20:25, 38). Thus, when Paul writes as the "prisoner of Jesus Christ," his choice of words demonstrates that he felt himself to be perfectly in God's will, for this was God's chosen method to enable Paul to testify to the grace of God to all people, both Jew

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<sup>89</sup> Paul also uses the corporate imagery elsewhere as well as is evident in the plural 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> person pronouns (cf. 1 Co. 3:16-17; 2 Co. 6:14-16).

<sup>90</sup>R. Webber, *Common Roots* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978) 55-71.

<sup>91</sup>Probably in 57 A.D., cf. F. Bruce, *Paul, Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) 475.

and Gentile. He was, indeed, a prisoner of Christ "for the sake of you Gentiles." It is also meaningful that neither here nor elsewhere does Paul describe himself as a prisoner of Rome.

At the end of 3:1, the sentence breaks off and will not continue until 3:14. The long passage of 3:2-13 is an interlude, and in 3:14 Paul will repeat his introductory clause. "For this reason...."

### **The Mystery Revealed (3:2-7)**

Early in the letter, Paul used the term *mysterion* (= mystery) to describe God's hidden purpose behind the movement of history (cf. 1:9-10). At the consummation of history, God had determined to bring all things in earth and heaven under the lordship of Christ. However, what he intended to accomplish in all the universe he would first accomplish in his church by uniting Jew and Gentile into one body through Christ's death on the cross. Paul's commission was to testify to that reality. He had been given an *oikonomia* (= stewardship) of this gospel of grace (3:2).<sup>92</sup> In recounting his divine commission before his fellow Jews and the Roman officials at the time of his arrest, Paul had reported an experience in the Jerusalem temple during which he fell into a trance (Ac. 22:17). In a vision, the Lord promised to send him far away to the Gentiles (Ac. 22:21; cf. 9:15-16; 26:17-20, 23). Thus, Paul can regularly refer to his knowledge of the gospel both by revelation (3:3a; cf. Ro. 16:25; Ga. 1:11-12) as well as by tradition (1 Co. 15:1-4).<sup>93</sup> Paul had already written concerning this mystery briefly in the earlier part of the letter (3:3b; cf. 1:9).<sup>94</sup> Now, he enlarges on his insight into God's universal purpose (3:4).

In previous ages, the universal purpose of God to unite both Jews and Gentiles into one body had not been known. Perhaps Paul had in mind the passage in the second Servant Song where God announced to far-off lands the future birth of his special Servant who would be hidden until the time of his revealing (Is. 49:1-2). Certainly he had in mind that the union of Jew and Gentile in the church was a new aspect only made known to the apostles and prophets of the Lord Jesus (3:5). The ancient prophets had envisioned the pilgrimage of the nations to Jerusalem to worship at the consummation of history, but they consistently viewed Israel and the nations to

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<sup>92</sup>The term *oikonomia*, derived from the words *oikos* (= house) and *nomos* (= law) and used from the time of Xenophon and Plato, describes the office of a steward who directs the household administration of a large estate or a government. It has the twofold indication of position and function, on the one hand describing the office of a subordinate who acts under orders from a superior, and on the other describing the actual work of administration, see loc. cit. in *LS* (1982), *BAG* (1979) and Moulton and Milligan.

<sup>93</sup>For Paul's dependence upon both revelation and tradition, see the insightful discussion in F. Bruce, *Paul*, 86-93.

<sup>94</sup>John Calvin and others have understood this phrase to mean that Paul had written an early epistle, one unknown to us today somewhat on the order of the letter to Laodicea (cf. Col. 4:16), cf. W. Hendriksen, *Galatians, Ephesians [NTC]* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979) 153. Most scholars, however, prefer the view that he merely refers to what he had already written in the present letter.

be distinct, Israel having a superior status (cf. Zec. 8:23). Yet Paul says the mystery now revealed to the New Testament apostles and prophets is that the Jews and Gentiles have been united in a single body. Gentiles are heirs together with Israel! They are fellow members of the same covenant community! They share together in the promise of fulfillment through Christ Jesus (3:6)! Through God's mercy (cf. Ro. 15:15-16) as well as his empowerment (cf. Col. 1:29), Paul was chosen as the special representative of this reconciling gospel (3:7).

Of course, Paul did not stand alone, which is why he mentions the other apostles and prophets. Luke details just how difficult it was for the Jewish Christians to cross their ethnic boundaries by accepting into the common fellowship of the church such outsiders as Samaritans (Ac. 8:14) and Gentiles (Ac. 10:34-35; 11:1-3, 15-18; 15:1-2, 5-21; cf. Ga. 2:1-10). In the end, however, the leadership of the early church was united on this issue.

### **Paul, the Missionary to the Gentiles (3:8-13)**

In spite of Paul's early antagonism toward the Christian community, God had graciously chosen him to serve as the primary representative of the abundant Christian message to the non-Jews (3:8).<sup>95</sup> His self-description as "less than the least of all God's people" is in keeping with other such comments which demonstrate that he felt continual regret for his role as an arch persecutor (cf. Ac. 7:58; 8:3; 9:1-2; 22:4-5; 26:9-11; 1 Co. 15:9; Ga. 1:13; 1 Ti. 1:15-16). Still, according to God's call,<sup>96</sup> Paul had been selected to explain what had been hidden in the divine mind from the beginning (3:9).<sup>97</sup> This mystery, the plan to create a single community of faith out of Jews and Gentiles, was a demonstration of his divine and multi-faceted wisdom (3:10-11).<sup>98</sup> What was not known in any previous generation of humans, and what the hostile spiritual entities in the heavenly realms could never have guessed,<sup>99</sup> was that in Jesus the Messiah all humans, regardless of race or heritage, could be saved by grace through faith. The force of the word *nyn* (= now) is that God has already

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<sup>95</sup>The word *ploutos* (= riches, abundance) is a favorite of Paul's. He uses it several times in Ephesians (1:7, 18; 2:7; 3:16) as well as elsewhere.

<sup>96</sup>One scholar has suggested the interesting possibility that the familiar language of "conversion" is misused, and it is more proper to say that Paul experienced a "call" rather than a "conversion" on the Damascus Road. Since he did not change from one God to another, and since early Christianity was firmly within the wing of Judaism, Paul could hardly be called a "convert," K. Stendahl, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976) 7-23. This subtle distinction may underemphasize the fact that Paul does not exempt his Jewish community from the charge of being under sin and in need of salvation (Ro. 3:9; 9:1-3; 10:1). However one wishes to split hairs on terminology, the fact remains that Paul considered himself to be unsaved outside of the grace of Jesus Christ.

<sup>97</sup>The verb *apokrypto* (= to hide, conceal) may imply that God kept his purposes hidden precisely to prevent the spiritual forces of evil from thwarting his plan (cf. 1 Co. 2:7; Col. 1:26).

<sup>98</sup>The word *polyoikilos* (= many-sided, many colored, variegated as in the patterns of embroidery) is used only here in the New Testament.

<sup>99</sup>For the "heavenly realms," see comments at 1:3.

accomplished in his church the same kind of lordship which ultimately will prevail over the whole universe (cf. 1:9-10; 19b-23). Through faith in Christ, anyone may approach God with freedom and confidence (3:12).<sup>100</sup> The "we" in 3:12 doubtless includes both Jews and Gentiles, for both have access to the Father by the one Holy Spirit (cf. 2:18). It is unnecessary to have any other mediator beyond the God-man, Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Ti. 2:5-6).

In view of this eternal purpose, long hidden but now revealed, Paul asks his friends not to grieve over his imprisonment (3:13). It might have been easy for them to think that such hardships should not befall a person who is living in God's will, particularly one who was called to such a significant role in the eternal purposes of God. But Paul understood that suffering and glory go together (Ro. 8:18-25; 2 Co. 4:16-18; 2 Ti. 2:11-12). His sufferings were for the glory of his Gentile converts. In spite of his confinement, and more to the point, by means of his confinement, the gospel of Christ would be magnified among the Gentiles. God had spoken to Paul through an angel, "You must stand before Caesar" (Ac. 27:23-25). If this was God's way, then so be it!

### **Paul's Prayer for Fullness (3:14-21)**

Earlier in the letter, Paul described his prayers for his readers (1:15-23). There, he prayed for his readers to be given wisdom and insight concerning their hope in Christ (1:17-18). Now, as though to complete the familiar trilogy of faith, hope and love (cf. 1 Co. 13:13; 1 Th. 1:3), he describes his intercession for his readers that they might be grounded in their faith and established in God's love.

### **Faith and Love, the Fullness of God's Glorious Riches (3:14-19)**

Paul's prayers, like those of the other earliest Christians, were addressed to the Father (3:14; cf. 1:17; 2:18; 5:20; Ro. 8:15; 15:6; 2 Co. 11:31; Ga. 4:6; Col. 1:3, 12; 3:17; 1 Th. 3:11).<sup>101</sup> This practice seems to follow Jesus' instructions that his disciples should pray to the Father (Mt. 6:9; Lk. 11:2; Jn. 4:23; 16:23-24). Only in unusual situations are prayers directed to Jesus (cf. Ac. 7:59; 9:13-17),<sup>102</sup> and so far as the New Testament is concerned, there are no occasions when the Holy Spirit is addressed in

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<sup>100</sup>The word *parrhesia* means outspokenness, and in classical Greek it signified the free speech which was the right of every citizen in a democratic state, cf. Bruce, *Ephesians*, 65.

<sup>101</sup>The KJV and NKJV follow later manuscripts with the added phrase "of our Lord, Jesus Christ." This reading is quite late, however, and all the earliest manuscripts, both in papyri and uncials, simply give the word "Father" without any additional phrase. The shorter reading is followed by virtually all other translations (i.e., RSV, NAB, NIV, ASV, NASB, NEB, TEV, TCNT, Phillips and Weymouth).

<sup>102</sup>These are the only two prayers in the New Testament addressed to Jesus, and both are in visionary circumstances.

prayer.<sup>103</sup> So, Paul bows his knee before God, the Father, because every fatherhood in heaven and on earth derives its meaning from God's fatherhood (3:15).<sup>104</sup> His is the only underived fatherhood in the universe, and he is the archetype for all other fathers.<sup>105</sup>

Paul's prayer was that inwardly<sup>106</sup> his readers would be powerfully enabled through the Holy Spirit so that Christ might dwell in their hearts through faith (3:16-17a). It was not that Christ was not already indwelling them, of course, but that Paul wanted their hearts to be settled with the permanence of Christ as their Lord.<sup>107</sup> Once again, the trinitarian structure of Paul's thought is evident. He bows his knee to the Father, praying that Christ might dwell in their hearts through the power of the Spirit.

Paul's prayer now moves on to love, the highest of the Christian graces. He wants his readers to be firmly rooted in God's love so that, along with all others in the Christian community, they might seize with a flash of insight<sup>108</sup> the unlimited dimensions of his divine love (3:17b-18). This prayer for Christian maturity is given in the context of the full Christian fellowship, that is, "together with all the saints." The notion that a man or woman can reach such maturity in isolation is contrary to Paul's thought. If the church is the jewel in God's eternal plan, then individuals should mature in the context of this same church. In grasping a full and mature knowledge of God's surpassing love, Christians can be filled with God's own fullness (3:19).<sup>109</sup> Later, Paul will speak about Christians "attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (cf. 4:13). Earlier, he spoke of the church as the body of Christ,

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<sup>103</sup>In fact, it is not until the 4th century that prayers in the worship of the church are found which addressed the Son and/or the Spirit. Smail has properly advised, "To pray *to* Jesus rather than *through* him...is to betray a doubt about our relationship to the Father," T. Smail, *The Forgotten Father* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 168-169. He also rightly says that there is a type of prayer that concentrates in an unhealthy and sentimental way upon Jesus, or upon the Holy Spirit and his gifts.

<sup>104</sup>The Greek words *pasa patria* have been variously translated as "every family" (so NEB, NASB, NAB, RSV, ASV, JB, TEV, Williams), "the whole family" (so KJV, NIV, Weymouth), and "all fatherhood" (so TCNT, Phillips). It should not be taken as "the whole family," since this would require the definite article. Also, the term "family" does not express well the relationship of the word *patria* to *pater* (= father). *Patria* refers to lineage, clan or pedigree on the father's side. In effect, the apostle refers to any "father-headed group," cf. F. Foulkes, 101.

<sup>105</sup>F. Bruce, *Ephesians*, 67.

<sup>106</sup>Lit., "the inward person." By this expression, the Greeks meant a person's reason, conscience and will, cf. W. Barclay, *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976) 131.

<sup>107</sup>Stott makes the observation that of two similar words, *paroikeo* (= to inhabit as a lodger) and *katoikeo* (= to settle within a home), Paul seems deliberately to have chosen the stronger of them in order to emphasize that the indwelling of Christ should be settled and permanent, cf. J. Stott, 135-136.

<sup>108</sup>The verb *katalambano* means to seize physically or to seize mentally. It carries the idea of suddenness, and here, seems to denote that dawning of the understanding which bursts upon the mind in a sudden flash of inspiration.

<sup>109</sup>The textual variant "he might be filled" (p46 and Codex Vaticanus) as opposed to "you might be filled" (Codices Sinaiticus and Alexandrinus and most other uncials, minuscules and versions) has been rejected by all translators. In any case, it is hard to discover any meaning at all in the variant "he might be filled," for it is grammatically, syntactically and conceptually impossible.

"the fullness of him who fills everything in every way" (cf. 1:23). The fullness for which Paul prays is that state of Christian maturity in which every spiritual blessing is fully comprehended and in every way appropriated into one's life (cf. 1:3).

### **The Doxology (3:20-21)**

Paul concludes his prayer with a doxology (3:20-21). Such a doxology terminates a primary section of the letter and makes way for a shift in focus from the theological to the practical. So far, Paul has prayed for his readers to be filled with insight and wisdom to know Christ better (cf. 1:17-18). He has interceded for them that they might have a flash of divine insight so as to perceive the limitless love of God (cf. 3:17b-19). Now, he offers praise to the God who is able to give them all this. Such spiritual heights are obviously beyond natural human capacity. Nevertheless, God is able to give infinitely more than any human's capacity to even ask or imagine (3:20)!

So, glory is ascribed to God in an ascending order. It is first in his church, which he chose before the creation of the world (cf. 1:4). It moves upward through Jesus Christ, who is the source of everything for the church (cf. 1:22). It will continue forever,<sup>110</sup> with one age supervening upon another into the remotest infinity! Paul concludes with the single, familiar Hebraism, "Amen."

### **The Goal of Unity (4:1-16)**

The Book of Ephesians can be rather evenly divided between the theological and the practical. Chapters 1-3 are theological, while chapters 4-6 are the practical implications of the theology discussed in the earlier part of the letter. This arrangement is typically Pauline, and here (4:1a) as elsewhere (Ro. 12:1) Paul uses the verb *parakaleo* (= to exhort) to introduce the practical section.

### **The Basis of Unity (4:1-6)**

Theologically, Paul has argued powerfully for one, holy, catholic and apostolic church, established through the death of Jesus Christ, and uniting the Jews and Gentiles into a single, spiritual community. This gospel was, accordingly to Paul, God's eternal purpose all along, though the details of it were hidden in the divine mind until they were revealed to the apostles and prophets of the New Testament. Since this is so, Paul now embarks upon a lengthy exhortation to his readers concerning how they ought to live in such a community. Their very first response ought to be a maximum effort toward unity. Twice Paul uses the key word *henotes* (= unity), once where he entreats his readers to "keep the unity of the Spirit" (4:3), and

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<sup>110</sup>Lit., "to all generations of the ages of the ages"



later, where he anticipates the time when they will "all reach unity in the faith" (4:13).

Once more repeating his self-description as the prisoner of Jesus Christ (4:1a; cf. 3:1), Paul urges his readers to live up to their exalted position in Christ. If the Lord has established one, holy, catholic and apostolic church, then those who belong to that community ought to live up to their calling as members of this church (4:1b; cf. 1 Th. 2:12). Paul lists four character traits that are imperative for believers who have been so called (4:2). These Christian virtues are *tapeinophrosyne* (= humility), *praotes* (= gentleness), *makrothymia* (= patience, longsuffering), and *anechomai en agape* (= forbearing, enduring for the sake of love). By living out such virtues in the context of the community, Christians can live up to their exalted position in Christ.

Paul urges them to give their best efforts<sup>111</sup> toward the unity which is already resident in the Holy Spirit who indwells the church (4:3; cf. 2:22). This unity is expressed through the bond of peace which should exist between fellow-members of the body. It is not a uniformity where everyone thinks alike, but rather, it is the state of peace resulting from the virtues of humility, tolerance, forbearance and love.

The basis for this unity can be summarized in the Christian community's unique core of common beliefs, common experiences and common realities (4:4-6). Paul lists these unique commonalities, prefacing each of the seven by the Greek word "one."<sup>112</sup> Once again (cf. 1:3, 5, 13; 2:18; 3:14-17), his language is implicitly trinitarian as he moves in ascending order from the Spirit to the Lord to the Father. Here is his list:

*One Body* (the church, cf. 1:22-23)

*One Spirit* (which indwells the community of faith, cf. 2:22)

*One Hope* (the expectation of eternal life under the reconciling lordship of Jesus Christ, cf. 1:9-10, 18)

*One Lord* (Christ raised from the dead and exalted to the right hand of the Father, cf. 1:20-21)

*One Faith* (the gospel of grace by which we are saved, cf. 2:8)

*One Baptism* (the gift of the Spirit which inwardly seals the believer and which is outwardly expressed in the water ritual, cf. 1:13-14)

*One Father* (God over all, supreme and transcendent; God through all, actively at work in his creation so that nothing escapes his divine purpose; and God in all, the one who lives in human hearts through faith, cf. 1:3; 3:14-15)<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>111</sup>The verb *spoudazo* carries the nuance of intensity, seriousness and eagerness. It means to give a maximum effort.

<sup>112</sup>Actually, Paul uses all three of the Greek synonyms for one, *ev*, *mia* and *eis*.

<sup>113</sup>It is interesting to note that Paul also includes the full Trinity in this concept of indwelling. Believers are indwelt by the Spirit (1:13; 2:22), indwelt by Christ (3:17), and indwelt by the Father (4:6).

### Diversity in Ministry (4:7-13)

The unity of the church is a unity in the midst of diversity. It is not a monolithic conformity, where everyone functions in exactly the same way. Rather, it is a unity which embraces the diversity of gifts God has given to his church. Thus, when Paul says that "to each one of us was given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ," he means that within the kingdom of grace, Christ apportions gifts as he chooses (4:7; cf. Ro. 12:3-6a). However, as he says elsewhere, there are diversities of gifts (cf. 1 Co. 12:4-6). Paul does not use the familiar word *charismata* (= gifts) in this passage, but he does use the word *charis* (= grace), which is the root of the former and should be understood as meaning the same thing.<sup>114</sup> All gifts are grace-gifts which flow out of God's gracious purposes.

In quoting Psalm 68:18, a psalm which reflects upon God's victorious march from Egypt to Mt. Zion in Jerusalem (4:8),<sup>115</sup> Paul shows that in Christ's resurrection and ascension, he not only was victorious over the opposing spiritual entities in the heavenlies (cf. 1:20-21; 3:10; 6:12), but he also shared the bounty of his victory with the members of his church.<sup>116</sup> This bounty consisted of his grace-gifts to the church. The fuller meaning of the "ascension" in Psalm 68:18 refers, not merely to the bringing of the ark to Jerusalem, but to the enthronement of the risen Christ in the heavenlies (4:9a). This ascension of Christ into the heavens was the counterpart to his earlier descent into "the lower parts of the earth" (4:9b).<sup>117</sup> In his ascension, he

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<sup>114</sup>Foulkes, 114; Stott, 155.

<sup>115</sup>The psalm may well have been composed in honor of the procession of the Ark of the Covenant from the house of Obed-Edom to the City of David. It opens with the echo of the desert shout when the ark led the way for Israel (Ps. 68:1; Nu. 10:35). It climaxes with the ascent of the mountain in Judah that God chose as his permanent resting place (Ps. 68:16). Thus, when God "ascended on high," that is, when his throne on the ark was taken to Jerusalem and established in honor, he led in his train the captives of his victory over the Canaanites, sharing the bounty of victory with the community of Israel (cf. 1 Sa. 30:16-31; 2 Sa. 6:17-19), cf. D. Kidner, *Psalms 1-72 [TOTC]* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1973) 238. For Paul, this event in the history of Israel was typological of a far greater ascension, the ascension of the resurrected Son of God into the heavens, in which he destroyed the spiritual enemies of his people (cf. 1:19b-21).

<sup>116</sup>Paul rather consistently saw events within the history of Israel as earthly foreshadowings or analogies of spiritual realities in the church (cf. Ro. 4:3, 22-25; 9:24-29; 1 Co. 10:1-11; 2 Co. 3:7-18; Ga. 4:21-31). His treatment of Psalm 68 is typical of such exegesis.

<sup>117</sup>Much discussion has attended the expression "lower parts of the earth." Does Paul refer to Christ's incarnation by which he descended from heaven to the earth (so NIV, NEB, TCNT, Conybeare, Phillips, Barth), or does he refer to the underworld, the place of the dead, where Christ descended between his death and resurrection (so Rotherham, TEV, NEBmg, Norlie, Bruce). The issue cannot be decided upon grammatical grounds, and many translations remain neutral (so KJV, NASB, RSV, JB, Weymouth, Williams). It cannot be denied that many if not most of the ante-Nicene fathers took this phrase to refer to hades, and the formulation in the Apostles' Creed, "he descended into hell," stems from this and other such passages (cf. Ac. 2:25-35; Ro. 10:6-7; 1 Pe. 3:18-20; 4:6; Mt. 12:40). In the end, the best of commentators and scholars are divided, and no definitive answer may be given. In the mind of this writer, Paul's reference to Jesus' death as a descent into the abyss (Ro. 10:7) along with the testimony of the early fathers slightly weights the interpretation toward the hades option.

was exalted to the highest position, or as Paul says, "higher than all the heavens" (4:10a; cf. 1:20-21; Phil. 2:9). This supremacy resulted in the removal of all spatial limitations which had been necessary during the incarnation. The resurrected and exalted Christ now "fills all things," that is, his presence pervades the universe from the highest heights to the deepest depths (4:10b).

So, this one, who already embodies the fullness of the godhead (cf. Col. 1:19; 2:9) and who now fills the universe, is the supreme victor who in his triumph has bestowed bountiful gifts upon his church. He gave gifts of ministry so that some were chosen as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists, and some as pastors-teachers (4:11).<sup>118</sup> As is customary, Paul offers a selective list of spiritual gifts,<sup>119</sup> here emphasizing the gifts for ministry of the Word.

The first two ministries, apostles and prophets, are the same as Paul mentioned earlier in the letter (cf. 2:20; 3:5), ministries which he prioritizes elsewhere as the "first" and "second" ministry gifts in the church (cf. 1 Co. 12:28). The first of these, the apostles (lit., "messengers" or "ambassadors"), refers to those primary leaders in the early church who had either been eyewitnesses of the earthly ministry and resurrection of Christ (cf. Mk. 3:14; Ac. 1:21-22; 2:32; 3:15; 10:39-41; 13:30-31; 1 Co. 9:1) or had been specially chosen by God to be missionaries in association with those who had personally seen the Lord (cf. Ac. 14:4; Ro. 16:7; Ga. 1:19; 1 Th. 1:1; 2:7). The prophets are at once easier and more difficult to define. It is easier in that we have the entire backlog of the Hebrew Bible to depend upon in defining their function, but it is harder in that the New Testament itself does not yield much. Clearly identifiable prophets in the New Testament are Agabus, Judas and Silas (cf. Ac. 11:28; 15:32; 21:10),<sup>120</sup> though obviously there must have been others (cf. Mt. 23:34; Ac. 11:27-28; 1 Co. 12:29; 14:29, 37; Ro. 12:6). That prophecy was a recognizable function is further emphasized in that there were some claiming this ministry who were impostors (cf. Ac. 13:6; 1 Jn. 4:1; Re. 2:20). By the end of the first century, the susceptibility of the prophetic ministry to exploitation resulted in various external controls.<sup>121</sup> In short, the function of prophesy in the early church

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<sup>118</sup>The fact that in the Greek text there are only four definite articles governing the ministries listed is why scholars treat the terms "pastors" and "teachers" as a single category ("teaching shepherds," *AB*), more or less as though in English the words were hyphenated ("pastor-shepherds").

<sup>119</sup>There are several gift lists in the Pauline corpus, none of them identical (cf. Ro. 12:6-8; 1 Co. 7:7; 12:8-10, 28-30; 13:1-3, 8; 14:6, 26). It appears, therefore, that Paul does not intend to be exhaustive in his various lists of spiritual gifts, but suggestive.

<sup>120</sup>At Antioch, there were "prophets and teachers," including Barnabas, Simeon, Lucius, Manaen and Saul, though it is unclear if they were all considered to be both prophets and teachers, or if there were some of one and some of the other (cf. Ac. 13:1).

<sup>121</sup>For instance, anyone claiming to be either an apostle or a prophet was not permitted to remain in a given church more than a day or two at a time. A three day stay meant that the claimant was a fraud. Furthermore, such people were allowed only to be fed. If they asked for money, they were considered to be a fraud. Evidence of a pure Christian lifestyle, also, was critical to receiving an apostle's or a prophet's claim, *Didache*, 11.

seems to have consisted of revelation and proclamation (1 Co. 14:22, 30-31), prediction (Ac. 11:27-28), and edification (Ac. 15:32; 1 Co. 14:3). This function seems analogous to the work of the prophets in the Old Testament, whose ministries also were occupied with ethical preaching and prediction.

Of the other two ministries, Paul lists teachers as "third" in priority in his letter to the Corinthians (cf. 1 Co. 12:28), though here he inserts the ministry of the evangelists in between. An evangelist, by the very meaning of the word *euangelistas*, must refer to one who proclaims the gospel. In the apostolic church, the known evangelists were Philip (Ac. 21:8) and Timothy (2 Ti. 4:5), though again, as implied here, there must have been others. Teaching pastors, on the other hand, are congregational leaders at the local level, and the title "shepherd" seems to be more or less interchangeable with the titles *presbyteros* (= elder) and *episkopos* (= bishop, overseer). At least the words "oversee" and "elder" are conjoined with the idea of shepherding (cf. Ac. 20:17, 28; 1 Pe. 5:1-2). Pastors must have teachings skills (cf. 1 Ti. 3:2; Tit. 1:9).

All these ministry gifts Christ has bestowed upon his church in his victory procession into the heavens. Such gifts were given to bring the church to maturity so that every Christian might become an able minister to others through works of service. In this way, the entire church, the body of Christ, can be strengthened so that it will grow toward maturity (4:12-13). The mistaken notion that these gifts were given so that the leaders would do all the work of ministry while the Christians watched from the wings is patently against Paul's thought. Rather, leadership aims at developing ministry for every member of the body. The ultimate goal is to reach unity in faith and the full knowledge of Christ, God's Son--which is Christian maturity. Christian maturity is measured, not by comparing some Christians with other Christians, but by comparing each Christian with the ultimate model, Jesus Christ. Through Christ's reconciling work on the cross, Paul spoke of unity in the church as an established fact (cf. 2:14-18). Later, he challenged his readers to live up to this established fact by maintaining unity in the way they related to their fellow Christians (cf. 4:3). Now, he urges unity as the final goal for all believers. The church already embodies the fullness of God by his divine call (cf. 1:23). Now, Paul urges the church to live up to that calling through spiritual growth (4:13).

### **The Maturing Community (4:14-16)**

The goal to become a mature community is the call of every Christian congregation. The members of the church are to grow out of spiritual infancy so that they will be stable Christians who are able to avoid the vacillating religious fads that blow through. Paul was well aware that religion, even the Christian religion, is susceptible to propaganda and its purveyors. Such deceptive teachings he compares to the tossing waves of the ocean or to the gusting winds of change (4:14). The

opposite of such unsteadiness is Christian maturity which expresses itself in the coordinating graces of truth and love.

Such maturity is reached when the church becomes like Christ, its head and the source of its life and character (4:15; cf. Jn. 1:14b, 17). Maturity produces stability, because the mature person has sufficient knowledge of the Lord so as not to be swayed by every unfounded opinion. Mature Christians are able to evaluate and sift the evidence. Such maturity enables them to avoid dividing the body over secondary issues or to avoid being misdirected by erroneous teachings. Instead, they are solidly connected with every other member of the body by "every supporting ligament." Every member contributes to the whole. Each member supports all the other members, and the body continues to mature and maintain its health through the bond of love (4:16). Finally, every part does its work. This is Christian maturity! This is what the church is supposed to be! This is living worthy of the calling the church has received (cf. 4:1)!

### **The Imperatives of the Christian Lifestyle (4:17--5:20)**

There are two moods which prevail in the Pauline letters, the indicative and the imperative. The indicative mood is what is. It is the theological fact of what Christ has done through the cross. The imperative mood is what ought to be. It is the practical demand called for by the new life in Christ. Paul's treatment of holiness, that is, his description of the Christian life, always maintains a balance between the fact and the demand, the indicative and the imperative. With regard to unity, Paul has stated the theological fact. The dividing barrier has been destroyed (cf. 2:14). Christ has made in himself one new man out of the two (cf. 2:15). There is only one body, and it is the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church (cf. 2:19-22; 4:4-6). At the same time, Paul can equally issue the practical demand that his readers should "live a life worthy of the calling" (4:1). While unity is an established fact in the death and resurrection of Jesus, Paul can still issue the imperative to "make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit....until we all reach unity in the faith" (4:3, 13).

These same indicative and imperative moods shape Paul's language with regard to Christian righteousness. Righteousness is both a fact and a demand, both indicative and imperative. The fact is that Paul's readers are already God's "holy ones" (cf. 1:1). Before the world began, they were chosen to be holy and blameless (cf. 1:4), and already their sins have been forgiven in the death of Jesus (1:7). God's grace has already become effective for salvation (cf. 2:5b, 8). However, the demand for holiness is not superfluous. Rather, Paul tells his readers and "insists upon it" that they must live as God's holy people (cf. 4:17). They must "put off" the old behaviors and "put on" a new attitude of true righteousness and holiness (cf. 4:22-24). The next

section of the letter, then, is a lengthy discussion of the Christian's "new self," which was "created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" (4:24).

### **The Old Life (4:17-19)**

Paul describes the former lifestyle of his readers as futile, ignorant, callous and filled with unrestrained self-indulgence. He tells them that it is absolutely critical that they no longer live in such a way. The demand for holiness is not merely Paul's personal preference, but it is "in the Lord" (4:17a). No longer must they live the pagan lifestyle. Rather, as Christians they belong to a "third race," no longer Jews and no longer Gentiles.<sup>122</sup> By the "vanity of the mind" (4:17b) and their "darkened understanding" (4:18a), Paul probably intends the same meaning as in the Roman letter, where he speaks of the pagans as deliberately suppressing the truth about God (cf. Ro. 1:18-23). It is ignorance, but it is ignorance by choice. The fundamental problem of the human race is not merely the absence of knowledge, but rebellion. In this state, men and women are alienated from the life of God due to the hardened condition of their hearts (4:18b). They are, as Paul said earlier, "dead in transgressions and sins" (cf. 2:1). They have no moral sensitivity to guide them into righteousness, but their conscience has become calloused (4:19a).<sup>123</sup> Without a sensitive conscience for discerning good from evil, they have abandoned themselves to sensuality, impurity and unbridled lust (4:19b; cf. Ro. 1:24, 26, 28).

Paul's contrast between the old life and the new life in 4:17-24 parallels his former description in 2:1-7 between the kingdom of death and the new life with Christ in the heavenlies.

### **The New Life (4:20-24)**

The old life of obstinate immorality stood diametrically opposed to the way of Christ which Paul's readers had learned when becoming Christians (4:20). The manner of Christ's own life is the supreme model for Christians (4:21). If they had received even the most basic Christian teachings, they had been taught to "put off" their old self and to "put on" a new self (4:22, 24).<sup>124</sup> This language of "putting off" and "putting on" derives from the language of changing clothes, and in fact, may even reflect the change of clothes that was necessary in Christian baptism, which in turn

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<sup>122</sup>Bruce points out that this phrase "third race" actually occurs in a second century Christian document, cf. Bruce, *Ephesians*, 91 [Footnote 1].

<sup>123</sup>Elsewhere, Paul uses another metaphor for the insensitive conscience--a conscience that has been seared by a hot iron (1 Ti. 4:2).

<sup>124</sup>The language of "putting off" and "putting on" is familiar from several New Testament documents (cf. Ro. 13:12; Col. 3:9-10; He. 12:1; Ja. 1:21; 1 Pe. 2:1). The verb *apotithemi* (= to take off) contrasts with the verb *enduo* (= to dress, put on, wear).

symbolized the change in lifestyles from what was "put off" to what was "put on."<sup>125</sup>

However, it should be understood that Paul is not talking about a mere change in appearances. Rather, he also employs the language of creation to demonstrate that this new life is a new existence altogether. It issues forth with a complete renewal of the mind (4:23; cf. Ro. 12:1), because there has been the creation of a new creature (4:24; cf. 2 Co. 5:17). The terms "old self" and "new self" correspond to the human heritage in Adam and the new life in Christ. The "old self" is in the image of Adam, while the "new self" is in the image of Christ (cf. Col. 3:10; 1 Co. 15:45-49).

### **Concrete Behavioral Norms (4:25--5:7)**

The new life in Christ has behavioral norms which affect one's attitudes toward truth-telling, material property, emotional expressions, daily conversation and interpersonal relationships. Far from dealing in abstractions, Paul focuses the discussion of the new life in Christ upon several very practical behaviors. First, he emphasizes the importance of transparent honesty.<sup>126</sup> Deceit is antithetic to God's nature, and it must be discarded by Christians (4:25a). Deceit within the Christian community is particularly odious, since as fellow-members of a new community, believers belong to a single body (4:25b). Second, Paul shows concern for the way Christians handle anger. Once again, he quotes from the Old Testament (cf. Ps. 4:4).<sup>127</sup> Anger may be an involuntary emotion, but how one handles this emotion is critical. If the Psalmist says, "Sleep on it before you act" (Ps. 4:4b), Paul goes one step further and says, "Get rid of it before sundown" in order to avoid giving Satan an opportunity (4:26-27).<sup>128</sup> Anger can easily become a foothold for the devil. Third, Christians must foster a right perspective toward material possessions. They cannot steal the property of others nor expect something for nothing.<sup>129</sup> Rather, they must work diligently, not merely to amass personal wealth, but to have resources with which to help others (4:28). Elsewhere, Paul says that if a person is not willing to work, then he should not expect free food (cf. 2 Th. 3:6-12).

There are certain kinds of speech patterns that Christians should avoid, patterns that Paul labels as "corrupt speech" (4:29a).<sup>130</sup> Such expressions, which often arise out of anger, contaminate the listener as well as the speaker. They are destructive, and

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<sup>125</sup>Some scholars even suggest that this language was part of the early church's baptismal catechism, see extensive discussion in E. Selwyn, *The First Epistle of St. Peter* (rpt. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981) 393-400. Certainly baptism by immersion involved the literal stripping off and putting on of clothes, cf. G. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962) 148.

<sup>126</sup>Ep. 4:25 contains a partial quotation of Ze. 8:16. The New Testament Greek text and the LXX are almost identical.

<sup>127</sup>Here, the text of Ephesians and the LXX are identical.

<sup>128</sup>The word rendered "foothold" in the NIV is *topos* (= place, room, chance, opportunity).

<sup>129</sup>Paul may have had in mind the wide practice of petty pilfering by slaves and workers.

<sup>130</sup>The word *sapros* literally refers to that which is decayed or rotten, and it is used of things like decayed fish or rotten fruit, BAG (1979) 742.

they are intended for harm. Instead, Christians should engage in upbuilding conversations which show concern for the needs of others (4:29b). They must realize that their speech patterns reflect their attitudes about God. When the ancient Israelites engaged in rebellious behaviors against Yahweh, they "grieved his Holy Spirit" (Is. 63:10). Paul alludes to this rebellion by instructing his readers not to grieve the Holy Spirit who had sealed them for redemption at the end of the age (4:30; cf. 1:13-14). Corrupt conversation is not compatible with the holiness of the indwelling Spirit (4:31). Christians must remove from their lives such expressions of *pikria* (= animosity, bitterness, anger), *thymos* (= anger, wrath, rage), *orge* (= anger, wrath, indignation), *krauge* (= shouting, clamor),<sup>131</sup> *blasphemia* (= slander, abusive speech, blasphemy),<sup>132</sup> and all *kakia* (= depravity, malice, ill-will). Instead, they should be persons of *chrestos* (= kindness, benevolence) and *eusplanchnos* (= tender-hearted, compassionate), persons who *charizomai* (= forgive, grant pardon freely as a favor). The great model of this kind of forgiveness is God, who in Christ forgave us all (4:32)!

Since God is the supreme model for moral character, Christians should model their lives after him (5:1a). Since he is the source of all fatherhood (cf. 3:14-15), and especially since he is the heavenly Father of all who believe (cf. 4:6), then Christians should imitate him as his dearly loved children (5:1b). Their lives should be characterized by the same kind of self-sacrificial love which was demonstrated in Christ's sacrificial death on their behalf (5:2).<sup>133</sup>

Continuing with additional exhortations, Paul raises the issue of sexual purity. In the Greco-Roman world, prostitution was common and even expected. The Greco-Roman man expected his wife to care for the home and his legitimate children, but he found his pleasure and companionship elsewhere.<sup>134</sup> Homosexuality, also, was common in Greek society, and the numerous words in the Greek language for sexual relations suggests a preoccupation with this aspect of life. The fertility cults in Asia Minor, Syria and Phoenicia made prostitution a part of religious practice, and in one period of Corinthian history, it was said that there were a thousand prostitutes servicing the temple of Aphrodite.<sup>135</sup> In view of the prevalence of sexual deviation,

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<sup>131</sup>While this word can mean crying out in the sense of grief or anxiety or even excitement and joy, it is also used to describe the quarreling of people shouting back and forth at each other, hence the NIV rendering "brawling." In the present context, it probably refers to loud arguments.

<sup>132</sup>Here, Paul may have in mind the cursings that accompany anger, something along the order of the modern profanities, "God damn you," or "Go to hell."

<sup>133</sup>The early Christians identified Jesus' death on the cross with several kinds of levitical sacrifices. Sometimes it was the sin offering (cf. Ro. 8:3; 2 Co. 5:21). Sometimes, as here, it was a cereal offering or peace offering (see also, He. 9:26; 10:10, 14, 26).

<sup>134</sup>Barclay, 170.

<sup>135</sup>E. Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) 52.



then, Paul urges his readers to totally eliminate<sup>136</sup> all *porneia* (= fornication, unchastity, prostitution, any and every kind of unlawful sexual intercourse)<sup>137</sup> and *akatharsia* (= impurity, dirt, unnatural vices, especially sexual sins). Also, they must eliminate the vice of greed. Such behaviors are out of place in a community that is called to be holy (5:3). The same prohibitions extend to certain expressions of low humor, such as, *aischrotes* (= wickedness, baseness), *morologia* (= silly talk) and *eutrapelia* (= coarse jesting, buffoonery). Such expressions are improper. Instead, Christian conversation should be characterized by thanksgiving (5:4). Fornicators, impure persons and the greedy<sup>138</sup> have no inheritance in God's kingdom (5:5). People who indulge in such vices are, in reality, idolaters, for they worship sex and materialism. Paul's readers should take clear warning: the popular defense of such behaviors was deceptive and empty. These very behaviors would end with the wrath of God<sup>139</sup> in final judgment upon the disobedient (5:6).<sup>140</sup> Paul's readers absolutely must not participate in such behaviors (5:7). If they were to live "worthy of the calling" they had received (4:1), a holy life was imperative!

### **Living as Children of Light (5:8-20)**

Paul's metaphors for the life of sin as contrasted with the life of righteousness are rich and varied. Earlier, he compared the old life and new life to death and resurrection (2:1-6), alienation and citizenship (2:19), and old clothes and new clothes (4:22-24). Now, he employs the metaphor of darkness and light (5:8a). If his readers had been changed from darkness to light, then they must live up to this change (5:8b). Their new lifestyle<sup>141</sup> should be characterized by goodness, righteousness and truth (5:9), and Christians' primary concern should be to please their Lord (5:10). Given this goal, they should avoid altogether the behaviors that characterize the life of sin, for such behaviors bear no fruit (5:11a).<sup>142</sup> Instead, Paul's readers should be diligent in exposing and reprovng sin (5:11b).<sup>143</sup> The behaviors of the pagans were so flagrantly

<sup>136</sup>Lit., "let it not be named among you"

<sup>137</sup>The word is used some twenty-five times in the New Testament, and in the Pauline writings, it refers to any kind of illegitimate sexual intercourse, cf. H. Reisser, *NIDNTT* (1975) I.500.

<sup>138</sup>Here, Paul repeats the personal noun forms of the same words he used in 5:3.

<sup>139</sup>While Paul can speak of God's wrath as a judgment within history, as when the rebellious are "given over" to the degradation of their sins (cf. Ro. 1:18, 24, 26, 28), here he has in mind God's eschatological judgment, hence his words "the coming wrath" (cf. Ro. 5:9; Col. 3:6; 1 Th. 1:10). For more extensive discussion of Paul's theology of God's eschatological wrath, see Ridderbos, 108-114.

<sup>140</sup>Lit., "sons of disobedience" (see footnote #55 and comments on 2:2).

<sup>141</sup>Paul mixes his metaphors here with the expression "fruit of light," but his meaning is clear enough. Elsewhere, Paul develops more fully the metaphor of fruit-bearing in the Christian lifestyle, cf. Ga. 5:22-23.

<sup>142</sup>By saying that such behaviors bear no fruit, Paul does not intend to say that they are without consequence. Rather, he only uses the metaphor of fruit in a positive way.

<sup>143</sup>The verb *elencho* can mean either to expose or convict or to reprove or correct. Certainly Paul would not be in favor of exposing sin merely for the sake of perverse information.

evil that it was inappropriate even to describe them in detail (5:12). However, light, by its very nature, makes things visible, and when the light of God's moral standard is cast upon the behaviors of darkness, they are seen for the deplorable expressions that they truly are (5:13). This exposure of evil behavior by the light of Christ is no more than what was clearly expressed in a popular Christian saying, a triplet calling for sleepers to rise from death so that Christ might shine upon them (5:14).<sup>144</sup>

Reaching the climax of this section of moral exhortation, Paul urges, "Therefore, carefully consider how you live" (5:15a)! He urges wisdom, not foolishness (5:15b; cf. Mt. 10:16; Ro. 16:19), and it may well be that he particularly has in mind the Christian reputation with outsiders (cf. Col. 4:5). Certainly with the various slanders which were making the rounds against the Christian community, it was important not to provide any additional fodder for such accusations! Christians should be prudent in the use of their time since evil abounded; they must not waste their time aimlessly but use it to its best advantage for the kingdom of God while it was available (5:16).<sup>145</sup> They must understand that God's will was for them to live fruitful Christian lives, taking advantage of every opportunity for the cause of Christ (5:17; cf. 5:10).

Finally, Paul urges his readers to be filled with the Spirit, which is the antithesis of the worldly practice of drunkenness and debauchery (5:18).<sup>146</sup> They are

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<sup>144</sup>Paul introduces this quotation in the same manner as he does citations from the Hebrew Bible (cf. 4:8); however, there is no single passage in the Old Testament that matches this triplet. One suggestion is that the various phrases may have been drawn from several passages and then conflated (i.e., Is. 26:19; 51:17; 52:1; 60:1; Mal. 4:2). A more popular solution is that Paul is drawing from an early Christian hymn familiar to his readers. The trochaic rhythm and the rhyming of the first two lines in Greek as well as the triple metaphors of sleep, death and light imply hymnody. It further has been suggested that this hymn, with its rousing summons to a moral lifestyle and the accompanying promise of God, may have been chanted in a baptismal context, or perhaps, in a communion service, R. Martin, *Worship in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974) 47-48.

<sup>145</sup>Lit., "buying back the time..." For time, Paul uses the term *kairos*, a word indicating a critical juncture or a point in time. In secular usage, this word referred to a moment which was especially favorable for an undertaking, cf. Cullmann, 39ff. Possibly Paul saw on the horizon the approaching disfavor which would erupt into persecution for the church, and every moment before that crisis was precious, cf. Bruce, 109.

<sup>146</sup>There is considerable discussion as how to take the word *pneuma* (= spirit, see discussion in footnote #40). Here, the word has neither the adjective *hagios* (= holy) nor the definite article, so that the text literally reads, "...be filled in/with spirit..." The critical exegetical question is whether the word *pneumati* (dative case) refers to the Holy Spirit or the human spirit. If the former, then it should be translated with a capital "S" and the definite article is supplied for English translation (so KJV, NIV, RSV, NEB, ASV, NAB, NASB, TCNT, NKJB, TEV, and various scholars); if the latter, then the word is not capitalized (so RV, IB, Lenski and various other scholars), and one may legitimately add the clarifying word "your" so that it reads "your spirit." The former translation, then, would call for the readers to be infilled with the Holy Spirit; the latter would call for the readers to be spirited in their response to Paul's moral exhortations.

In favor of the translation "Spirit," it may be pointed out that contextually Paul has already demonstrated his preference for trinitarian language in which he repeatedly includes internal references to the Father, the Son and the Spirit in the same context (cf. 1:3-14; 1:17; 2:18, 22; 3:2-5; 3:14-17; 4:4-6; 4:18-30). This passage may follow in kind with references to "the Spirit," "the Lord" and "the Father" (5:18-20). Furthermore, Paul on several occasions has already used the term *pneuma* to refer to the Holy Spirit without the qualifying adjective *hagios* in contexts which are unmistakable (cf. 2:18; 3:5, 16; 4:4).

to communicate with each other through music, using psalms, hymns and spiritual songs (5:19). It is not possible, given our current understanding of the language, to make hard and fast distinctions between these musical categories, although the verb *psallo* is taken from the Hebrew Bible and generally means to pluck a stringed instrument. Certainly some of the psalms in the Old Testament were composed with an orchestra in mind.<sup>147</sup> It has been suggested that hymns might refer to original Christian compositions, while the term "songs" may have been adaptations of the Greco-Roman songs of celebration, though here modifier "spiritual" denotes their Christian orientation.<sup>148</sup> All these expressions aim at one primary goal, to express thanksgiving to the Father in the name of the Son (5:20).

### The Household Code (5:21--6:9)

In the Greco-Roman world, there existed ethical lists among both Jews and Gentiles which regulated their behavior with respect to family relationships, social relationships, duties, and hierarchical relationships. The background for such Jewish lists derived from the Torah, the Mishnah and other Jewish writings. Sirach, for instance, contains a rather elaborate example (cf. 7:18-36), and one finds the same sort of thing in the writings of Philo and among the Dead Sea Scrolls. The background for Gentile lists derived from the Greek and Latin moralists.<sup>149</sup> In what is probably a conscious parallel to such familiar ethical lists, Paul's letters contain codes regulating the stations of life (cf. Ro. 13:1-7; Col. 3:18--4:1; see also, 1 Pe. 2:13--3:7). In them, Paul offers the Christian perspective toward household communities. In Luther's translation of the Bible, the German word *haustafel* (= household table) was used to head these lists, and the name has remained as a technical term for such New Testament compositions.

The Greco-Roman *oikonomia* (= household community) forms the significant social background for such lists. An *oikonomia* was a large inclusive and socially

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On the other hand, the very fact that most passages are clear while the one in 5:18 is ambiguous (as is also the passage in 1:17) clouds the issue. Lenski remarks that Paul would not dare compare the effect of wine with the Holy Spirit, though the value of such an argument is inconclusive. Paul was not noted for his lack of daring! In the end, the preponderance of scholarly opinion favors the capitalization of *pneumati*, though the translators' decision must remain tentative.

<sup>147</sup>Psalms 4, 6, 54, 55, 61, 67 and 76, for instance, all contain the Hebrew word *bineginot* (= with stringed instruments) in the headings.

<sup>148</sup>R. Martin, "Approaches to New Testament Exegesis," *New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Principles and Methods*, ed. I. Marshall (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) 235-241; *TDNT* (1972) VIII.489ff. It is unclear whether the expression "spiritual songs" has any relationship to Paul's description of "singing with the spirit," which apparently was singing in other tongues (cf. 1 Co. 14:14-15). The fact that Paul seems to discourage public tongues-speaking, while here he encourages the use of spiritual songs being sung in the context of the group, makes the identification unlikely.

<sup>149</sup>O. Seitz, *IDB* (1962) III.137-138; D. Schroeder, *IDBSup* (1976) 546; G. Cannon, *The Use of Traditional Materials in Colossians* (Macon, GA: Mercer University, 1983) 111-121.

cohesive unit, often composed of families and individuals bound together under the authority of the senior male member of the principal family. Sometimes included in the *oikonomia* were various mixes of friends, clients, relatives and slaves. Since early Christian congregations were made up of such households (cf. Ac. 11:14; 16:15, 31; 18:8), and since a basic premise of the Christian gospel was that in Christ Jesus there was no longer to be any racial, social or gender prejudices (cf. Col. 3:11; Ga. 3:28), the question naturally arose as to how household life was to be regulated.<sup>150</sup> In some cases, the traditional Greco-Roman household pattern was disturbed when some of its members became Christians, and many in the culture perceived Christianity to be an outright rebellion against society. By the second century, the slander was popular that Christianity destroyed the household community by attracting women, slaves and young people.<sup>151</sup>

Consequently, Paul adopts the pattern of constructing household codes. In some ways, his codes parallel the codes already extant in the Greco-Roman world. However, in some significant ways, Paul christianized these codes. To be sure, the very presence of such codes become a sort of accommodation ethic which creates tension in Paul's letters. On the one hand, he can say that in Christ there is neither slave nor free (Col. 3:11), but on the other, he can instruct slaves to obey their masters (Col. 3:22). Apparently, Paul's deeper concern was that the gospel not be hindered by domestic upheaval. His answer to his critics was that while there is true freedom in Christ, this freedom must be voluntarily limited, when necessary, so that as many could be won to the Christian faith as possible (1 Co. 9:1, 12-18, 23).<sup>152</sup>

### **Husbands and Wives (5:21-33)**

Paul prefaces his social code with the over-arching principle of mutual submission (5:21).<sup>153</sup> Such a principle is fundamental to the Christian ethic, for all believers stand on equal footing before God. Wives are to voluntarily submit themselves to their husbands, just as they would to the Lord Jesus (5:22). It is important to notice that in the two times the verb *hypotasso* (= to submit) appears in

<sup>150</sup>D. Tidball, *The Social Context of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Academie, 1984) 79-86.

<sup>151</sup>E. Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her* (New York: Crossroad, 1983) 263.

<sup>152</sup>P. Richardson, *Paul's Ethic of Freedom* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979) 82-90.

<sup>153</sup>I have followed the exegetical decision that the phrase in 5:21 is an independent sentence which prefaces the household code (so RSV, NEB, JB, TEV, Williams). In the Greek of the New Testament, especially in the context of exhortation, a participle may be used as an independent verb and carry the force of an imperative, and this passage seems to fit the conditions, cf. A. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Nashville: Broadman, 1934) 944-946. However, some translators conclude that this participle is dependent upon the main verb in 5:18, "Be filled with the Spirit," and therefore, is the final clause in the preceding paragraph (so UBS text, KJV, NASB, ASV, NAB, Weymouth, Phillips). However, assigning the participle in 5:21 to the preceding paragraph leaves 5:22 without any verb at all, and consequently, it seems better to include 5:21 with what follows. Whichever way the exegetical decision falls, the statement in 5:21 is certainly a transition between what went before and what follows. The NIV opts to make 5:21 a paragraph in itself, thus giving maximum value to its transitional character.

this passage (5:21, 24), in neither occurrence is it in the active voice. On both occasions it appears in the middle voice. In other words, Paul does not advise husbands to dominate their wives, but rather, he advises wives to submit themselves voluntarily to their husbands.<sup>154</sup> This is submission out of freedom, not submission out of compulsion.<sup>155</sup> Later, to balance out this submission from the other side, he will instruct husbands to "give themselves up" for their wives (cf. 5:25). Such sacrificial love is also voluntary submission on the husband's part. In this way, the mutual submission of 5:21 can be maintained.

The deference of the wife to her husband stems from the fact that he is her "head", just as Christ is the "head" of the church. Much discussion has attended this Pauline metaphor, especially in regard to this passage. In the 1950s, it was pointed out that the term *kephale* (= head) did not mean "chief" or "ruler," a notion that owes more to the modern neurological understanding of the brain, but rather "source" or "beginning" (see comments at 1:22).<sup>156</sup> Prominent scholars followed this lead, suggesting that Paul's metaphor of headship was an allusion to the creation account, in which the woman was taken from the man (cf. Ge. 2:21-22), and as such, he became her "source."<sup>157</sup> In the same way, Christ is the head of the church in that he is its source and sustainer.<sup>158</sup> Against this viewpoint, however, yet another scholar conducted a computerized survey of 2,336 usages of *kephale* in ancient Greek literature, concluding that it means "authority over."<sup>159</sup> This survey, in turn, was challenged, and what still continues is what *Christianity Today* calls the "battle of the lexicons."<sup>160</sup>

However headship is to be understood in a lexical way, it seems contextually clear that Paul understands the husband's headship to be an expression of sacrificial love (5:23, 25). Just as Christ is the "savior" of the body, his church, so the husband is to be the head of his wife, "giving himself up" for her sake. Thus, headship may imply leadership, but it is hard to see how it could mean authoritarianism. John Stott is doubtless correct when he says that the husband's headship of his wife is "more of

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<sup>154</sup>J. Bristow, *What Paul Really Said About Women* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991) 38-41.

<sup>155</sup>In fact, had Paul meant submission out of compulsion, he probably would have used either the word *hypakouo* (= obey) or *peitharcho* (= obey).

<sup>156</sup>It is perhaps significant that Paul uses the term *kephale* (= head) rather than the word *arche* (= head, ruler).

<sup>157</sup>As such, the term "head" in Ephesians is more akin to the English nuance in the word "headwaters" of a river.

<sup>158</sup>One scholar who supported this line of interpretation was F. F. Bruce, who in his commentary on 1 Corinthians 11:3, said, "...we are probably to understand not, 'chief' or 'ruler' but rather 'source' or 'origin'....", cf. F. Bruce, *I and II Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971) 103.

<sup>159</sup>W. Grudem, "Does *kephale* (head) mean 'source' or 'authority over' in Greek Literature? A survey of 2,336 examples," *Trinity Journal* (1977 rpt. No. 6 1985). It is clear that Dr. Grudem resists the concept of mutual submission as described above, cf. W. Grudem, *I Peter [TNTC]* (Grand Rapids: IVP, 1989) 136-137.

<sup>160</sup>*CT* (Jan. 16, 1987), as cited in J. Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1990) 270.

care than of control, more of responsibility than of authority."<sup>161</sup> The church submits to Christ (5:24a), the one who says he is "gentle and humble of heart" and who also says, "My yoke is easy and my burden light" (Mt. 11:29-30). In this same way, wives voluntarily submit to their husbands (5:24b).

The husband's duty is to care for his wife in the same way Christ cares for his church. If Christ gave himself up to make his people holy (5:26-27),<sup>162</sup> husbands should be willing to give themselves up for their wives, protecting, guarding and honoring them. Christ's sacrificial love for the church is the paradigm for a husband's love toward his wife. A husband should love his wife with the same attention and concern he shows toward himself (5:28-29), and it is obvious that Paul understands love to be more than simply emotive. Love is action!

Finally, Paul draws to a close his discussion of Christian marriage by recalling the original marriage in the Garden of Eden. God began with a single human, separated this human into male and female, and then brought the two back together again so that in marriage they might be one (Ge. 2:7, 18, 20b-24). In this same way, the church is united with Christ so that "we are members of his body" (5:30). Paul quotes Genesis 2:24 to make clear that the union of Christ and his church is analogous to the union of a man and a woman in marriage (5:31). Such a union, like the eternal purpose of God in Christ and like the union of Jews and Gentiles into a single entity through the death of Jesus (cf. 1:9; 3:2-6, 9), was a profound mystery.<sup>163</sup> The eternal marriage of Christ and his people was part of the inscrutable plan of God, not known in previous times, but now revealed to his church (5:32). In fact, all three metaphors for the church in Ephesians--the church as the body of Christ (1:23; 4:15-16), the church as the temple of the Holy Spirit (2:19-22), and the church as the bride of Christ--emphasize the reality of catholicity and unity. Since this is God's ultimate purpose for his one holy catholic and apostolic church, husbands and wives must model this unity in their own relationship, the husband demonstrating the actions of

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<sup>161</sup>Stott, *Issues*, 272.

<sup>162</sup>Since Paul mentions the church, which is the central subject of the Ephesian letter, he cannot avoid temporarily digressing from his comments on marriage. The phrase "having cleansed her by the washing of water through the (spoken) word" most naturally refers to Christian baptism. In the first place, Paul uses the word *rhema* (= utterance, saying, that which is said) rather than *logos* (= word). As such, he is hardly referring to the Hebrew Bible, but rather, to that *rhema* which was spoken at the time of baptism, either the preaching of the gospel itself (cf. Ro. 10:17) or the words called out over the candidate (cf. Mt. 28:19; Ac. 2:38, etc.) or, even more likely, the confession of faith made by the candidate at the time of baptism (cf. Ac. 22:16; Ro. 10:8-10; 1 Ti. 6:12; 1 Pe. 3:21), Bruce, *Ephesians*, 116.

Paul's second statement about the church heralds the day of Christ's second advent when the Lord shall present the church to himself in perfection. At that time, there will be a triumph of Paul's indicative mood. The imperative mood, which challenges the church to live up to its privileged status, will no longer be necessary, for the church will have consummated her perfection by resurrection and transformation (1 Co. 15:50-57; Phil. 3:12-14; Col. 1:28). Christ will be both the presenter and the recipient of his church. If Paul has anything in mind analogous to the Apocalypse of John, Christ will not only be the groom, but also the officiant at his marriage to the church (cf. Re. 19:6-9; 21:2, 9).

<sup>163</sup>For the term *mysterion*, see comments and footnotes at 1:9.

sacrificial love toward his wife, and the wife volunteering deferential respect to her husband (5:33).

### **Children and Parents (6:1-4)**

The second station Paul addresses in his social code is that of children and parents. He begins by counseling children to obey their parents (6:1), and he follows this injunction with a quotation of the fifth commandment in the decalogue (6:2-3; cf. Ex. 12; Dt. 5:16). The fifth commandment, with its attendant promise of long life, is closely related to the whole notion of the covenant (cf. Dt. 4:40). Parents were responsible to teach their children about the covenant (Dt. 4:9-10; 6:7). The father-son relationship was analogous to the God-Israel relationship (Dt. 1:31).<sup>164</sup> Hyatt is probably correct in stating that the fifth commandment must have applied both to young children as well as to adults living in the same household with aged parents. Honor to parents should not stop when the child reaches adulthood.<sup>165</sup> Elsewhere, Paul comments that disobedient children reflect the general depravity of the human race (Ro. 1:30; 2 Ti. 3:2). The fact that children should obey their parents "in the Lord" may assume either that such children would be reared in Christian homes,<sup>166</sup> or else, that obedience to the Lord holds precedence over obedience to parents.<sup>167</sup> Still, the norm is always for children to obey their parents, and any perceived conflict between parental requirements and what Christ demands is the exception.

A special notation is given to fathers, probably since they would be more apt to allow their anger to get the better of them. The relationship of a father to a child must be that of a self-controlled, patient, and gentle educator (6:4). This kind of parenting stood in sharp relief against the typical role of the Roman *patria potestas* (= the father's power), which was so absolute that he could sell a child into slavery, abandon it shortly after birth, or inflict the death penalty upon it.<sup>168</sup>

### **Slaves and Masters (6:5-9)**

The third station Paul addresses in the social code is that of slaves and masters. Without question, many of his readers would have been slaves, since slavery was basic to Greco-Roman culture and economics. About one in five residents of Rome were slaves, and they were considered to be "living property" or "living tools." They

<sup>164</sup>P. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy [NICOT]* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976) 158-159.

<sup>165</sup>J. Hyatt, *Exodus [NCBC]* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971) 213.

<sup>166</sup>So Bruce, 121; Foulkes, 163.

<sup>167</sup>So Stott, 242; Mitton, 210-211.

<sup>168</sup>Barclay, 175-176. In 1 B.C., a Roman man on a business trip to Alexandria, Egypt wrote back to his pregnant wife concerning the birth of their child, "...if it is a boy, let it live; if it is a girl, throw it out." Seneca wrote that it was the common practice to throw out children who were weak or deformed. If children were unwanted, they were abandoned to any one who could use them. Usually, they were picked up to stock the brothels in Rome or sold as slaves, Ferguson, 59-60.

had no legal rights and, according to Roman law, were under the absolute power of their masters.<sup>169</sup> In some of Paul's letters, slaves are mentioned by name, the most famous, of course, being Onesimus (Phlmn 10, 16). Other Christians who may have been slaves were Tertius and Quartus (Ro. 16:22-23).<sup>170</sup>

In general, Paul's teaching concerning slavery had both a theoretical side and a practical one. The theoretical side was that in the new community of Christian faith, the dominant-submissive categories of slave and master no longer existed (cf. Ga. 3:28; Col. 3:11). The practical side was that everyone who came to faith in Jesus Christ should be content to remain in their social station (cf. 1 Co. 7:17-20, 24). Those who were married should remain married (cf. 1 Co. 7:12-13). Those uncircumcised should remain so. Those circumcised should not abandon their Jewish heritage. Paul does allow, however, that if a slave were able to obtain freedom, he should do so (cf. 1 Co. 7:21).<sup>171</sup> He even hints at manumission for Onesimus (Phlmn 17-22). However, Paul seemed to feel that one's station in the present life was not nearly as important as preparing for the afterlife. So, he says, "Keeping God's commands is what counts" (1 Co. 7:19b), and "Were you a slave when you were called? Don't let it trouble you" (1 Co. 7:21a). Even those who were slaves were "free" in the Lord, and those who were masters must think of themselves as Christ's "slaves" (1 Co. 7:22). In the end, both slaves and masters must answer to God's judgment. Slaves must remember that they are serving the Lord, while masters must remember that they have a master in heaven (Col. 3:23--4:1).

In Ephesians, Paul's teaching conforms to the same pattern. Slaves should be obedient, because in the larger sense they are "slaves of Christ" (6:5-7). In the great judgment, Christ will reward everyone, slave or free, according to whatever good he/she does (6:8). Masters, for their part, are counseled to treat their slaves with equity, remembering that there is no favoritism with their own Master in heaven (6:9).

Two additional comments are in order for the modern Christian community regarding Paul's teaching. First, it is very difficult for the modern Christian to accept Paul's ambivalence about the institution of slavery. It took the Christian church a long time to realize the practical implications of the gospel which declare that in Christ there is "neither slave nor free." While there are some ameliorating factors

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<sup>169</sup>Ferguson, 45-47.

<sup>170</sup>Tertius (= Number Three) and Quartus (= Number Four) were common slave names, cf. J. Dunn, *Romans 9-16* (Waco, TX: Word, 1988) 909, 911.

<sup>171</sup>There were conditions under which a slave in the Greco-Roman world could obtain freedom. The *peculium* (= slave wage) was money or property which legally remained in the possession of the master but was available to the slave when he/she had saved enough to purchase freedom. Some manumissions were accomplished in pagan temples, where the slave paid money to the deity and his/her manumission was recorded in the temple records. The most frequent form of manumission was simply by the will of the master, either formally before a magistrate or informally before friends, cf. Ferguson, 47.



which make Paul's ambivalence more understandable,<sup>172</sup> still the liberating gospel should have pressed the church to deal with this evil far sooner than it did.

Second, while Christians rightly abhor slavery today, they should not miss the implications of Paul's teaching as it applies to employers and employees. Paul's advice is still timeless--one serves the Lord Christ, and in view of eternity, one must always remember who passes final judgment!

## **Spiritual Warfare (6:10-20)**

With the completion of the household code, Paul now arrives at the culmination of his letter. The expression "finally" (6:10a) denotes that he has reached the last word of advice. The subject is the Christian's warfare against the devil's schemes. The imagery is based on the armor of a Roman soldier, and inasmuch as Paul was imprisoned at the time of writing, he surely had plenty of opportunity for observation! The analogy between the Christian life and warfare is a frequent one in Paul's letters, for Christians are "soldiers" in God's army (2 Ti. 2:3), and Paul's colleagues are "fellow-soldiers" (Phil. 2:25; Phlmn 2) or "fellow-prisoners" of war (Ro. 16:7; Col. 4:10; Phlmn. 23). Together, they stand shoulder to shoulder in the fight of faith (1 Ti. 6:12; 2 Ti. 4:7), using their spiritual weapons (2 Co. 10:4; Ep. 6:10-20).<sup>173</sup>

### **The Nature of Spiritual Warfare (6:10-13)**

The very first order in this war is that the Christian's strength is in the Lord's mighty power (6:10b). Earlier, Paul prayed that his readers might better know the incomparably great power available to them from the risen Lord who had been exalted over all (cf. 1:19-21). Now, he urges that they arm themselves with every piece of God's spiritual armor<sup>174</sup> in order to be protected from the schemes of the devil (6:11).<sup>175</sup> The warfare in which Christians engage is not waged against other people, where natural human resources are sufficient, but against the spiritual powers of evil in the heavenlies which dominate the present age (6:12; cf. 2 Co. 4:4; 20:3-5; Ga. 1:4;

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<sup>172</sup>I.e., slavery in the Greco-Roman world was less severe than African-American slavery, slavery could not have been abolished without an economic collapse of the entire culture, Christian groups were so small in the Greco-Roman world as to be politically powerless, the availability of manumission already was widespread, the legal status of slaves was improving and showing signs of further improvement, etc., Stott, *God's New Society*, 254-257.

<sup>173</sup>Bruce, *Ephesians*, 126-127.

<sup>174</sup>The term *panoplia* refers to the full armor of a heavily armed soldier, cf. F. Gingrich, *Shorter Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1965) 159.

<sup>175</sup>Elsewhere, Paul describes the Christian's spiritual armor as consisting of the breastplate of faith and love and the helmet of the hope of salvation (1 Th. 5:8). Here, he describes even more pieces.

Col. 1:13; 1 Jn. 5:19).<sup>176</sup> Thus, they must arm themselves with every piece of spiritual armor that God has provided, for the entire age is characterized by evil (cf. 5:16), and every Christian can expect to experience times of great opposition (6:13; cf. 1 Th. 3:3-4). Only in this way can they hope to stand their ground "in the evil day."<sup>177</sup>

### The Armor of God (6:14-17)

Paul's analogy between Roman armor and spiritual armor compares six pieces. In Roman armor, the belt (*cingulum*) held the sword as well as identified a soldier as being on duty. The breastplate (*lorica*) protected the neck and torso (a second piece would protect the back). The military half-boot (*caliga*) was necessary for marching, flight and lightness of foot in hand-to-hand conflict. The metal-sheathed, fire-proof body shield (*scutum*) was not only useful for protecting the individual soldier, but together, the Roman infantry could pack their shields side by side into a screen, which in turn was effective against a rain of enemy projectiles, some of which were dipped in pitch and set ablaze before launching. The metal helmet (*galea*) protected the head, while the sword (*gladius*) was a primary offensive weapon.<sup>178</sup> Roman short-swords were devastating in close combat because of their advantage in maneuverability.

These six pieces of armor Paul compares to the spiritual weaponry of the Christian believer. Some of his analogies have precedents in the Old Testament, where the coming Messiah wears a belt of righteousness and faithfulness, a breastplate of righteousness, and a helmet of salvation (Is. 11:5; 59:17). The word *aletheia* (= truth) probably refers to integrity, loyalty and faithfulness rather than factual reality (6:14a).<sup>179</sup> By righteousness (6:14b), Paul may have in mind either the imputed righteousness which is received as a gift (cf. 1 Co. 1:30), or even better, the believer's lifestyle of righteousness (cf. 2 Co. 6:7). The gospel of peace is either that which the believer depends upon to hold him/her steady, or that which the believer is ready to share with others (6:15).<sup>180</sup> The believer's active faith protects against the

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<sup>176</sup>For the meaning of "the heavenlies," see comments at 1:3. For the meaning of "rulers, powers and authorities," see comments at 1:21 and 3:10-11.

<sup>177</sup>The "evil day" probably refers, not to some particular time of distress, but rather, to the distressing evil which characterizes the entire age.

<sup>178</sup>E. Simpson and F. Bruce, *The Epistles of Paul to the Ephesians and the Colossians [NICNT]* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957) 146-150; J. Hoffmeier, *ISBE* (1988) IV.1040-1041.

<sup>179</sup>The word appears without the definite article in the Greek text, indicating that what Paul had in mind was not some particular truth, but truth as a general principle. Truth in this sense of the word is more akin to the Old Testament *emeth* (= reliability, fidelity, steadiness, truth).

<sup>180</sup>There is an ambiguity in the Greek text, both because of the different meanings of the word *etoimasia* (= preparation, readiness, equipment) as well as because of the genitive construction. If a subjective genitive, then the phrase could be translated, "Let the shoes on your feet be the gospel, to give you firm footing" (so NEB, also Phillips). If an objective genitive, then the phrase could be translated, "....readiness to announce the Good News of peace" (so TEV, also JB).

incendiary missiles of the devil (6:16; cf. 1 Pe. 5:8-9). The most important part of one's body, the head, is protected by the assurance of salvation (6:17a; cf. 1 Th. 5:8). The most important weapon is Holy Scripture, which is provided by and made effective by the power of the Holy Spirit (6:17b; cf. 2 Pe. 1:21).

### **The Imperative of Prayer (6:18-20)**

Paul's final comments on spiritual warfare are in terms of prayer. He urges his readers to pray "in the Spirit"<sup>181</sup> on "all occasions."<sup>182</sup> What he probably means is that the Christian is to pray with the awareness of God which the Spirit gives.<sup>183</sup> Prayer "in the Spirit" is prayer which is prompted and guided by the Holy Spirit.<sup>184</sup> Prayer may take many forms, but it should always be carried out in the Spirit (6:18a).<sup>185</sup> Especially important, Christians should pray for each other with alertness, like good soldiers (6:18b). Paul requests that his readers pray for him in his missionary endeavors (6:19), for here, too, there was open warfare against the power of Satan (cf. Ac. 26:18; 1 Co. 16:8-9; 2 Co. 4:3-4; 1 Th. 2:18).<sup>186</sup> Prayer is, in fact, an act of spiritual warfare. As a "prisoner of the Lord," Paul was an ambassador in chains (6:20; cf. 3:1; 4:1). Incarceration had not dampened the fire of his commission from Christ (cf. Ac. 28:17-31).

### **The Closing (6:21-24)**

Tychicus, a native Asian (cf. Ac. 20:4), was one of Paul's most trusted couriers. Not only did he carry this letter, he also carried the Colossian letter and probably the Laodecian letter (Col. 4:7, 16). He was used on more than one occasion as Paul's personal representative (cf. 2 Ti. 4:12; Tit. 3:12). Since the official postal service of the Roman Empire did not carry private correspondence, Paul was obliged to arrange for his own letter carrier.<sup>187</sup> Such a courier not only could deliver the letter, he could

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<sup>181</sup>Once again, there is the same ambiguity in 6:18 that the reader encountered in 1:17 and 5:18, i.e., *pneuma* without the definite article (see earlier comments). Does it refer to the Holy Spirit (so KJV, RSV, NASB, NAB, NIV, NEB, TEV, JB, Williams, Weymouth, Conybeare, Goodspeed and most commentators), or does it refer to spirited or spiritual praying (so Phillips)? The phrase here is not the same as the one in 1 Co. 14:15, where the definite article is used and where Paul seems to refer to praying in other tongues. In any case, Paul would hardly urge his readers to pray in other tongues "on all occasions." For the sake of consistency, it is better to take *pneuma* as referring to the Holy Spirit.

<sup>182</sup>Lit., "at every time"

<sup>183</sup>Mitton, 228.

<sup>184</sup>Stott, *Ephesians*, 283.

<sup>185</sup>Elsewhere, Paul says that when Christians do not know how they ought to pray, the Spirit intercedes for them and through them, enabling them to pray in harmony with God's will (cf. Ro. 8:26-27).

<sup>186</sup>For the term "mystery," see comments at 1:9; 3:3, 9.

<sup>187</sup>O. Seitz, *IDB* (1962) III.114.

verbally give news about the sender, and if necessary, answer any questions that the letter might raise (6:21-22).

Paul closes with a collage of Christian blessings--peace, love, faith and grace. As is customary, his benediction is from the one God, who is the Father, and the one Lord, who is Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Co. 8:6).