

# A Study of Ephesians, Colossians, & Philemon

Photo: Jeff Smelser

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## **Introduction to Ephesians, Colossians, & Philemon**

*Jeff Smelser*

### **Introduction:**

#### **I. The theory set forth herein:**

- A. Ephesians was an encyclical intended first for Gentile Christians throughout Asia and perhaps also Galatia.
- B. Copies of the letter were to be delivered in person by Tychicus to multiple churches.
- C. Tychicus, accompanied by Onesimus, also carried a similar letter intended specifically for the church at Colossae, adapted to address a particular error in that locale, as well as a personal letter to Philemon, in whose house the church at Colossae met.

#### **II. The theory of the interrelation between Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon presented herein is intended to account for the following facts.**

- A. The letter we know as Ephesians was written to Gentiles.
- B. The book of Acts does not present a picture of a primarily Gentile constituency in the church at Ephesus. If anything, the opposite is true.
- C. Ephesians contains no location specific material.
- D. Colossians is similar to Ephesians but contains location specific material.
- E. Both letters were intended for people whom Tychicus could and would visit.
- F. Paul knew there would be a letter available to the Colossians from Laodicea which he wanted the saints at Colossae to read, and he wanted his letter to the church at Colossae to be read by those at Laodicea.
- G. According to almost all extant manuscripts of Ephesians that include the first verse, the letter was addressed to the saints at Ephesus.
- H. The words “in Ephesus” are absent in some early manuscripts still extant.
- I. The words “in Ephesus” were absent in other manuscripts no longer extant.
- J. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, Origen’s was apparently unaware of mss containing the words “in Ephesus.”
- K. The Marcionite claim was that the letter we know as Ephesians was actually written to the Laodiceans.
- L. Paul had previously written briefly about the gospel having been made known to him by revelation, and he expected that among the recipients of “Ephesians” there were some who were aware that he had so written.

## Body

### I. Date of Composition:

A. Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon, and Philippians are known collectively as the “prison epistles.” However, three of these, Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon, were written at about the same time and delivered by the same courier during one journey, while Philippians was written and delivered separately, probably later.

1. The Evidence that Paul was imprisoned at the time he wrote these three letters is as follows:
  - a. Ephesians
    - 1) 3:1, “I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus”
    - 2) 4:1, “I, the prisoner of the Lord”
    - 3) 6:20 “I am an ambassador in chains.”
  - b. Colossians
    - 1) 4:18 “Remember my imprisonment.”
    - 2) In 4:10 the reference to “Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner” is open to debate.
      - a) It might be construed in a manner that would not necessarily indicate a literal imprisonment.<sup>1</sup>
      - b) On the other hand, Greg Beale argues for taking it literally.<sup>2</sup>
  - c. Philemon
    - 1) 1 “Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus”
    - 2) 9 “Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus”
    - 3) In verse 23, “Epaphras, my fellow prisoner” is open to debate.
      - a) It might be construed in a manner that would not necessarily indicate a literal imprisonment.<sup>3</sup>
      - b) On the other hand, Greg Beale argues for taking it literally.<sup>4</sup>
2. The evidence that all three letters were sent by the same courier at the same time is as follows:
  - a. Ephesians and Colossians were sent together.
    - 1) Tychicus is the courier for both (Ephesians 6:21, Colossians 4:7)

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<sup>1</sup> Smelser, *Walk Worthily*, p. 48.

<sup>2</sup> Beale, p. 354f.

<sup>3</sup> Smelser, *Walk Worthily*, p. 48f.

<sup>4</sup> Beale, p. 435f.



- 2) The description of Tychius is similar in both letters.
    - a) “the beloved brother and faithful servant in the Lord” (Eph) and “our beloved brother and faithful servant and fellow bond-servant in the Lord” (Col)
  - 3) The description of Tychicus’ mission is described in both letters in almost identical language.
    - a) “But that you also may know about my circumstances” (Eph), and “that you may know about our circumstances (Col)
    - b) “I have sent him for this very purpose” (Eph), and “I have sent him to you for this very purpose” (Col).
    - c) “so that you may know about us, and that he may comfort your hearts” (Eph), and “that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts” (Col).
  - 4) The locations of Ephesus and Colossae made it efficient to deliver the two letters on the same trip.
    - a) Tychicus must have landed at Ephesus, and then traveling south, would have come to the Meander River valley where he would have turned east and followed the river to its tributary, the Lycus. Turning southeast, he would have delivered a copy of the letter we know as Ephesians to the church at Laodicea, and then 12 miles further upstream, would have delivered the similar letter intended for the Colossians, wherein they were instructed to read the letter that had been left at Laodicea.
    - b) We will consider further possible destinations later in this discussion.
- b. Colossians and Philemon were sent together.
- 1) Onesimus traveled with Tychicus.
    - a) Colossians 4:9
    - b) He also appears to be the one who carries the letter to Philemon: “I have sent him back to you in person” (Philemon 12).
  - 2) Paul’s named companions at the time of the composition of the two letters are almost identical: Epaphras, Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke
    - 1] Philemon 23-24
    - 2] Col 4:10-14, with the additional mention of Jesus that is called Justus.
  - 3) Archippus is mentioned in both letters as being associated with the recipient(s)
    - 1] Philemon 2
    - 2] Col 4:17
  - 4) It must be the case that the Philemon was one of the Colossians and the church at Colossae met in his house (Philemon 2, “the church in your house”).
3. The evidence that this was the imprisonment at Rome is as follows:

- a. Paul's description of himself as a "prisoner...in behalf of you Gentiles" points to an imprisonment after his arrest in Acts 21.
  - 1) His Jerusalem/Caesarean/Roman imprisonment began with the accusation that he had taken a Gentile into the temple (Acts 21:27-29)
  - 2) His initial defense on the steps of Antonia was cut short when he spoke of being sent to the Gentiles (Acts 22:21-22).
  - 3) Paul's imprisonment and transfer to Rome became a part of the mission the Lord had described, saying, "I will send thee forth far hence unto the Gentiles" (Acts 22:21).
    - a) The Lord had told Ananias that Saul would "bear my name before the Gentiles and kings," as well as the children of Israel (Acts 9:15).
    - b) While at sea, an angel told Paul, "thou must stand before Caesar" (Acts 27:24).
- b. Tradition almost without exception points to Rome as the place of composition.<sup>5</sup>
4. The theory that the letters were written while Paul was still in Caesarea is not impossible, but not probable.
  - a. Tradition weighs against it.
  - b. Paul's request that Philemon prepare a lodging (Philemon 22) indicates an expectation on Paul's part of being set free in the near term.
5. The theory that these letters were written during an Ephesian imprisonment rests on little more than circumstantial and speculative evidence.
  - a. It is thought that the proximity of Ephesus to Colossae might make Ephesus an attractive destination for Onesimus, a runaway slave.
    - 1) This is a subjective argument.
    - 2) It could as well be argued that slave having run away from Colossae might be eager to put more distance between himself and his master.
  - b. Paul's request that Philemon prepare for a visit from Paul is thought to imply that Paul was imprisoned not far from Philemon's home in Colossae.
  - c. The Marcionite prologue to Colossians says, "the apostle writes to them from Ephesus, already in custody," but given that all three letters must have been written from the same location, this testimony is undermined by the prologues to Ephesians and Philemon which give Rome as the place of composition.<sup>6</sup>
  - d. There is an overlooked piece of evidence that argues against Ephesus as the setting.

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<sup>5</sup> Smelser, *Walk Worthily*, pp. 45-48.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

- 1) The writings of the New Testament were inspired and were intended to function collectively.
- 2) Accordingly, it is no accident that the book of Acts provides an illuminating backstory to Paul's letters to various churches.
  - a) We can identify at what point in Luke's narration Paul wrote Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, and 1 Thessalonians, and we have a good idea as to about where 2 Thessalonians fits in Luke's narrative.
  - b) Should we be surprised if the imprisonment Paul mentions in his letters is one Luke describes?
  - c) This would argue against Ephesus as the locale from which Paul wrote the prison epistles.
- e. Remarks within Ephesians argue against an Ephesian imprisonment as the setting for any of the three letters carried by Tychicus.
  - 1) If we were to suppose Ephesians was addressed uniquely to the church at Ephesus, we cannot imagine that Paul, right there in Ephesus as he wrote and with access to audiences (Eph 6.20), would have said such things as the following:
    - a) "having heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus" (1.15)
    - b) "if indeed you heard about the stewardship of the grace of God that has been given me toward you" (3.2)
    - c) "In order that you also might know the things according to me, what I do, Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful servant in the Lord, will make known all things to you, whom I sent to you unto this end, in order that you might know the things concerning us" (6.21f)!
  - 2) if, as argued herein, Ephesians was intended for churches throughout Asia, and if Ephesus were the place of composition, it is difficult to imagine that the words "in Ephesus" would have entered the text as an indication of the destination, let alone become the dominant reading in the manuscript tradition.
  - 3) If we can rule out Ephesus as the setting from which Paul wrote Ephesians, then appealing again to the clear evidence that Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon were all written at about the same time and delivered by the same courier on the same journey, we can say that none of these letters were written from Ephesus.

## B. Implications regarding the date of Composition

1. *Terminus a quo*:
  - a. Paul arrived in Rome in the spring of A.D. 59.
  - b. However, at the time he wrote, Paul anticipated being released—he wrote to Philemon, "prepare me a lodging."
  - c. This makes his first year of imprisonment an unlikely candidate for the date of composition.

- d. I suggest A.D. 60 as the *terminus a quo*.
- 2. *Terminus ad quem*
  - a. His imprisonment lasted “two whole years” at a minimum (Acts 28:30).
  - b. But evidence suggests he was released and had time to travel to Ephesus and Macedonia (1 Timothy 1:3) and to Crete (Titus 1:5) before being arrested again and finally put to death after the conflagration of A.D. 64.
  - c. Therefore, I suggest A.D. 62 as the *terminus ad quem*.

## II. Who were the original recipients of the letter we know as Ephesians?

- A. The letter was not written to Ephesus uniquely, but to Gentile Christians throughout a region that included Ephesus (For a discussion of the words “in Ephesus,” see Appendix 1.)
  - 1. Manifestly written to Gentiles
    - a. Ephesians 2.11ff.
    - b. Ephesians 1.13
      - 1) The “you also” is in contrast to the “we who had previously hoped in Christ” (vs. 12) — that is, the Jews who for generations had hoped in a coming Messiah.
      - 2) If the “we” refers to Jews, then the “you also” refers to the Gentiles.
    - c. Ephesians 2.1ff, again Paul distinguishes between “you,” i.e., the Gentiles, and “we also,” i.e., the Jews.
    - d. Ephesians 2.17, Paul’s readers are “you who were far off” (i.e., Gentiles), while the Jews are mentioned obliquely, “those who were near.”
    - e. Ephesians 3.1 Paul addresses his audience as Gentiles and speaks of “the dispensation of the grace of God that has been given me toward you,” a clear reference to his particular mission to preach to Gentiles.
    - f. The overall purpose of the first three chapters of Ephesians is to impress upon the Gentiles what God has done for them in Christ by assuring them of their place in God’s “eternal purpose” (3:11) as “fellow-citizens with the saints and in the house of God” “as fellow-heirs, fellow-members of the body and fellow-partakers of the promises, that they might then be motivated to “walk worthily” of their calling.
  - 2. The idea that Ephesians was addressed uniquely to the church at Ephesus would be inconsistent with the letter’s Gentile audience.
    - a. At its founding, the church at Ephesus consisted largely of Jews.
      - 1) There is no mention of Greeks, or even proselytes, among those who heard Paul when he first visited Ephesus. We read only that Paul entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews (Acts 18.19).
      - 2) When Paul departed, he left Aquila, a Jew, and his wife, Priscilla, there (Acts 18.19-21).
      - 3) Apollos, a Jew, visited Ephesus, teaching only the baptism of John until further instructed by Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18.24-26).

- 4) When Paul returned, the “disciples” whom he found there were no doubt Jews inasmuch as they were men who surely had been influenced by Apollos’ teaching either directly or indirectly (Acts 19.1-7).
    - a) That Apollos was the source of the influence seems to be the reason Luke inserts the account of Apollos at Ephesus in his narrative prior to discussing Paul’s arrival.
    - b) Acts 19.2 may be interpreted as indicating that the twelve men were anticipating the pouring out of God’s Spirit in accordance with OT prophecies (Joel 2.28, Ezekiel 39.29, 36.27, 37.1-14) but were unaware that the Spirit had already come.
  - 5) After enlightening these men, Paul was teaching in the synagogue three months, and he and the rest of the disciples only separated themselves from the unbelieving Jews when the latter began to speak evil of the believing Jews (Acts 19.9).
  - 6) At this point, the church there seems to have consisted entirely or almost entirely of Jews.
- b. The references to Greeks in Acts 19 do not paint a picture of sufficient numbers of Gentiles being converted in Ephesus itself so as to make the church there predominately Gentile.
- 1) Acts 19.10 mentions “both Jews and Greeks,” but this is in reference to the gospel being heard by “all that dwelt in Asia,” not just those in Ephesus.
  - 2) Acts 19.17 mentions “both Jews and Greeks that dwelt at Ephesus.”
    - a) It does not specifically tell us that both Jews and Greeks became disciples, but rather that the incident involving Sceva’s sons made an impression upon “both Jews and Greeks.”
      - 1] The result was that the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. It would be naïve to suppose no Gentiles were converted.
      - 2] Still we don’t see anything that would suggest the church at Ephesus had gone from being primarily Jewish to being primarily Gentile.
    - b) The interest in *perierga* (“magical arts”), evidenced by the books that ended up being burned, is not necessarily evidence of Gentiles being converted. These practices were also popular among some Jews.
      - 1] Robertson described those who burned their books as “performers or *exorcists* (emphasis added, JS).”<sup>7</sup>
      - 2] Deissmann referred to those who burned their books as “the Jewish exorcists.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Robertson, p. 319.

- 3) Gentiles came to be included among the saints at Ephesus, but it is unlikely that this church had come to consist almost entirely of Gentiles in a half-dozen years.
  - a) Acts 19.26 does speak of people being “turned away” from idols, “not alone here at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia.”
  - b) Finally, Paul later describes his work at Ephesus and says he was “testifying both to Jews and to Greeks repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Acts 20.21)
3. The idea that Ephesians was addressed uniquely to the church at Ephesus is inconsistent with Paul’s habit.
  - a. Excluding the letter known as Ephesians, in every case where we have a known letter of Paul to a church that he had visited, we see allusions to his time there.<sup>9</sup>
    - 1) See 1 Cor 1.14-16, 3.2, 3.2-15, 11.23, 15.1, 2 Cor 1.12, 2.1, 11.2-10 (verse 9, “even when I was present with you”) 12.11-14, 13.1-2, Gal 4.12-15, Phil 1.30, 2.12, 1 Th 1.5-6, 1.9, 2.1, 2.6-12, 2.17, 3.4, 2 Th 3.7-10.
  - b. But in Ephesians, there is no mention of, indeed, no hint of, Paul’s visit to Ephesus.
  - c. Aside from the words, “in Ephesus,” there is nothing in the letter connecting it uniquely with the church at Ephesus nor with any single church.
4. The idea that Ephesians was addressed to a wide audience is supported by comparing it with and contrasting it to Colossians.
  - a. First, note the similarity between the two letters.
    - 1) “Three-fifths of Colossians is reflected in Ephesians.”<sup>10</sup>
    - 2) In 51 instances, the wording in Ephesians and Colossians are similar.<sup>11</sup>
    - 3) Colossians largely follows the general outline of Ephesians.

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<sup>8</sup> Deissmann, p. 323.

<sup>9</sup> I am indebted to Scott Smelser for this observation.

<sup>10</sup> Goodspeed, p. 8.

<sup>11</sup> Smelser, *Walk Worthily*, pp. 18-23.

	<b>Ephesians</b>	<b>Colossians</b>
Greeting	1.1–2	1.1–2
<b>What God Has Done for Us in Christ</b>	<b>1.3–3.21</b>	<b>1.1–2.5</b>
All things are in Christ, who is the head of the body	1.3–2.10	1.9–2.5
Our prior condition	2.11–12	1.21
Our reconciliation through Christ	2.12–22	1.22–23
Paul's role in proclaiming the reconciliation	3.1–21	1.24–2.5
<b>How We Should Therefore Walk</b>	<b>4.1–6.20</b>	<b>2.6–4.6</b>
The body is to be built up, free from error and doctrines of men	4.1–16	2.6–2.23
Put away sin; put on righteousness	4.17–5.21	3.1–17
Instructions to house hold members...	5.22–6.9	3.18–4.1
...to wives	5.22–24	3.18
...to husbands	5.25–33	3.19
...to children	6.1–3	3.20
...to fathers	6.4	3.21
...to servants	6.5–8	3.22–25
...to masters	6.9	4.1
Final exhortation, especially to pray, particularly on Paul's behalf that he might speak as he ought	6.10–20	4.2–6

b. Then notice the differences

1) Difference in the respective sections concerning doctrinal error

- a) In Ephesians, Paul discussed the gifts God had bestowed on the church, that is, the apostles, prophets, et al., from whom Gentiles would learn how to walk worthily of their calling, thus leading to a practical unity in the body of Christ (“no longer tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, in craftiness, after the wiles of error”), but no specific error is addressed.
- b) But in the corresponding section of Colossians, Paul's discussion of doctrinal error turns pointedly to Judaistic Gnosticism to such a degree that this becomes that for which that epistle is most readily remembered.
  - 1] Some are making spoil of the saints through a vain and deceitful philosophy.
  - 2] This philosophy was characterized by Jewish (2.16) and Gnostic (2.17–23) elements.

2) Difference in the Greeting

- a) When Paul wrote to the church at Colossae, Timothy was included as sender along with Paul.
- b) There is no mention of Timothy in Ephesians.

- c) Inasmuch as these two letters were written at the same time, the absence of Timothy's name in one is significant.
  - 1] Apparently, Timothy's name would be recognized by the church at Colossae.
  - 2] The implication is that it was not known to all the recipients of the present letter we know as Ephesians.
  - 3] And yet Timothy's name was known to the Ephesians.
    - a] Timothy had rejoined Paul at Corinth from whence Paul traveled to Ephesus the first time.
    - b] During Paul's subsequent stay at Ephesus, it seems that Paul sent Timothy, along with Erastus, to Macedonia from Ephesus.
  - 4] This further supports our understanding that what we know as Ephesians was not written only to the church at Ephesus, but to a larger audience.
- 3) Difference in locally specific references
  - a) In Colossians there are geographically specific references to nearby Laodicea and Hierapolis
  - b) Paul mentions various individuals in Colossae or known to the Colossians.
- 5. Colossians is a version, or variation, of Ephesians.
  - a. Ephesians is a general appeal to Gentile Christians to abandon the ways of the Gentile world.
  - b. Colossians is a similar appeal but adapted to give special attention to a particular doctrinal error in a particular location.

### **III, A Scenario that Accounts for All of the Evidence**

- A. Tychicus and Onesimus left Rome with multiple (probably few, perhaps no more than three or four) copies of one encyclical ("Ephesians") intended for Gentiles throughout Asia and Galatia, each addressed to a different church, and one copy of a letter specifically written for the church at Colossae, and one copy of a letter to Philemon.
  - 1. While the Spirit intended the encyclical to be of use to the body of Christ throughout the ages, the immediate audience was a readership whom Tychicus would visit, for Paul said Tychicus would "make known to you all things, whom I have sent unto you for this very purpose." (Ephesians 6:21)
  - 2. Thus, we know that the immediate audience was confined to a group of people whom Tychicus would visit as he delivered copies of the encyclical.
- B. They landed at Ephesus where Tychicus delivered one copy, wherein were the words, "to the saints that are in Ephesus."
  - 1. Ephesus would have been a likely jumping off point to begin travel across the Anatolian peninsula.
  - 2. This is all the more true if Tychicus was a native Ephesian.



- a. Tychicus was a native of Asia (Acts 20:4).
  - b. He was mentioned in connection with Trophimus, who was an Ephesian, suggesting the possibility that Tychicus also was from Ephesus.
  - c. Tychicus' ties to Ephesus are evidenced again when Paul, near the end of his life, sent Tychicus there again, not merely en route to other places, but as a destination (2 Tim 4.12).
- C. As they departed Ephesus, scribes were busy making copies of this letter, retaining the words "to the saints that are in Ephesus."
- D. Tychicus and Onesimus went south, passing through Magnesia and then traveled east through the Meander River Valley, visiting the church at Tralles along the way.
1. Luke says, "all they that dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord" (Ac 19.10) and according to Demetrius, "throughout almost all Asia" Paul had "persuaded much people" (Ac 19.26). Early in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, churches existed at Magnesia and Tralles, as we have Ignatius' letters to them.
    - a. Did Tychicus deliver copies of Paul's encyclical to these churches?
    - b. Or perhaps because of these cities' proximity to Ephesus, Paul expected the saints in these cities to read the copy left at Ephesus, as he would instruct the Colossians to read the copy left at Laodicea.
  2. Copies of the letter left at Ephesus were already making their way to Smyrna, Pergamon, Thyatira, Sardis, and Philadelphia. All these copies retained the words "to the saints that are in Ephesus."
- E. Tychicus continued east about 65 miles beyond Tralles, and then turned southeast along the Lycus River Valley to Laodicea where he delivered a copy of the encyclical, this copy having in the introduction the words, "to the saints that are in Laodicea."
1. This letter is mentioned in Col 4:16.
    - a. If the letter mentioned in Col. 4:16 had not been one sent by Paul himself and delivered on this very occasion, how would Paul, more than a thousand miles away, have known weeks in advance that such a letter would be available from the Laodiceans?
    - b. That the letter mentioned in Col 4:16 was more likely the encyclical ("Ephesians") than a letter uniquely addressed to Laodicea is further evidenced by the need to tell the Colossians to "salute the brethren that are in Laodicea." Had Paul sent a letter specially crafted for the Laodiceans as he did for the Colossians, no special salutation by way of the Colossians would have been necessary.
  2. This copy served as the basis for Marcion's contention that the letter we know as "Ephesians" was written to the church at Laodicea.

- a. Tertullian wrote, “I here pass over discussion about another epistle, which we hold to have been written to the Ephesians, but the heretics to the Laodiceans.”<sup>12</sup>
  - b. Marcion was from Sinope, on the shore of the Black Sea in Pontus.
  - c. Though it is second-hand testimony by way of Tertullian, if we can assume it represents Marcion’s own view, the earliest evidence we have outside the NT as to the identity of the recipients of the letter we know as “Ephesians” is that it was addressed to the Laodiceans, Marcion’s heretical views notwithstanding.
3. To the north, across the Lycus River, the saints at Hierapolis (who may have constituted a part of the church at Laodicea) were to read the copy of the letter left at Laodicea.
- F. A dozen miles further upstream, Tychicus and Onesimus came to Colossae where he delivered the letter specially written to them.
1. Onesimus was reunited with Philemon and Paul’s personal letter to Philemon was delivered.
  2. In the letter specifically addressed to the church at Colossae, Paul instructed that it be read by those at Laodicea.
  3. Paul also instructed the saints at Colossae to “read the epistle from Laodicea,” knowing that a copy of his encyclical would have been left there by Tychicus. This would have been the letter that included the words “to the saints that are in Laodicea.”
  4. There were now (at least) two versions of the encyclical circulating, identical except that the one in the western part of the Anatolian peninsula contained the introductory words “to the saints that are in Ephesus” while the other in the central part of the peninsula had the words “to the saints that are in Laodicea.”
- G. From Colossae, Tychicus, now traveling alone, continued east following the road that ran through Apamea and then on to the cities in Galatia which Paul had visited with Barnabas (Acts 13-14).
1. These were cities where Gentiles had become Christians but where they had at one time come under the influence Judaizing teachers.
  2. Paul had previously written to them briefly explaining “that by revelation was made know unto [him] the mystery,” a reference to Galatians 1:11-17.
  3. Tychicus delivered a copy or copies of the Encyclical (“Ephesians”) to the saints in these cities.
    - a. Was there only one, addressed to the saints that are at Antioch, and those of Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe would have to gain access to it, or were there a few copies delivered to the churches in Galatia?
    - b. There would now have been a minimum of three versions of the encyclical circulating throughout the Anatolian peninsula.

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<sup>12</sup> Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, 5.11.

- c. However, as time passed and copies were made for general distribution throughout the world, the early distribution of the version addressed to the saints at Ephesus preempted the use of any introduction other than “to the saints in Ephesus.”
- d. But scribes in the eastern part of the peninsula, being very much aware of a version or versions circulating in their region that had some city other than Ephesus mentioned in the introduction, simply omitted the geographic reference altogether.
  - 1) This would account for Basil’s familiarity with copies of the encyclical that contained no mention of a particular city in the introduction.
  - 2) Basil lived in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, in Cappadocia, in the eastern part of the Anatolian Peninsula.
  - 3) While Basil knew of the letter as being written to the Ephesians, his understanding was that the older manuscripts made no mention of the city of the intended recipients.
    - a) “But also writing to the Ephesians as truly having been united through knowledge with the one who is, he named them particularly as being, saying, ‘To the saints who are, and are faithful in Christ Jesus.’ For thus also those before us have handed it down, and thus we have found it in the old samples of the copies.” ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῖς Ἐφεσίοις ἐπιστέλλων ὡς γνησίως ἠνωμένοις τῷ ὄντι δι’ ἐπιγνώσεως ὄντας αὐτοὺς ἰδιαζόντως ὠνόμασεν, εἰπὼν· Τοῖς ἁγίοις τοῖς οὕσι καὶ πιστοῖς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ. Οὕτω γὰρ καὶ οἱ πρὸ ἡμῶν παραδεδώκασι, καὶ ἡμεῖς ἐν τοῖς παλαιοῖς τῶν ἀντιγράφων εὐρήκαμεν.<sup>13</sup>
  - 4) Copies that included no mention of a city within the text of the letter itself became widespread for a time.
    - a) In Alexandria in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, Origen seems to have been unaware of copies that included a reference to a city and speculated on the meaning of the text absent such a reference.
    - b) In total, five manuscripts have come down to us that omit mention of a city with the body of the letter, and one that includes the words “in Ephesus” but marks them as inauthentic.
    - c) While these half-dozen manuscripts are only 1% of the total number of ancient manuscripts that contain the beginning of the letter we know as “Ephesians,” they include the three oldest witnesses.

## IV. The Structure and Message of Ephesians

A. Ephesians is a general appeal to Gentile Christians to abandon the ways of the Gentile world, to walk worthily of their calling.

1. Their Calling: To be a dwelling place for God (chapters 1-3)

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<sup>13</sup> Adv. Eunomius.

- a. Paul emphasizes the riches of God's grace in Christ poured out upon his readers (1:3-10)
  - b. He assures Gentiles that they, along with those who had previously hoped in a Messiah (the circumcision), have been made a part of God's own possession, God's inheritance, and identifies the Holy Spirit as that whereby God has sealed, i.e., identified and secured, his inheritance to himself (1:11-14).
  - c. He speaks of what God has done in Christ, raising him from the dead to sit in the heavens, and says God has done the same thing for the readers of this letter (1:15-10).
  - d. Paul contrasts the previous alienation of the Gentiles, how they were far off, with their present status in the house of God, reconciled to God together with Jewish saints in the one body through the cross, such that they are a dwelling place for God in the Spirit (2:11-22).
  - e. Paul begins to introduce his prayer on behalf of the Gentiles, but first turns his attention to the privilege that is his to be the one through whom the unsearchable riches of Christ are preached to the Gentiles, whose inclusion is according to God's eternal purpose.
  - f. Finally, Paul expresses his prayer on behalf of the Gentiles and prays that glory be to God in the church which he has described as the body of Christ (3:14-20).
2. Exhortation to walk worthily of their calling (chapters 4-6).
    - a. The call to unity (4:2-6), having in mind what was said in 2:11-22.
    - b. Discussion of the gifts whereby this unity would be attained (4:7-16).
    - c. Resumption of the call to walk worthily, not as they previously walked. (4:17ff)
      - 1) The readers have been taught in Christ to put away the old man and put on the new man (4:20-24)
      - 2) Practical applications of putting off the old man and putting on the new man (4:25-6:9)
    - d. Exhortation to put on the whole armor of God (6:10-20).
- B. Ephesians is a letter with a practical message, as evidenced by the eight occurrences of the word "walk."
1. "trespasses and sins, wherein ye once **walked**" (2:1-2)
  2. "good works, which God prepared that we should **walk** in them" (2:10)
  3. "**walk** worthily of the calling wherewith ye were called" (4:1)
  4. "no longer **walk** as the Gentiles also **walk**" (4:17)
  5. "**walk** in love" (5:1)
  6. "**walk** as children of light" (5:8)
  7. "Look therefore carefully how you **walk**" (5:15)

## Appendix A “In Ephesus”

### I. Paul had specific readers in mind within specific geographical area.

- A. Tychicus, Paul’s courier, would make “all things” known to the readers.
- B. This only makes sense if the letter was intended to go to sufficiently defined readers such that Tychicus could visit them.

### II. Ephesians 1:1 was meant to indicate some geographic destination.

- C. In the phrase τοῖς ἁγίοις τοῖς οὖσιν... (*to the saints the ones being...*) We should understand οὖσιν (*being*) to anticipate some location because of the pattern we see in Paul’s greetings in other epistles.
  1. Philippians is addressed to “all the saints in Christ Jesus τοῖς οὖσιν ἐν Φιλίπποις.”
  2. 1 Corinthians was addressed to “the church of God τῇ οὖσῃ ἐν Κορίνθῳ.”
  3. In 2 Corinthians 1.1 the participle being occurs twice, once in the singular and once in the plural: “to the church of God τῇ οὖσῃ ἐν Κορίνθῳ with all the saints τοῖς οὖσιν ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ Ἀχαΐᾳ.”
  4. Similarly, Romans was addressed to πᾶσιν τοῖς οὖσιν ἐν Ῥώμῃ.
  5. And besides the greetings, we should note 1 Thessalonians 2.14, τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν τοῦ θεοῦ τῶν οὖσῶν ἐν τῇ Ἰουδαίᾳ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ.
  6. Galatians, Colossians, and 2 Thessalonians all include a mention of the location of the recipients in the greeting, though without the participle “being.”
  7. We may say that, excluding the letters to individuals, all of Paul’s letters include a mention of the location of the recipients, unless this letter labeled Ephesians is the sole exception.
  8. We must, therefore, expect that the greeting provides an answer to the question, “being where?”
- D. There have been attempts to explain Ephesians 1:1 assuming no geographical destination was intended.
  1. However, without the words “in Ephesus” (or something similar), Paul’s greeting would be a little awkward and more importantly, out of character.

a.

τοῖς ἁγίοις τοῖς οὖσιν ἐν Ἐφέσῳ καὶ πιστοῖς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ	
to the saints the being in Ephesus and faithful in Christ Jesus	
absent the words ἐν Ἐφέσῳ, we are left with...	
τοῖς ἁγίοις τοῖς οὖσιν	καὶ πιστοῖς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ
to the saints the being	and faithful in Christ Jesus

- b. Possible translations would include *to those being saints and faithful in Christ Jesus,*” or *“to the saints, the ones who are being also faithful in Christ Jesus.”*
- 1) οὖσιν is indeed used of a person or persons being (or not being) characterized by some trait.
    - a) e.g., being Romans (Ac 16.21).
    - b) being called (Rom 8.28).
    - c) not being gods (Gal 4.8).
  - 2) But such would not be in keeping with Paul’s usual greeting.
    - a) Schnackenburg concedes this is not in keeping with Paul’s usual greeting, but he believes the letter was written by a pseudonymous author.<sup>14</sup>
- c. Origen (third century) took a different tack.
- 1) Origen appears to have been unaware of a text that included the words ἐν Ἐφέσῳ.
  - 2) In order to explain the text as he had it, Origen reasoned that just as God’s name was *the one who is* (Ex 3.14), perhaps so also those who partake of his being become *the ones who are*.
  - 3) Basil, (4<sup>th</sup> century), also understood the participle in an absolute sense. (See above, 3)a).
  - 4) An absolute use of the participle is certainly possible in some contexts. We see it in 1 Cor. 1.28, τὰ μὴ ὄντα... τὰ ὄντα, *“the things that are not...the things that are.”*
  - 5) But again, Paul’s formulaic greetings argue against understanding the participle in such an absolute sense in Eph. 1.1.

### III. Manuscript and Patristic Evidence Strongly supports the authenticity of “In Ephesus”.

#### E. Patristics

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<sup>14</sup> Schnackenburg, 41

1. In the early centuries, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria,<sup>15</sup> and Basil all recognized the letter as having been addressed to the Ephesians.
2. Irenaeus referred to it as the “epistle to the Ephesians” three times<sup>16</sup> and once cited a passage from the letter as what “the apostle says to the Ephesians.”<sup>17</sup>
3. Only the speculation of Marcion, that it was written to the Laodiceans, comes down to us as an opposing view.

#### F. Manuscripts

1. Some manuscripts, very few to be sure, omit the words “in Ephesus” in Ephesians 1.1.
2. But ninety-nine percent of the manuscripts that include verse one have “in Ephesus.”<sup>18</sup>
  - a. Approximately 580 manuscripts have τοῖς οὖσιν ἐν Ἐφέσῳ
  - b. Another eighteen have variations of this phrase, all of which include the words ἐν Ἐφέσῳ.<sup>19</sup>
  - c. Five manuscripts in their original form lacked the words ἐν Ἐφέσῳ, and in a sixth, the words were marked as inauthentic.<sup>20</sup>

### IV. Historical Evidence supports the view that some 1<sup>st</sup> Generation MSS did not say “in Ephesus.”

- A. Among all manuscripts extant today that include Ephesians 1.1, those that lack the words ἐν Ἐφέσῳ are the three oldest.<sup>21</sup>
- B. In the third and fourth centuries it was supposed that the original reading of the text lacked the words ἐν Ἐφέσῳ.
  1. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, Origen seemed to be unaware of manuscripts that included the words.

<sup>15</sup> Strom. IV.8 (64.1-GCS II, P. 277), Paed. i.5 (18.3= GCS I, p. 100).

<sup>16</sup> Adv. Her. v.2.3, v.8.1, v.24.4.

<sup>17</sup> Adv. Her. v.14.3.

<sup>18</sup> This statement is derived from Kurt Aland’s tally of MSS readings for Eph. 1:1 in *Text und Textwert der Griechischen Handschriften des Neuen Testaments, 2, Die Paulinischen Briefe, Band 3: Galaterbrief Bis Philipperbrief*, p. 356f, Walter De Gruyter:Berlin, 1991.

<sup>19</sup> This tally is based on Kurt Aland’s collation of MSS readings for Eph. 1.1 in *Text und Textwert der Griechischen Handschriften des Neuen Testaments, Vol. 2 Die Paulinischen Briefe, Band 3: Galaterbrief Bis Philipperbrief*, p. 356f, Walter De Gruyter:Berlin, 1991.

<sup>20</sup> The five are the very early P46 (c. AD 200), the fourth century uncials Sinaiticus and Vaticanus (both of which have the words added in the margin by a later hand), the sixth century Claromontanus, and the tenth century minuscule 1739. A corrector of the eleventh century minuscule 424 marked the words as inauthentic.

<sup>21</sup> P46 (c. AD 200), and the fourth century uncials Sinaiticus and Vaticanus, both of which have ἐν Ἐφέσῳ added in the margin by a later hand.

2. In the 4<sup>th</sup> century, Basil thought the true reading was found in old manuscripts that did not have a geographical destination indicated
  - a. Even though Basil believe the letter was written to the Ephesians, he cited a version of Ephesians 1.1 which he said was found in the old manuscripts “To the saints who are, and are faithful in Christ Jesus.”
  - b. Basil commented, “For thus also those before us have handed it down, and thus we have found it in the old samples of the copies.”<sup>22</sup>
3. In the 4<sup>th</sup> century Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus were produced, both of which originally lacked the words ἐν Ἐφέσῳ at Ephesians 1.1.<sup>23</sup>

## V. There is evidence that an alternative reading was “in Laodicea” rather than “in Ephesus.”

- A. Paul told the Colossians that they should “read the epistle from Laodicea,” not meaning a letter written by the Laodiceans, but meaning a letter that the Colossians could obtain from the Laodiceans.<sup>24</sup>
- B. If we grant that “from Laodicea” refers to the location of the letter and not to the writers of the letter, we are compelled to understand this to be a letter sent by Paul.
  1. If Paul did not have in mind a letter that he himself was sending to Laodicea by the hand of Tychicus, how was it that Paul, nearly a thousand miles away in Rome, knew at the time he was writing Colossians that when Tychicus would arrive in Colossae, there would be a letter at Laodicea which the Colossian saints should also read?
  2. Even if he had been made aware of some letter already in the possession of the Laodicean saints but suitable for circulating, how could he know it would still be in their possession weeks later when Tychicus would arrive in Colossae?
  3. Paul’s certainty that the letter from the Laodiceans would be available to the Colossians when Tychicus arrived is a strong indication that the letter “from the Laodiceans” was one he himself was sending to the Laodiceans by Tychicus.
- C. Heretic though he was, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century Marcion averred that what we know as Ephesians was actually written to the Laodiceans.
- D. Possible explanations for the dominance of manuscripts with the reading “in Ephesus” and for the letter’s identification with Ephesus even among those who had manuscripts lacking the geographical identification in verse 1 include the following:
  1. The prevalence of copies disseminated from Ephesus.

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<sup>22</sup> Adv. Eunomius.

<sup>23</sup> In both codices, the words ἐν Ἐφέσῳ are added in the margin.

<sup>24</sup> Col 4.16. For a thorough discussion of the various theories that have been proposed for the identity of the letter “from Laodicea,” see J. B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon, a Revised Text*, pp. 274–300.



- a. If Tychicus followed the route suggested above, the saints at Ephesus would have become the first recipients of the letter.
  - b. Word of the letter's existence and contents would have spread from Ephesus before Tychicus had even delivered copies to some other cities.
  - c. As Tychicus continued along 100 mile route to Colossae, scribes would have already busy making copies of the original letter left at Ephesus, and these copies could easily have been disseminated to churches in the western part of Asia, bearing the name of Ephesus, the city of the saints addressed in the original.
    - 1) Thus even though Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, and Philadelphia did not lay along Tychicus' route, churches in those cities could have received copies containing the words "in Ephesus."
    - 2) All of these cities were closer to Ephesus than was Laodicea.
  - d. So then very early on, even before Tychicus had completed his trip, a version of this letter with the words "in Ephesus" could have become widespread.
2. Tychicus' association with Ephesus.
    - a. Perhaps Tychicus was indeed from Ephesus as suggested earlier.
    - b. If he ultimately returned to Ephesus after Paul's death, his close relationship with Paul and his part in the dissemination of the letter could have enhanced the standing of the version of the letter that went to the church there.
  3. Extraordinary Preservation at Ephesus
    - a. There is the 7<sup>th</sup> century claim (whether credible or not, who knows) that at that time, the church in Ephesus still held the autograph of the gospel of John.<sup>25</sup>
    - b. If what Tychicus had delivered remained at Ephesus for some centuries, conceivably this too could have enhanced the standing of the reading, ἐν Ἐφέσῳ.
  4. Political standing of Ephesus
    - a. Ephesus had been designated the capital of proconsular Asia during the reign of Augustus.
    - b. It is possible that the copy that went to the capital city, more so than any other copy circulated among the intended audience at least in Asia, would on that account be the copy to which later generations would appeal.
  5. Religious standing of Ephesus
    - a. Already in the second century the church at Ephesus was reckoned as famous in its own right. Ignatius referred to the church there as "famous unto all the ages."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Chronicon Paschale, vol. 1 ed. Ludwig August Dindorf, Impensis ed. Weberi:Bonnae 1832.

<sup>26</sup> To the Ephesians, 8.

- b. In the early centuries, in the face of gnostic heresy there was a conscious effort to hold up certain churches as being the standard bearers of orthodoxy. The church at Ephesus was among these churches.
  - 1) Late in the second century, in his effort to undermine the influence of gnostic teachers, Irenaeus wrote, “Suppose there arise a dispute relative to some important question among us, should we not have recourse to the most ancient Churches with which the apostles had constant intercourse, and learn from them what is certain and clear in regard to the present question?”<sup>27</sup>
  - 2) Churches so regarded were those that had come to be recognized as “apostolic mother churches,” namely, the churches in Jerusalem, Antioch of Syria, Alexandria, Ephesus, Corinth and Rome.<sup>28</sup>
  - 3) Of all the churches in Asia Minor that might have been original recipients of a copy of the letter we know as Ephesians, only the church at Ephesus attained the dubious distinction of being an “apostolic mother church.”
6. It is not surprising then that a letter originally sent in various forms, each with a different city identified in the greeting, would eventually be preserved for posterity in the form containing the name of Ephesus.
7. The evidence indicates that Paul intended something, some phrase indicating the intended audience, to follow τοῖς οὖσι.
  - a. The evidence also indicates that it was not necessarily Ephesus.
  - b. But the evidence for ἐν Ἐφέσῳ is very strong, even compelling.
  - c. The foregoing explanation accounts for all of this, as well as Paul’s reference in Ephesians 3.4 to a previous letter.

Jeff Smelser  
 953 Churchtown Rd.  
 Narvon, PA, 17555  
[jeffsmelser@ntgreek.net](mailto:jeffsmelser@ntgreek.net)

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<sup>27</sup> Adv. Her. III.iv.1

<sup>28</sup> Schaff, vol 2, p. 153.

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EndLesson1

## To Unite Everything in Christ *Mason Venusa*

### Introduction:

- I. The priority<sup>29</sup> for this study is to establish Paul's flow of thought in Ephesians 1:3-2:22. God's plan to sum up all things in Christ (1:10) is relevant to the entire letter, but most directly this section. Paul invites us to praise God whose comprehensive plan graciously involves us in Christ (1:1-14). After praying for them to more fully comprehend the power of Christ's resurrection and enthronement (1:15-23), he then shows how that power is at work in us by our being joined with Christ through death, resurrection, and enthronement. Then he reminds them of how Christ works in the church to reconcile previously diametrically opposed people (2:11-22). In all of this, Paul encourages his largely Gentile audience, reminding them they are fully reconciled to God along with the rest of the saints.
  
- II. A summary of the relevant background of Ephesians.
  - A. Authorship: Paul authored this epistle, as the letter flatly claims, even incorporating key elements of Paul's life and work, his imprisonment, and his role as an apostle to the Gentiles.
  - B. Audience: The epistle is written to a general Christian audience in Asia Minor, a letter not exclusively to the Ephesians but to be actively circulated among churches in the region.
    1. The basic identity of the audience as Gentiles in Asia Minor is key to appreciating how Paul's letter served to build these Christians up (given potential insecurities as outsiders and latecomers).
  - C. Structure: The epistle moves from indicative to imperative,<sup>30</sup> from theology to application.

### Body:

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<sup>29</sup> This extended text contributes to biblical theology in areas such as God's sovereignty and foreknowledge (such as predestination in 1:3-14) and soteriology (such as salvation by grace through faith in 2:8-10). However, this presentation is on the larger text and so will not afford time to delve into those topics. It is my hope that our examination of the flow of thought will be fruitful and thereby contribute to our understandings of these and other relevant areas of Christian teaching.

<sup>30</sup> There is one command (2:11) in chapters 1-3. There are 40 commands in chapters 4-6. This is based on a search of imperatives (using Accordance software), not all possible command formulations.

## I. Unity: God is uniting all things in Christ (1:3-14).

### 1. One long blessing.

1. That Paul uses long sentences is not a mere piece of trivia. Sentence structure carries meaning. When versions break it up into multiple sentences, some degree of meaning is lost in translation. Most significantly, the concepts that are given emphasis by Paul may no longer stand out as such.
2. Paul's language takes on that of a blessing. It is in the sense of speaking well of, praising God. Seen frequently in the Psalms. Four psalms begin with this usage of the verb in the LXX: Psalms 144:1; cf. 34:1; 103:1-2, 20-22; 104:1 (English Bible references).

### B. God's mission is thoroughly intentional.

1. In so many terms, Paul asserts the intentionality of God's mission (1:4, 5, 9-10, 11, 14)
2. God is not haphazard. He has not scrapped his plan for another.
3. That God's purpose so directly includes us should stir deep gratitude.
  - a. God planned to love us before it all began. God knew how this was all going to go. Before the world began. Even knowing all our sin, he planned to send Christ. It was a plan that he knew would bring salvation to you and me.

### C. Christ is central to this mission.

1. Though the particular form and function of the "in him" phrases shift, it carries the same emphasis: we have these blessings only in relationship to Christ.
  - a. Variations: "In Christ", "in him", "in whom", "in the beloved".
  - b. Modern translations do not even bother representing the second occurrence in 1:10, "in heaven and earth in him".
  - c. "The redundancy keeps the focus on Christ at the expense of good Greek style. Verse 11 repeats the reference with a relative pronoun ("in whom") — again, at the expense of good Greek style. Although the syntax is awkward, the theology is rich. This is not the first time that a NT writer was so overcome with awe for his Lord that he seems to have lost control of his pen. Indeed, it happened frequently enough that some have labeled their christologically motivated solecisms an 'apostolic disease.'" (Harris, paragraph 82266)
2. The spiritual blessings that are part of God's mission only come about in Christ. Our hope is in Christ. Our salvation, adoption, election—all of it is in Christ. No one is being reconciled to God apart from or outside of Christ. No one is being genuinely reconciled to others apart from this plan set forth in Christ. There is no other possible plan.

### D. The encapsulating of everything in Christ (1:10) is the goal of Christ's mission.

1. 1:10 is key to seeing the the flow of thought simply because of how it speaks to God's purpose in all of this. The word "plan" (ESV; "administration" in the NET.  $\text{οἰκονομία}$ ) refers to God's management of this mission. He has so arranged for the plan to come together at "fulness of time". "Fulness of time" is to say that the course of history is coming to fruition.



2. This and Romans 13:9 are the only occurrences of the verb “sum up” (ἀνακεφαλαιόω). In Romans, the whole law is encapsulated by those two laws.<sup>31</sup>
  - a. The word involves a sense of uniting. “bring everything together in Christ” (BDAG, s.v. “ἀνακεφαλαιόω”).
  - b. Perhaps 1:22-23 (cf. 4:10) further explains what is meant here. There is no corner of reality which escapes the reach of Christ’s mission. “In heaven and on earth” also speaks to the comprehensive victory of God in Christ. This reaches back to creation, claiming the victory that is the restoration of all things. Heaven and earth, severed since the first sin, will be brought together again. Everything will be set to rights as a result of the mission that so features Christ.
- E. God’s plan entails that his saints be sanctified for this same purpose (1:4, 12).
  1. The fact that God’s grace is transformative for his people means that the mountain of imperatives in Ephesians 4-6 are entailed by God’s mission in Christ.
  2. There is a fitting and necessary (“worthy”, 4:1) response to this gospel. In fact, the mission itself works through his people (a thread through 1:10; 2:10; 3:10).
- F. We are heirs as well as God’s heritage.
  1. Translations vary on the meaning of a verb in 1:11. Have we “obtained an inheritance” (active/middle voice, per the ESV) or have we “been claimed as God’s own possession” (passive voice, per the NET)? There is no reason to avoid the passive at face value. This accords well with 1:18 where it is said that God’s inheritance resides in the saints themselves. Paul is working from a well established OT concept (Deut 32:9; 1Sam 10:1; 1Kings 8:51-53; Psa 2:8; 33:12; 68:9; 79:1; 94:5, 14; 106:5, 40; Mic 7:14, 18; Joel 2:17; 3:2; Isa 19:25; 63:17; Jer 10:16). Not only was God about to provide an inheritance for his people to obtain, what they needed to remember is that they were themselves the Lord’s heritage.
  2. Yet at the same time, Paul writes of “our inheritance” as well (1:14; see also 5:5). That is, we are his people, and he is our God.
- G. The mission results in praise of God’s glory (1:5, 12, 14).
  1. It is his grace most of all that is to be praised (1:6-7).
  2. While God’s intentional self-glorification may seem uncouth, it is not only right for God to bring glory to himself (that is where glory belongs), but it is also the most sacrificial thing for God to do. His glory is shown through his sacrifice of Christ on the cross.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> The LXX uses a closely related verb (without the prepositional prefix) in Sirach (or Ben Sira) 32:8 “Be brief [κεφαλαίωσον λόγον]; say much in few words; be as one who knows and can still hold his tongue” (NRSV).

<sup>32</sup> John Piper expounds this concept in multiple works. For example, “Christ is there. And what a friend he is. Oh, yes, a self-exalting friend because you will never be happy until you are happy in his glory, but a friend nonetheless who will care deeply for you.” <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/gods-passion-for-his-glory--2> (Accessed March 12, 2021).

- H. All the active ingredients for Ephesians as a whole are here in 1:3-14.
  - 1. Our union with (or in) Christ is further developed in 1:15-2:10.
  - 2. Grace—God as the initiator that empowers salvation is further developed in 2:1-10.
  - 3. Uniting everything, us to God, Gentiles to Jews is further developed in 2:11-22.
  - 4. The exaltation and victory of God’s plan is developed throughout the letter, especially 3:10; 4; 6.

II. Union: Saints are united with Christ in his death, resurrection, and enthronement (1:15-2:10).

A. Paul’s prayer for the saints to know the power of Christ’s resurrection (1:15-1:23).

- 1. 1:15-1:23 is a distinct section from 2:1-10, the first focusing on Christ’s mission and exaltation and the second focusing on that work as it is accomplished in the redeemed, but the two do bear a powerful relationship: we are joined with Christ in his work. See Colossians 2:20-3:4.
  - a. Christ’s death is only mentioned in 1:20 when he is already writing about resurrection from death, but it is a crucial parallel with our move from death to life.
- 2. He wants us to know the strength and might that raised Christ. That is the move in 1:19-20. He then expounds this power at work in us in 2:1-10.
- 3. Paul speaks of this “age” in both sections (1:21; 2:2, “course” in the ESV). One age is ending and the other is arising. Some day this will be complete, but the old era is ending, the church grows. and the new era is increasingly coming.

B. God made us alive (2:1-10).

- 1. What was our condition (2:1-3)?
  - a. Paul describes them as having been dead. Their condition and situation appears increasingly dim. The darker the pit, the brighter the light when rescued. But this is speaking of death, and he has already encouraged us to know the power of Christ’s resurrection at work in us.
  - b. Paul describes a spiritual reality where evil is pervasive. Satan described as this ruler of the “air”. This is synonymous with the “heavenly places”, those spiritual realms Paul has already had us thinking about. When we sin, and especially when we walked in sin, we were not alone; Satan and those spirits aligned to his machinations were working in us. But these are the ones over whom Christ has been enthroned.
  - c. Paul says, “we all” (2:3). Though Paul had been saying “you” to refer to his mostly Gentile audience, he now wants to make sure they understand that this is not a uniquely Gentile problem. He does not only include himself but everyone. That probably came as somewhat of a surprising idea for Gentiles coming to faith in this Jewish Messiah.
- 2. God made alive (2:4-10).
  - a. The main verb of this long sentence which starts in 2:1 does not appear until 2:5, “he made alive together” (σὺζῶοποιέω, cf. Col 2:13). The subject of this verb appeared in 2:4, “God”. The affect of putting so much information into the sentence before getting to the main point is a kind of suspense, especially given

the content of the sentence. When he writes “And you” in 2:1, the original audience knew immediately that they were not the subject of the sentence (because of the accusative form of the pronoun). Something or someone, after this extended description of their desperate condition—someone would act.

- b. God made us alive so as to reveal his grace (see 3:10).
  - 1) God’s saving work is grace. Paul is bursting at the seams to get to the main implication of this doctrine. God made us alive. That necessarily means that it is “by grace you have been saved”.
  - 2) “This” has no single word antecedent. The neuter form (*τουτο*) makes this clear. Instead, it refers to the preceding thought, as in other occurrences in Ephesians. (Hoehner, 343). Yet, this says a great deal still. Our salvation is not characteristically our own doing. Even faith itself would accomplish nothing except that God acted first.
- c. Our responsibility is fundamentally summed up as faith.
  - 1) That we have a responsibility does not undermine God’s grace. That is because our responsibility, most fundamentally, is to trust his grace, not ourselves. Our responsibility, in terms of how we are saved, is summed up as faith.
  - 2) Baptism is not so much in addition to faith as itself being through faith (see Col 2:12). Anything in addition to faith as being, in part, the basis of our salvation is to undermine God’s grace.
  - 3) Beware the error of handing a passage over to denominations which seem to be champions of it, and losing it as a tenet of our faith. Beware undermining Paul’s teaching by taking a passage that teaches the primacy of grace and faith to teach that faith and works are equivalent. We can faithfully teach against the neglect of accurate teaching on baptism and affirm this passage. Our understanding of baptism must be consistent with a salvation that is by grace through faith.
- 3. “We are his workmanship” (1:10).
  - a. As people graciously made alive, trusting in his work, we the do the good work we were (re)made to do. To be his workmanship is to faithfully carry out our part in Christ’s mission.
  - b. 2:1-10 serves as the direct theological backing to 4:17-6:9, when Paul instructs them to put off certain behaviors and vices and put on holy and righteous living.

### III. Peace: God unites circumcised and uncircumcised in Christ (2:11-22).

#### A. “We” and “you”.

- 1. When did Paul start to address his audience as Gentiles? How early has “you” referred to them in this way? Has Paul been anticipating what he would write in 2:11? Notice especially 1:12, 13 and 2:1, 3. He does distinguish between two groups, the audience (“you”) and a group that includes the author (“we”). The question is whether he intends to be understood as highlighting the Jew-Gentile distinction that far back. This affects how they would have read those sections. If Paul has been hinting at this distinction as far back as 1:12, 13, then that means his audience’s self-identify is distinctly Gentile. That is, he has only had to say “we” and “you” and expected to be heard as saying

“Jews” and “Gentiles”. That is just how Gentile they were. And if that is the correct explanation, then they may very much need Paul’s sensitive remarks. They may be characteristically insecure about their apparently secondary status as (1) latecomers to the gospel and (2) Gentile outsiders. So it is all the more important for Paul, having brought the universal church into view in 1:22, 23, to assure them that they are as much a part of that body as Paul and any of the first Jewish Christians.<sup>33</sup>

B. The new temple.

1. The dividing wall (2:14).

- a. Both a barrier vertically (“reconcile us both to God”) and horizontally (“in one body”).
- b. While he is using figurative language, there was a particular wall that would have served as a concrete example of this greater reality (Bruce, 297).<sup>34</sup> At the temple complex, there was the outer court of, the court of the Gentiles, and there was the inner court. The two were separated by a wall. Only Jews could enter that inner court. Inscriptions were on those walls that warned of the death penalty for any who trespassed (Josephus translated by Whiston, 336).

2. Paul is not saying here that Gentiles have been added in (as in Romans 11:17); he says that it is one new person in place of the two. There were Gentiles. There were Jews. Now there are Christians. That becomes their primary identity (Bruce, 296).<sup>35</sup>

3. Christ is the most important in the construction of this temple. The apostles and prophets serve a foundational role. However, that is the end of Paul’s hierarchy. Jews and Gentiles are joined together as a dwelling place for God.

C. In Christ, the gospel effectively reaches the Gentiles where the Law could not.

1. At Israel’s peak in the glory days of David and Solomon, they were being a blessing to the nations by pointing the way to the Lord. The queen of Sheba praised Solomon’s wisdom and Yahweh, “And the whole earth sought the presence of Solomon to hear his wisdom, which God had put into his mind” (1Kings 10:9, 24).

2. But Israel under the old covenant, even in its glory days, could not effectively fulfill its mission. The law of Moses was like that sign in the temple court. It wasn’t until after the

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<sup>33</sup> “Us” in 1:3 (and all 3rd person plurals in 1:3-10) is read by the recipients *before* Paul makes any distinction between “us” and “you”. There would be no reason for them to assume they were excluded from the blessings of that section. Further, such an exclusion would undermine Paul’s very effort in reassuring them of their equal access to the blessings in Christ.

<sup>34</sup> Bruce suggests that that particular wall could easily have been on Paul’s mind since he may be writing from an imprisonment in Rome that began in Jerusalem—based on accusations that he had brought Gentile Christians into the inner court (see Acts 21:27-29; an Ephesian disciple in particular and Jews from Asia accusing Paul.). Paul was there to break down barriers of a different sort (see Romans 15:25-27). He was there to bring a gift from Gentile Christians to Jewish Christians, and he was particularly in the temple grounds to show solidarity to Jewish Christians. He was accused of defiling the temple grounds by allowing a Gentile to trespass. Little did they know God was using Paul to bring a flood of Gentiles into the Kingdom.

<sup>35</sup> Bruce cites Clement’s quotation of the *Preaching of Peter* in *Stromata* book VI, chapter 5. Christians are referred to as the “third race”, in contrast to Jews and Gentiles.

Law was fulfilled in Christ that the way for the Gentiles was fully opened. This is something to celebrate. When Gentiles hear the gospel is freely offered to them, they should rejoice and glorify the word of the Lord (Acts 13:49).

3. Expect diversity in the household of God. Diversity is not to be an arbitrary goal, but the gospel reaches all kinds of people. It is right to let our degree of diversity or lack thereof be a factor in assessing how we are doing at bringing the gospel to the lost of any sort. If my whole church looks like myself, from exactly the same economic bracket, it should give me pause. I should want to examine my part in that. I should want to consider whether my gospel or some addendum to it could be placing a barrier before others that God has already broken down.

## Conclusion:

Paul wrote to build these disciples up. He recognizes their insecurities as latecomers and foreigners. So Paul focuses on God's comprehensive mission to show his grace by turning us from death to life in union with him, simultaneously bringing enemies together in Christ. Rejoice! We do not deserve this. Yet he has brought us near by Christ's blood. Show grace! There are no foreign Christians. There are no foreign mission fields. The gospel is not American. The gospel is for all.

Mason Venuso  
13 Linda Ln. Normal, IL 61761  
masemvenuso@gmail.com

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\*Reports of plagiarism in O'Brien's works were taken into account.

EndLesson2

## A Prayer Interrupted *Simon Harris*

Ephesians 3

### Introduction:

- II. After writing about the rich spiritual blessings these Gentile Christians now enjoy in Christ as fellow citizens in the household of God, Paul asks our heavenly Father, “*who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think,*” to fill them with His fullness.
- III. However, before he even lets them know that a prayer is forthcoming, his thought is interrupted at the mention of his current imprisonment.
  - A. Why would his being a prisoner be cause for an interruption?
    - 1. He didn’t want them to be discouraged by his sacrifice. (Vs. 13)
    - 2. Therefore, Paul pauses to tell them about what a great blessing it is for him to be a steward of grace of God.
  - B. Why might the recipients be discouraged by Paul’s imprisonment?
    - 1. He said he was a “a prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles.” (Vs. 1)
    - 2. He was arrested in Jerusalem because he preached to Gentiles. (Acts 22:21-22)
    - 3. Specifically, because the Jews thought Paul had brought a Gentile, Trophimus the Ephesian, into the temple. (Acts 21:29)
  - C. It’s as if Paul is saying, “Don’t be discouraged by this little thing. Don’t you understand what I get to do? I get to play a part in God’s eternal plan!”
  - D. The intrusion isn’t merely self-serving. It also gives greater depth and meaning to the prayer Paul will offer on their behalf.
- IV. When Paul comes back to his original thought in verse fourteen, he prays that they may receive every blessing that’s held in store for them as full-fledged members of God’s family. He wants them to be filled with the riches of God’s glory.
- V. I hope that we will see ourselves in the same light in which Paul saw himself. We, too, by grace have been given a stewardship of grace according to the eternal purpose of God.
- VI. I also pray that we will long to be filled with the fullness of God according to the riches of His grace and power.

## Body:

### I. A Dispenser of Grace (Ephesians 3:1-13)

- A. Paul begins a thought in verse one based on the previous paragraph (2:11-22) but digresses (verses 2-13) before finishing the thought in verse fourteen.
  1. There is no verb in the phrase “For this reason I...” (Vs. 1)
  2. He repeats the same phrase in verse fourteen and then says, “I bow my knees...” thus indicating that his original intention was to pray for them.
  3. Paul’s digressive thought seems to be triggered by the mention of his current imprisonment, specifically because it is “for you Gentiles.”
    - a. As noted in the introduction, the purpose of verses 2-13 are to help the readers not be discouraged by Paul’s circumstances.
    - b. While his imprisonment was most certainly related to his work among the Gentiles, Paul saw it as part of God’s eternal plan.
  4. It is also interesting to see that Paul does not view himself as a victim of the Jews or of Rome. He is the “*prisoner of Christ Jesus.*”
    - a. He had such a high regard for his work that he refused to feel sorry for himself.
    - b. He learned to have joy and contentment in every situation. (Php. 4:4, 11)
    - c. We know that even in prison, Paul continued teaching. (Php. 1:12-14)
  
- B. Paul had been given the stewardship, or dispensation, of grace for the Gentiles. (Vs. 2)
  1. The statement, “if indeed you have heard...”
    - a. May be an indication that some of Paul’s readers had not heard about Paul’s ministry,
    - b. But it seems more likely that it “is not designed to express a doubt whether they had heard it or not, for he takes for granted that they had.” (Barnes, pg. 55)
  2. Paul was given the responsibility to dispense the grace of God among the Gentiles.
    - a. “Dispensation” (NKJV) or “stewardship” (NASB) is the Greek word “OIKONOMIA.”
      - 1) Thayer says it describes “the management of a household... specifically, the management, oversight, administration, of others’ property.”
      - 2) Stewardship is a common idea in the Scriptures with Joseph (Gen. 39:4) and the Parable of the Talents (Mt. 25:14-30) being ready examples.
    - b. God entrusted Paul with the gospel, and he was then obligated to pass it on to others with a special emphasis on dispensing it to Gentiles.



3. How might our work change if we viewed ourselves as dispensers of grace?
    - a. Some see themselves as dispensers of truth.
      - 1) They just “tell it like it is” and if others can’t handle truth, then so be it.
      - 2) We absolutely must speak the truth, but so that others might be saved, not just so we a proven right. (Eph. 4:15; Col. 4:6)
    - b. Some are dispensers of knowledge.
      - 1) A gospel preacher is not the same as a theologian.
      - 2) Gospel preaching must convince, rebuke, and exhort. (2 Tim. 4:2)
      - 3) Don’t dispense knowledge so that others are impressed by what you know, but give them a message that inspires them to change because they are amazed by our gracious Lord. (1 Cor. 2:1-2)
    - c. Others are dispensers of wisdom.
      - 1) These are the “know-it-all” who always know what you should do, or worse, what you should have done.
      - 2) Certainly, wisdom is needed but with wisdom there must be humility. We don’t always know what’s best.
      - 3) Also, is there anything wiser than helping others feel the grace of God? Instead of telling others what they should have done, show them what they can now do to be forgiven. (1 Cor. 8:1)
    - d. A dispenser of grace puts the needs of others first and seeks their reconciliation to God with patience and humility.
- C. Paul says that the grace given to him by God was the revelation of the mystery of Christ. (Vss. 3-4)
1. Paul made it clear that the gospel he preached did not come from his own imagination nor did it come from man. It was revealed to him directly from God. (Gal. 1:11-12)
  2. Vine says that “mystery” as it is used here “denotes, not the mysterious, but that which, being outside the range of unassisted natural apprehension, can be made known only by divine revelation, and is made known in a manner and at a time appointed by God.”
  3. “God has unveiled or uncovered that which had been hid from men through the ages.” (Stan L. Caldwell, pg. 119)
  4. Paul says that he had written something about this mystery to them some time before. What he wrote and when he wrote it is disputed.
    - a. Smelser says, “Paul says he previously wrote about the mystery having been made known by revelation specifically to *him*.” (pgs. 147-148)
    - b. Smelser also argues that a strong case can be made that the phrase is “a reference to some earlier document such as Galatians.” (pg. 148)
    - c. Others such as Weed (pg. 147) and Colly Caldwell (pg. 109) say that Paul had written about the content of the mystery (i.e. Jew and Gentile in one body) in this same epistle, specifically in 2:11-22.

- d. Knowing there is such debate is probably a good indication that we cannot really know the answer, nor does one's conclusion seem to affect the overall understanding to the passage.
  - e. However, for the sake of argument (and taking sides), I think it is better to see Paul referring to the content of the mystery found in Ephesians 1 & 2.
    - 1) There are many common phrases and ideas connecting 3:1-13 to the previous chapters. (1:5, 9-10, 11, 17-18, 21; 2:11-22)
    - 2) Ephesians 3:4 states the mystery itself can be read about.
    - 3) Ephesians 3:6 is clearly a summation of 2:11-22.
5. Paul also says that we can read and understand his knowledge of the mystery.
- a. We can know that Paul *knows*.
  - b. We can also know *what* Paul knows.
  - c. This is proof that Paul was indeed dispensing God's grace, and still is.
- D. Paul has a particular aspect of the mystery in mind, that being the position of the Gentiles among God's people. (Vss. 5-6)
1. Before Paul plainly states what the mystery is in verse six, he says that, "it was not made known to the sons of men, **as it has now been revealed...**" <sup>(emphasis mine)</sup>, contrasting the OT allusions with the revelation he had received.
    - a. The OT is filled with hints and clues, as well as some clear statements about Gentile inclusion in the promise of the Messianic kingdom, beginning with the promise to Abraham (Gen. 12:3).
    - b. The means by which the Gentiles would be included through Jesus is the mystery revealed to the apostles and prophets by the Holy Spirit.
    - c. The mystery revealed was that both Jew and Gentile would have to surrender themselves to a crucified and risen Savior in order to be redeemed and reconciled to God. Both would be saved in the same manner, together.
  2. Paul then describes the new position of the Gentiles in Christ.
    - a. "Fellow heirs" (SUNGKLĒRONOMOS)
      - 1) Co-inheritors of the kingdom with the Jews.
      - 2) They were just as much children of God with full rights and benefits.
    - b. "Fellow members of the body" (NASB) (SUSSŌMOS)
      - 1) This may have been a term coined by Paul.
      - 2) Equal members of the one body, the body of Christ.
    - c. "Fellow partakers of the promise" (SUMMETOCHOS)
      - 1) They had an equal share in the promise of God given to Abraham, fulfilled in Christ.
      - 2) *And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.* (Gal. 3:29)

3. Note the connection from grace (Vs. 2) to revelation (Vs. 3) to mystery (Vs. 4) to gospel (Vs. 6). The good news is that God cleared up a spiritual mystery for us with a message of grace.
- E. Paul understood what a great privilege it was to be given this stewardship of God's grace. (Vss. 7-8)
1. His being a minister of grace was itself a gift of grace.
  2. He also recognized that God deserved all the credit.
    - a. It was not Paul who did great things, but God working through Paul.
    - b. He saw himself as a "nobody" who God made a "somebody."
    - c. Humility is an essential quality to service.
  3. Paul also fully appreciated his unworthiness to be called to such a task.
    - a. Called himself, "*less than the least of all the saints.*" (Vs. 8)
    - b. He said he was not worthy to be called an apostle because he persecuted the church. (1 Cor. 15:9)
  4. Two lessons from opposite extremes:
    - a. You can be effective when working by your own power, but not nearly as effective as you can be by working according to His power.
      - 1) Do what God says to do, not what you want to do, not what you think is best. Follow the example of service we see in Paul
      - 2) Who do you trust? Who do you promote? Who gets the glory for the work you do? (1 Cor. 1:29, 31)
      - 3) Do you think preaching is a competition? (Php. 1:15-17)
    - b. We often feel unworthy to preach because we aren't.
      - 1) But this message is worthy to be heard. It is God's eternal plan of salvation, the exceeding riches of His grace, the revealed wisdom of an all-powerful, all-knowing, all-loving God.
      - 2) Stop thinking about yourself and work hard to represent the grace of God in your deeds and to proclaim it clearly with your words.
      - 3) Paul used his unworthiness to show the glory of God's grace. We can, should, and must do the same thing.
- F. Paul also wanted his readers to understand exactly what it was that he got to do. (Vss. 8-12)
1. He was called to preach the "*unsearchable riches of Christ.*" (Vs. 8)
    - a. They are beyond comprehension, "unfathomable." (NASB)
    - b. They can only be known through revelation.
    - c. God's riches are a common theme throughout the epistle (1:7, 18; 2:4, 7, 3:8, 16).

2. To shed light on God's eternal plan. (Vs. 9)
  - a. This was in conjunction with Paul's original calling. (Acts 26:18)
  - b. It's interesting that Paul says his job was to make everyone see "what is the stewardship of the mystery."
    - 1) We might have expected him to say that his job was to shed light on the mystery, and it may not be much different.
    - 2) But he seems to be emphasizing that including Gentiles in Christ's kingdom an equal footing with the Jews is what God wanted others to hear from Paul's preaching.
  - c. The God who created all things had a one grand plan to save mankind, and Paul was privileged to proclaim this good news.
  - d. There is a manuscript difference that is reflected when comparing the NKJV with the NASB.
    - 1) NKJV says, "...*what is the fellowship of the mystery...*" based upon KOINŌNIA being found in the Textus Receptus.
    - 2) NASB says, "...*what is the administration of the mystery...*" based upon OIKONOMIA being found in several others. (Thayer)
    - 3) OIKONOMIA is preferred by scholars.
3. To make known the manifold wisdom of God. (Vs. 10)
  - a. While it is certainly true that what Paul preached was wisdom from God (1 Cor. 2), that is not Paul's point here.
  - b. God's manifold wisdom is made known by the very existence of the church being made up of Jews and Gentiles as fellow citizens.
    - 1) That God could bring these former enemies together in one body clearly a demonstration of His wisdom.
    - 2) Even more so, that two groups of people who were often guilty of markedly different sins could find salvation together in Christ is beyond comprehension, even for beings that dwell in the spiritual realm.
  - c. God's wisdom is made known by the church to the same beings mentioned in Ephesians 1:21.
    - 1) It seems best to me to understand this to refer to *all* spiritual beings, evil and holy.
    - 2) The church is the showcase of God's wisdom on earth and in the heavenly places.
    - 3) So, all of this is to the praise of the glory of His grace.
  - d. Paul's role in this was establishing churches among the Gentiles, often made up of Jewish and Gentile Christians, and getting these Christians to work together for the benefit of the body. (Rom. 15:27; 2 Cor. 9:12-14)
  - e. Is God's wisdom really on display in places where the church is divided along lines of race or ethnicity?

4. To declare God's eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus. (Vs.11)
    - a. Paul fulfilled a role in the eternal purpose of God!
    - b. We, as members of Christ's church, fulfill the eternal purpose of God.
    - c. As preachers and teachers, we also get to dispense grace and play a part in the eternal purpose of God.
    - d. The church was no afterthought, no stopgap measure until such a time when God will try again to accomplish His will.
    - e. The church being made up of Jew and Gentiles is what God always intended to bring about in Christ; promised to Abraham and planned before the beginning of the ages.
  5. To make it possible for others to have boldness and access to God. (Vs. 12)
    - a. Here is the desired outcome of God's eternal plan in Christ, that we might be able to enter into His presence.
    - b. It would seem that this was God's original intention when He placed man in Eden, and ever since man's sin severed that access, God has been working to restore it.
    - c. Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ that we can enjoy it once again.
    - d. AND Paul gets to be an agent in this reconciliation!
    - e. The word "boldness" is PARRĒSIA and carries with it the idea of "freedom in speaking," and "free and fearless confidence." (Thayer)
    - f. "Boldness is not rashness; and faith is not presumption; but we can come to God without hesitation, and with assurance that our prayers will be heard." (Barnes, pg. 60)
    - g. Paul is about to ask God to shower some amazing blessing down upon his readers, and here he reminds them that this is indeed what God grants to those who have faith in Him.
- G. Lastly, Paul asks his readers not to be discouraged by his imprisonment. (Vs. 13)
1. There is a clear connection back to verse 1.
    - a. Paul was "the prisoner of Christ Jesus for *you Gentiles*—" (emphasis mine)
    - b. His tribulations were "for you" (Vs. 13)
  2. Paul didn't want them to be discouraged because he knew that he was part of something so much bigger than himself.
    - a. He had a stewardship from God. (Vs. 2)
    - b. He knew things that others only wished they'd known. (Vs. 5)
    - c. Angels and demons were watching. (Vs. 10)
    - d. He was helping future generations to know about God's plan. (Vs. 21)

3. Paul was willing to suffer so that they could have glory.
  - a. Paul may have been arrested and put in prison because of jealous Jews, but that was a small price to pay so that Gentiles could have access to God.
  - b. Again, he saw the bigger picture.
    - 1) “...I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.” (1 Cor. 9:22)
    - 2) “And I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls.” (2 Cor. 12:15)
  - c. Paul saw his suffering as proof that he was doing the right thing (2 Cor. 11:23-27).
    - 1) It happened because he stood for Gentile equality among Jewish believers. He stood for them by standing with God.
    - 2) For that reason, they could glory and be encouraged.
4. We don’t hear a hint of discouragement from Paul in the entire epistle, and he didn’t want others to feel sorry for him over something that he saw as being insignificant in God’s grand scheme.
5. May this be a powerful lesson for us not to make mountains out of molehills so that others might pity us or praise us.

## II. A Prayer for Fullness (Ephesians 3:14-21)

- A. Paul now completes the thought he began in verse one. It is a prayer on behalf of the epistle’s recipients. (Vss. 14-16a)
  1. It is addressed to the Father from whom every family is named. (Vs. 15)
    - a. The phrase “every family” is from PASA PATRIA and translations are divided as to whether it should be interpreted as “every family” or “whole family.”
      - 1) KJV & NKJV have “whole family.”
      - 2) NASB & ESV have “every family.”
      - 3) The NIV84 has “whole family” and the NIV2011 has “every family.”
    - b. There seems to be general agreement that “every family” is better.
    - c. “‘Every family’ rather than ‘the whole family’ is to be preferred, so v 15 is basically an affirmation of God as *Creator* of all groups of living beings.” (Turner, pg. 1243)
    - d. This seems to be an allusion to the Seed promise given to Abraham. (Gen. 12:3)
  2. Paul asked God to grant his request “*according to the riches of His glory.*” (Vs. 16a)
    - a. Keep in mind all that Paul has said about the riches of God. (1:7, 18; 2:4, 7; 3:8)
    - b. Paul was asking God to bless his readers on a magnitude beyond comprehension!

- B. Various attempts have been made to give structure to Paul's petition in verses 16-19, with verses 20-21 serving as a doxology.
1. Weed sees three petitions and a summation (pgs. 153-155)
    - a. To be strengthened by the Holy Spirit (Vs. 16)
    - b. That Christ may dwell in your hearts (Vs. 17)
    - c. To know the love of Christ (Vss. 18-19a)
    - d. The fullness of God then being the ultimate goal of the prayer (Vs. 19b)
  2. Turner sees two, possibly three petitions (pgs. 1235-1236)
    - a. Empowered by the Spirit (Vss. 16-17)
    - b. Comprehending the love of Christ (Vss. 18-19a)
    - c. Filled with the fullness being either #3 or the result of #2.
  3. I will discuss the prayer as three petitions, but I see them all as inseparably linked and each building upon the previous.
- C. *"...to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man."* (Vs. 16b)
1. In verse thirteen he asked the recipients not to be discouraged at his tribulations, now he goes a step further and asks God to strengthen them.
  2. "might" comes from DUNAMIS often translated "power"
    - a. This is the power that raised Jesus from the dead (1:19), empowered Paul to be a dispenser of grace (3:7), and from the One who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think (3:20).
    - b. This is the power of God that completely transforms us into a new creature and through which we are made more than conquerors.
  3. This blessing enables Christ to dwell in our hearts through faith. (Vs. 17)
    - a. In chapter one Paul enumerated several blessings that come to those who are "in Christ." Now we learn that Christ will dwell in us. What an amazing blessing!
    - b. There is nothing mystical about this, for it is through faith. Practically speaking, it means that Christ is always in our thoughts as the center of our world and the dominate factor in our lives.
  4. This then leads to stability and steadfastness in our lives.
    - a. Rooted like a well-established tree.
    - b. Grounded like a building with a firm foundation.

D. *“to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge.”* (Vss. 18-19a)

1. Paradoxically, Paul prays that the readers may be able to comprehend something that is unfathomable.
  - a. A love that knows no end is ultimately unknowable.
  - b. No matter how much we know it, appreciate it, revel in it, there is still more to discover about the love of Christ.
  - c. In verses 2-11 Paul emphasizes the revelation of the mystery, now he wants the readers to fully appreciate the immense love that is the impetus behind the plan.
2. It’s interesting that Paul says this love has dimension. Maybe I’m stretching the meaning of Paul’s words, but notice this connection:
  - a. How **wide** is God’s love? - *“For God so loved the world...”*
  - b. To what **lengths** has He gone to show his love? - *“...that He gave His only begotten Son...”*
  - c. To what **depths** was He willing to sink? - *“...that whoever believes in Him should not perish...”*
  - d. To what **heights** does His love take us? - *“...but have everlasting life.”*
3. This is a blessing that is available to *all* who are in Christ, but *only* to those who are in Christ.
  - a. Others may rightly see the love my wife has for me, but only I know it.
  - b. Only those who have been made alive together with Christ (2:5) can even begin to fathom the depths of His love.

E. *“...that you may be filled with the fullness of God.”* (Vs. 19b)

1. Not only are we granted access to God (Vs. 12), we can be filled with God.
2. Paul, the dispenser of God’s grace, wants us to be filled with the fulness of God.
3. He is praying that the readers might get *everything* that’s coming to them as full-fledged members of the household of God.
  - a. Imagine for a moment that God has a treasure house. How big is it? How much stuff is in there? How valuable is it?
  - b. Imagine that God says, “Take whatever you want.”
  - c. Do you take one plastic kazoo? The cereal box decoder ring? A glow in the dark frisbee?
  - d. Paul is asking that we might be able to back up the truck and fill ‘er up!
4. Is it humility or lack of faith that keeps us from seeking the fullness of God? Are we afraid to ask, or are we limiting God’s ability?
5. Worse yet, do we fail to ask because like the Laodiceans, we think we are already rich. (Rev. 3:17)



- F. While verses 20-21 certainly form a doxology to Paul's prayer, and maybe even to the whole letter up to this point, it also answers an unasked question.
1. Can God, or would God, really do all this?
  2. Paul has asked God for some rich and powerful blessing, and it would be easy to think that he was really just asking for too much.
  3. In truth, Paul hasn't even come close to asking God to do all that He can do.
- G. What can God do? (Vs. 20)
1. Had Paul said, "God is able to do anything you ask." that would be amazing.
  2. If he had said, "God is able to do more than you ask." that's even more amazing.
  3. But no, he said, "exceedingly abundantly above all that you we ask or think" there are no words to describe how amazing that is. It is mind-blowing!
  4. So, again I ask, why aren't we asking?
    - a. Elisha rebuked Joash for only shooting three arrows. (2 Kgs. 13:19)
    - b. Jesus told Peter that with faith in God, mountains could be cast into the sea (Mr. 11:23), and we feel obligated to clarify that Jesus didn't *really* mean we could cast literal mountains into the sea.
    - c. That kind of thinking then often finds its way into our prayers. We limit God in our hearts.
- H. All of this must lead us to give glory to God. (Vs. 21)
1. Paul said we are being built together for a dwelling place for God (2:22). He prayed that we might be filled with the fullness of God (3:19). So that He would have glory in the church (3:21).
  2. In Exodus 40:34-35, once the Tabernacle was completed, the glory of the Lord filled the Tabernacle. It happened again when the Temple was completed in 1 Kings 8:10-11.
  3. We, the church, have become the glory of the presence of God on earth forever more, which means we are the last earthly manifestation of that glory.
  4. Maybe that's why we need so much from God. (Vss. 14-19)
  5. That's certainly why we must walk worthy of the calling with which we were called. (4:1)

## **Conclusion:**

- I. Paul realized that a great blessing and responsibility had been given to him as a dispenser of the grace of God. He not only accepted his calling, he pursued it with an unstoppable tenacity.
- II. May God grant us a mere portion of that spirit as we strive to proclaim the mystery of Christ.
- III. Beyond that, it is clear that Paul thought his highest calling was simply that of Christian; formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, but now a member of God's household; a man whose real desire was to be filled with the fullness of God.
- IV. May we, my brothers, find abundant joy in the same knowledge of our place in the family of God.

Simon Harris  
68 Van Schoick Ave. Albany, NY 12208  
preachersimonh@gmail.com

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EndLesson3

## Gifts for Unity *Andy Diestelkamp*

**Text: Ephesians 4:1-16**

### Introduction:

#### I. **Unity is a word which evokes both positive and negative feelings.**

A. Most see the concept of *unity* as positive.

1. e.g. *United States, United Way, United Nations*, etc.
2. Jesus prayed for unity among His disciples (Jn 17:21)

B. To many people, unity implies compromise

1. both the proponents and opponents of unity efforts acknowledge this
2. the debates are not over the value of unity, but over proposed compromises
3. However, neither in Jesus' prayer nor in the one context in which the actual word *unity* is used, is the idea of compromise to be found.

C. Scripture is explicit in its warnings against unions which are incompatible, compromise truth, and put faithfulness to God at risk (e.g. 2 Cor 6:14-7:1).

1. This does not mean we should be suspicious of unity, but that we should shun calls for unity at the expense of truth.
2. The unity we must pursue is that which finds its entire basis in God, and if we are adherents of the gospel, maintaining that unity is an essential part of our walk.

#### II. **How our text fits into the overall context of Ephesians**

A. The Working of God's Eternal Plan (chs. 1-3)

1. Theological section reviewing God's redemption of sinners through Jesus Christ to become God's chosen people, His inheritance.
2. Special emphasis is placed upon the *body* of Christ in which both Jews & Gentiles are both reconciled to God and to one another (2:14-18).
  - a. this *body* is variously referred to as "*the church*" (1:22,23), "*the household of God*" (2:19), "*a holy temple*" (2:20-22).
  - b. This metaphorical use throughout the letter is in reference to the singular unit of all redeemed through and in Christ.

B. The Walking of the Called (chs. 4-6)

1. 4:1-3 - a summary description of the walk that should be typical of those in Christ culminating in diligence to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.
2. 4:4-16 - a tangent about the maintenance of unity and growth
  - a. 4-6 - the basis of unity in Christ
  - b. 7-16 - Christ's gifts for unity

3. 4:17-6:20 - details/applications of the walk

## Body:

### I. Urging a Walk Conducive to Unity (4:1-3)

1. *"Therefore, ... walk worthily of the calling with which you were called."*

1. *Therefore*, implies an essential extension of the foregoing theological section (1-3).
  - a. As *"faith without works is dead"* (Jas 2:26), theology without a worthy walk is vain.
  - b. That Paul makes this appeal as *"a prisoner for the Lord"* is impressive.
2. *"walk worthily of the calling"*
  - a. *walk* is used often by Paul as a metaphor for a manner of life.
    - 1) uses its various forms 32 times in all of his letters to the churches (and in none of his letters to individuals) to describe walks either good or bad.
    - 2) uses the word the most (8 x) in this letter
  - b. *the calling* is the gospel, God's eternal plan to reconcile man to Himself.
    - 1) It is essentially chapters 1-3
    - 2) 1:15-18 - it is all God has planned and fulfilled in Jesus Christ, an invitation extended to Jews & Gentiles by grace through the gospel of Jesus Christ to:
      - a) be accepted and adopted as sons (v. 5,6)
      - b) be redeemed from our sins (v. 7)
      - c) be one in Christ and thereby be God's inheritance (v. 10-14,18)
      - d) be sealed with the Holy Spirit (v. 13)
      - e) have hope (v. 18)
  - c. *worthily*
    - 1) The root word *worth* and the Greek word from which *worthily* is translated carry with them the idea of "equal value" and thus to be brought in line, commensurate, appropriate, corresponding to.
    - 2) Thus to *walk worthily* of this calling is to:
      - a) *"be holy and without blame before Him in love"* (1:4)
      - b) NOT walk *"according to the course of this world ... in the lusts of our flesh"* (2:2,3), *"as the rest of the Gentiles walk"* (4:17)
      - c) walk in *"good works, which God prepared"* for those re-created in Christ (2:10)
      - d) Paul expresses similar thoughts in:
        1. 1 Th 2:12 - a walk worthy of God who calls you into His kingdom
        2. Col 1:10 - a walk worthy of the Lord

## 3. Php 1:27 - conduct worthy of the gospel of Christ

## 2. Characteristics of walking worthily

## 1. “with all lowliness and meekness”

a. *lowliness*

- 1) a compound of two words (*lowly* and *mind*)
- 2) It has positive and negative connotations as illustrated in Colossians.
  - a) 2:18,23 a false humility or taking delight or pride in self-abasement/asceticism
  - b) 3:12 - a true humility accompanied by kindness and meekness
- 3) The positive quality is best exemplified in Jesus - Php 2:1-8
  - a) Jesus’ humbling of Himself is a mindset to be imitated (v. 5).
  - b) The fellowship of the Spirit is evident in “*being like-minded ... of one accord, of one mind*” (vv. 1,2)
  - c) “*lowliness of mind*” is the opposite of “*selfish ambition or conceit*”

b. *meekness*

- 1) It is a virtue exemplified and expected by Jesus.
    - a) Mt 11:28-30 - Jesus was *meek* and lowly.
    - b) “*Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the land*” [Mt 5:5 quoting from Ps 37:11].
  - 2) “The word never connotes the idea of weakness. Rather it implies the conscious exercise of self-control, exhibiting a conscious choice of gentleness as opposed to the use of power for the purpose of retaliation” (Hoehner, p. 507).
  - 3) Paul called for meekness as the appropriate response to the gospel and thus conducted himself with such in his work among the saints - 2 Cor 10:1.
    - a) Clearly, meekness does not mean that one is never angry or corrective.
    - b) It *does* mean we remain under the control of the Spirit (cf. Gal 5:22,23).
  - 4) The word was used to describe tamed animals. A horse is a strong animal, but once it has been broken, it is now fit for its master’s use and yields and uses its strength under its master’s control.
- c. These two words are linked together because they are complimentary attitudes. True humility and true meekness will always be companions of one another.
- 1) Jesus’ humbling Himself to the point of death on a cross should humble us.
  - 2) Jesus’ meekness in the face rejection should elicit a yielding of ourselves to the control of our Master. “*Not my will, but yours, be done*” (Luke 22:42).

## 2. “with longsuffering”

- a. Like the English word, the Greek is a compound word using the words for *large* or *long* and *temper*.

b. It is a characteristic of God which is fundamental to the gospel.

1) 1 Pt 3:9

- a) It is this quality that has God keeping His promises and giving us time to repent.
- b) “*the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul ... has written*” (v. 15).
  - 1. Paul uses this in its various forms a dozen times in his letters.
  - 2. He has vested interest in God’s longsuffering - 1 Tim 1:15,16

2) Mt 18:21-35

- a) The message is clear - God is the king. We are the servants who have been shown patience through the gospel of the cross in paying our unpayable debt of sin. To walk worthily of that gospel requires that we be longsuffering in our relationships with others.
- b) This is why Paul explicitly says later in Eph 4, “*forgiving one another, just as God in Christ Jesus forgave you*” (v. 32) which appears to be a reiteration of a component of Jesus’ model prayer, “*forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors*” (Mt 6:12).

3) 1 Th 5:14,15

3. “*bearing with one another in love*”

a. *bearing with*

- 1) The word essentially means to *endure, suffer, put up with, tolerate*.
- 2) Enduring suffering for the cause of Christ is praised by Paul (2 Th 1:4).
- 3) It is not always used in a positive sense (cf. 2 Cor 11:4,19,20).

b. *one another*

- 1) The worthy walk is not just with God, but involves *one another*.
  - a) *One another* is a dominating concern for the remainder of this letter.
  - b) The rationale for this emphasis is the reality that in Christ “*we are members of one another*” (v. 25).
- 2) Keep in mind the reality expressed and illustrated earlier - 2:14-22
  - a) God has made both Jews and Gentiles one by abolishing the law of commandments through the cross and thus reconciling all to God in one body (vv. 14-16).
  - b) The same gospel has been preached to all (v. 17)
  - c) Through Christ all have access by one Spirit to the Father (v. 18)
  - d) Now all in Christ are *members* of the household of God, fellow citizens of the kingdom, and joined together in a holy temple (vv. 19-22).
  - e) It is the reality of this union that requires *walking worthily* to include *bearing with one another*.

c. *in love*



- 1) Christians know the divine quality of love and its necessity in our lives.
  - a) God *is* love (1 Jn 4:8) thus our relationship with God is contingent on our connection with love. If we do not love then we do not know God. If we abide in love then we abide in God (v. 16).
  - b) The abiding things are faith, hope, and love, and the greatest is love (1 Cor 13:13). Among other things, love is longsuffering (v. 4).
  - c) Col 3:12-15 - “above all put on love”
    1. In a letter written around the same time as Ephesians, Paul lists things that ought to characterize us “*as the elect of God*” (v. 12).
    2. It is described as “*the bond of perfection*” (v. 15).
- 2) *Love* is a dominant theme in Ephesians.
  - a) 2:4,5 - speaks of God’s “*great love with which he loved us*” in graciously saving us in Christ.
    1. God’s love is the primary love (cf. 1 Jn 4:19).
    2. God’s demonstration of love is supreme (Jn 3:16; Rom 5:8).
  - b) Yet, in Ephesians most of the uses of *love* pertain to what God created and calls us to be.
    1. Note Paul’s prayer immediately preceding this application section - 3:14-19
      - a. Our being rooted and grounded in love is by comprehending and knowing the love of Christ.
      - b. It is therein that we are filled with all the fulness of God.
    2. 5:1,2 - to walk worthily is “*to walk in love as Christ has loved us*”
    3. This walk defines us and thus has application to other relationships (e.g. marriage 5:25).
  - c) Thus love is crucial and essential to what God has called us to be with *one another*.
4. “*endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*”
  - a. *endeavor* involves eager diligence and urgency
    - 1) “*Be diligent*” (2 Tim 2:15) involves effort toward a high standard and thus carefulness is implied
    - 2) “*Be diligent to enter that rest*” (Heb 4:11) is a call for faithfulness and caution against pitfalls.
  - b. *to keep* means to preserve
  - c. *the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*
    - 1) as noted with the *one another* of the previous phrase, this also refers back to the *oneness* that comes from God (2:14-18)
      - a) It is important to note that Christ, the Spirit, and the Father are specified as being involved in making Jew & Gentile one in this text.

- b) The unity is as members of the household of God (2:19).
  - c) This unity is not the creation of saints. It is the creation of God. Yet, a walk worthy of being called to be a part of this holy temple requires each saint to do his part to preserve that unity.
    - 1. It is not that if we fail to do this that the body of Christ *will* be divided (cf. 1 Cor 1:13).
    - 2. However, if we do not walk in this manner *we* (and perhaps others who fall under our influence) will be deceived (4:14) and not have any inheritance in the kingdom (5:5) and not stand against the wiles of the devil (6:11).
    - 3. It is clear from Jesus' own words that some among the churches to whom this letter was circulated later had fallen and were in real danger of judgment (Rev 2:4,5,14-16,20-23; 3:1-3,15-19).
- 2) The word *spirit* is variously used in this letter, but predominantly in reference to the Holy Spirit.
- a) The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are grouped several times in key texts in this letter.
    - 1. God the Father blessed us in Christ and has sealed us with the Holy Spirit (1:3-14).
    - 2. Christ has reconciled us in one body and by one Spirit to the Father (2:13-18).
    - 3. This unity is pictured as that which grows into a holy temple in the Lord as a dwelling of God in the Spirit (2:19-22).
    - 4. Paul speaks of his apostolic stewardship as "*the grace of God ... revealed by the Spirit ... in Christ through the gospel*" (3:2-7).
    - 5. Thus Paul prayed "*to the Father*" for them "*to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith*" (3:14-17).
  - b) This then prepares us to better appreciate the bases of this unity succinctly expressed in 4:4-6.
- 3) *the bond of peace*
- a) Like the unity, this peace is not one of our making, but of God's making.
    - 1. This peace is "*from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*" (1:2).
    - 2. Christ "*came and preached peace*" and He "*Himself is our peace*" in reconciling us to God and creating "*in Himself one new man from the two thus making peace*" (2:14-17).
  - b) Part of the panoply of God is to be shod with "*the gospel of peace*" (6:15).
    - 1. the gospel is the means whereby we are called into this walk and it is that upon which we *stand* against the wiles of the devil and the powers of darkness in the evil day (6:11-13).

2. thus it makes sense that diligence in keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace requires diligence in taking a stand in the gospel which brings that peace.
5. These three verses generally and positively describe the walk that is worthy of the gospel of Jesus Christ.
  - a. While there are three characteristics of heart mentioned that individuals must have, the participle phrases focus on individual actions which contribute to the collective.
  - b. Since one of the primary observations of chs 1-3 is the assembling of Jews & Gentiles in one body as God's inheritance to His glory, it logically follows that a primary application is how we must participate in that oneness.
  - c. Thus, the one another unity that is only made possible in the context of God's eternal plan and gracious work is a primary goal in our walk.
  - d. From here we could easily jump to v. 17 and the flow of thought would be smooth and uninterrupted.
    - 1) Some have called vv. 4-16 a digression, a parentheses, a tangent elaborating on the foundation and function of the unity God predestined.
    - 2) So important is this designed unity that Paul is inspired to succinctly set forth key doctrinal components upon which this unity is based (vv. 4-6).
    - 3) After that he explains how the diverse gifts given all work together to maintain this unity (vv. 7-16).

## II. The Bases of Unity (4:4-6)

### 1. "one body and one Spirit ... just as one hope"

1. *one body*
  - a. mentioned first because it is "*the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*" (v. 3).
    - 1) The body is not first because of any preeminence over the rest of the *ones*.
    - 2) because it follows the line of thought and is the primary point of the letter.
  - b. contextually, the *one body* has already been clearly defined:
    - 1) It is the creation of "*one new man*" uniting Jews and Gentiles and reconciling "*them both to God in one body through the cross*" (2:14-16; 3:6).
    - 2) It is earlier identified as "*the church ... the fulness of Him of who fills all in all*" over which Jesus is head (1:22,23).
    - 3) This *one body* is comprised of *members* (2:19; 3:6) who are therefore also "*members of one another*" (4:25).
    - 4) This *one body* is therefore not referring to a local congregation (of which there are many, not *one*), nor is it referring to a collectivity of congregations, the Roman Catholic church, a denomination, the Restoration Movement, nor those who identify as "churches of Christ."
2. *one Spirit*

- a. contextually, the *one Spirit*, has already been identified as the *Holy Spirit* (I.B.4.c.2) with whom we are sealed “*for the day of redemption*” (4:30) when we believed the gospel (1:13).
    - 1) It is by *one Spirit* that we have access to God through Jesus Christ (2:18).
    - 2) It is in the Spirit that we are “*built together for a habitation of God*” (2:22).
    - 3) It is the Spirit who revealed the gospel of unity of Jews and Gentiles in one body (3:3-6).
    - 4) It is the Spirit who strengthens the members of the body with power (3:16).
  - b. the conjunction of *body* and *Spirit* seems to be an intentional play on the reality that just as a human body without a spirit is dead (Js 2:26), so the *one body* of Christ is enlivened by the Holy Spirit.
    - 1) “the Spirit being the animating principle of the corporate body” (Bruce, p. 336)
    - 2) As members of the body of Christ we are under the influence of the one Spirit and that produces fruit in each of us impacting our walk (cf. Gal 5:22-25) and corporately produces unity.
3. *one hope*
- a. the oneness of the body and Spirit is illustrated by the phrase “*just as.*”
    - 1) This comparison is intended to confirm that there is just one body.
    - 2) To say that there are two hopes, two callings, or two gospels (one for the Jews and one for the Gentiles) destroys the logic of this comparison.
  - b. contextually, the *one hope* is that which Jews and Gentiles share through the call of God.
    - 1) It is that which is a result of us being enlightened by the revelation of the mystery through the gospel of Jesus Christ (1:17-18).
      - a) It is a hope that has us belonging to God as His inheritance.
      - b) It is a hope that is realistic and rooted in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.
    - 2) It is a hope that Gentiles did not have being ignorant of God’s promises to Abraham, David, and the prophets (2:12), but now do in Christ Jesus (2:12,13).
  - c. Therefore, seeing that Jews and Gentiles have a common hope in Christ shows that there is just one body enlivened and empowered by one Spirit.
2. “*one Lord, one faith, one baptism*”
- 1. *one Lord*
    - a. The Lord is clearly identified from the beginning of this letter as Jesus Christ (1:2).
      - 1) The word is used 23 times in this letter and specifically identified as Jesus six of those times with three of those times being the first three times the word *Lord* is used in the letter and two of those times as he closes the letter.
      - 2) All of the other times it is used, context suggests it is a reference to Jesus.

- 3) In this context, its use is connected with the Father and the Spirit, thus indicating that the *one Lord* is a reference to the Son, aka Jesus Christ.
- b. It is logical that having emphasized the *one body* with a view toward unity that he also mention the head of the body - Eph 1:22,23.
  - 1) The word Lord means Master, and here we have him being described as “*the head over all to the church which is His body.*”
    - a) He has all authority (cf. Mt 28:18).
    - b) “*God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ*” (Acts 2:36).
  - 2) Jesus is not head over many bodies (e.g. a Jewish body and a Gentile body). The *one body* is comprised of many members, and it only has *one Lord*, and only in Him, His body, do we have unity with God and one another.

## 2. *one faith*

- a. objective faith or subjective faith?
  - 1) objective faith is *what* is to be believed, the body of doctrine that is taught.
    - a) Ac 6:7 - “*the word of God*” is equated with “*the faith*” to which people were obedient.
    - b) 1 Tim 4:1 - Paul warns that “*some will depart from the faith*” which by implication refers to sound doctrine (cf. 1:10; 6:3) vs. “*doctrines of demons.*”
    - c) Jude 3 - “*the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.*”
  - 2) subjective faith is the personal response of the believer.
    - a) This is the way the word *faith* is most often used, by far, in Scripture.
    - b) Rom 3:21-28 - “*the one who has faith in Jesus*” is “*justified by faith*”
    - c) This is the way it is used in Ephesians leading up to this *one faith* (1:15; 2:8; 3:12,17).
- b. Two texts strongly suggest objective faith
  - 1) Immediate context - Eph 4:11-13
    - a) “*till we all come to the unity of the faith*” is equated with “*the knowledge of the Son of God*”
    - b) here the basis of *unity* is objective, so it should be understood in v. 4.
  - 2) Paul’s similar statement in Php 1:27
    - a) Paul calls upon the Philippians to make sure their conduct is “*worthy of the gospel of Christ.*”
    - b) “*the faith*” is “*the gospel of Christ*”
  - 3) If *the faith* is the *one faith*, our personal faith is simply the fruit of the *one faith* (i.e. the word of God, the gospel). Subjective faith comes by hearing the *one faith* (cf. Rom 10:17) which is the basis of unity.

- 4) “The one faith of v. 5, similarly to the one hope of v. 4, is best interpreted objectively, as the faith avowed and acknowledged, rather than as faith in its subjective aspect as trust. It’s conjunction with baptism is significant as intimating yet again the connection between faith and baptism, observed frequently in Acts and Paul. Baptism is the supreme occasion of the confession of faith as it is faith’s embodiment, subjectively and objectively” (Beasley-Murray, p. 200).<sup>1</sup>

### 3. *one baptism*

- a. *baptism* is not explicitly elaborated upon in this letter, but Paul’s teaching is ample on this subject.

1) Rom 6:3,4 - it is pictured as a burial into Christ and into His death from which we are raised to walk in newness of life.

2) Gal 3:26,27

a) It is parallel/synonymous with becoming sons of God through faith.

b) It is pictured as into and a clothing with Christ.

3) Col 2:12 - again pictured as a burial and resurrection with Christ “*through faith in the working of God.*”

- b. Is the *one baptism* a baptism in water or the Holy Spirit?

1) 1 Cor 12:12,13

a) In harmony with our primary text, this text connects baptism with the body and the Spirit as a part of the basis of unity for Jews and Gentiles.

b) Some assume this is *not* water baptism, but Holy Spirit baptism.

1. “Paul is not writing of water baptism. That outward sign depicts the believer’s union with Christ in his death and resurrection (*see notes on Rom. 6:3-4*). Similarly, all believers are also immersed into the body of Christ by means of the Holy Spirit. Paul’s point is to emphasize the unity of believers. There cannot be any believer who has not been Spirit-baptized, nor can there be more than one Spirit baptism or the whole point of unity in the body of Christ is convoluted. Believers have all been Spirit-baptized and thus are all one body. *See notes on Eph. 4:4-6*. This is not an experience to seek, but a reality to acknowledge” (MacArthur, p. 1703).

2. Rom 6:3 comment - “This does not refer to water baptism. Paul is actually using the word ‘baptized’ in a metaphorical sense, as we might in saying someone was immersed in his work, or underwent his baptism of fire when experiencing some trouble. All Christians

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<sup>1</sup> F. F. Bruce disagrees. “The ‘one faith’ is not their common body of belief (even if it is mentioned in a credal context); it is their common belief in Christ” (p. 336). “It is doubtful whether *pistis* is ever used in the NT (apart from Jude 3, 20) in the sense of a creed or body of belief, although a few occurrences of the word in the Pastorals may have this force” (p. 336 n. 16).

have, by placing saving faith in him, been spiritually immersed into the person of Christ, that is, united and identified with him. Certainly water baptism pictures this reality, which is the purpose—to show the transformation of the justified” (MacArthur, p. 1658).

3. Eph 4:5 comment - “This probably refers to the water baptism following salvation, a believer’s public confession of faith in Jesus Christ. Spiritual baptism, by which all believers are placed into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:11-13), is implied in Eph. 4:4” (MacArthur, p. 1762).
- c) The baptism of this text is the *one baptism* of Eph 4:5, and that is the same baptism as we read Jesus commanding and the apostles teaching.
1. To suggest that the *one baptism* which Paul taught is a baptism other than the water baptism in the name of Christ as documented in Acts and commanded to both Jews & Gentiles (Ac 2:38; 8:35-39; 10:47,48) is without evidence.
  2. 1 Corinthians 6:11 refers to being washed, sanctified, justified “*in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God*” which easily harmonizes with 12:13 (See Beasley-Murray, pp. 162-171).
- 2) Eph 5:26 - “*the washing of water*” is an allusion to water baptism.
- a) The most natural understanding based on the points made just above.
  - b) “Clearly one need not read back into the first century a later mindset to find a reference to baptism in Paul’s ‘washing with water.’ Whether it fits with one’s theology or not, the uniform teaching and practice of the first century would have provided ample basis for seeing such a reference in those words. The truth is, one has to read a 20th century Evangelical mindset back into the passage in order to avoid thinking of baptism when reading Ephesians 5:27 [sic].” (Smelser, p. 244)
  - c) It is this *washing* which is the *one baptism* of 4:5.
- 3) Hoehner offers a third option
- a) While acknowledging that “in the early church faith in Christ is tied closely to water baptism” he rejects it for two flawed reasons: (p. 517).
    1. “the rite of baptism, with all its different modes, seems to be more divisive than unifying (certainly in later centuries)” - this argument is presumptuous and anachronistic.
    2. “there is no mention of the other ordinance, the rite of the Lord’s Supper, as a unifying element as Paul did in 1 Cor. 10:17.” - this assumes both that Paul’s list is exhaustive *and* that baptism and the Lord’s Supper are equal as unifying “rites.”
  - b) He rejects Spirit baptism for two reasons (p. 518):
    1. “the phrase is in the triad of elements that pertain to Christ” [rather than the Spirit where it should be listed were that the meaning].
    2. “there is nothing in the broader context (vv. 1-16) referring to the Spirit’s baptism”

c) “A third option that needs to be considered is that it refers metaphorically to the believer’s baptism into Christ’s death, speaking of the believers union with Christ in his death and resurrection. Baptism signifies identification as seen in the baptism of Israel into Moses as they went through the Red Sea (1 Cor. 10:2) and the baptism of the disciples with reference to Christ’s death (Mark 10:38). Both of these examples make no reference to water or to the Holy Spirit. ... This inward reality is all too often missed. It serves as the basis of the outward ritual. Hence, the ‘one baptism’ most likely refers to the internal reality of having been baptized into (identified with) the ‘one Lord’ by means of the ‘one faith’ mentioned in this verse” (p. 518).

1. Nothing in the broader context refers to this third baptism.
2. The Red Sea *would* qualify as a reference to water!
3. Without denying inward realities (e.g. faith, repentance, a good conscience), nothing suggests an inward baptism vs. an outward baptism.

### 3. “one God and Father of all”

1. Specifically referred to God as “*Father*” eight times in this letter.
  - a. Eph 1:2,3
    - 1) “*our Father*” speaks to the special relationship Christians have with God.
    - 2) Praises God as the Father of our Lord and for blessing us in Christ.
  - b. Eph 3:14 - Because of what God has done in uniting Jews & Gentiles in one body (2:1-3:7), He is worthy of our worship.
2. “*of all*”
  - a. God is the creator of all and Paul makes this point to Gentiles most famously in Ac 17:22-31 when he introduces them to their “*Unknown God*.”
    - 1) “*He gives to all life, breath , and all things*” (v. 25).
    - 2) Gentile poets had correctly understood that “*we are also His offspring*” (v. 28).
  - b. However, depending on context, *all* is not always intended literally.
    - 1) Sometimes *all* in Ephesians is used in a universal sense - 1:21; 3:9
    - 2) Sometimes *all* is used in a more limited context - 1:10,22
  - c. While it is true that God *is* in some senses the Father of all, in the immediate context of unity of the body, it seems to be more specific to the *all* in Christ.
    - 1) “*who is above all*”
      - a) Yes, God is literally above all, but contextually, that is not the point.
      - b) If we see the picture drawn by the “ones” cited as the bases of the unity, God the Father is at the pinnacle (above all of them).
    - 2) “*and through all*”
      - a) He is not only above, but works through us. He is not aloof.



- b) 3:10 - God's wisdom is made known *through* the church/the body.
- 3) "*and in [you] all*"
  - a) This is not a pantheistic statement about God. Indeed, this is a privilege only given to saints.
  - b) The indwelling of God the Father is through:
    - 1. the Spirit - 2:22
    - 2. Christ - 3:17

### III. **The Grace of Christ (4:7-10)**

1. Given "*to each one*" (v. 7)
  1. Grace is favor or blessing bestowed out of the goodness of the givers heart as opposed to out of obligation or debt.
    - a. Thus grace is inherently something that is undeserved.
    - b. We typically think of grace in its greatest sense: the grace God has shown to man in offering redemption through Jesus Christ. (This is the way the word *grace* is used most often in Ephesians - 1:6,7; 2:5,7,8.)
    - c. However, Paul uses it another way as well: 3:2-8
      - 1) Here grace refers to the privilege of being a minister (v. 7) of the gospel and to "preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ" (v. 8)
      - 2) Notably, Paul also uses the word *grace* in similar fashion not just in relation to preaching the gospel but in ministering in other ways (e.g. Rom 12:3-8; 2 Cor 8:1-7).
  2. Paul says that grace was given "*to each one of us.*"
    - a. "*us*" includes all Christians.
      - 1) In 4:1 Paul refers to himself (a Jew) and the Gentile Christians to whom he writes.
      - 2) Prior to this Paul has labored to show that Jews and Gentiles are one in Christ (again stressing the theme of unity).
      - 3) Throughout this letter "*us*" consistently refers to the body of Christ consisting of Jews & Gentiles.
    - b. The grace under consideration here is bestowed to *each one*.
      - 1) The dispensing of grace to individuals is in contrast to the unity just emphasized.
        - a) Contextually, this is in no way to be understood as undermining the unity being promoted. Rather, it is to stress that unity in diversity (Jews & Gentiles with varying gifts and functions) *is* the plan of God.
        - b) "After exhorting his readers to maintain the 'unity of the Spirit' (4.1-3) and reminding them of the oneness of the gospel which God's people share (4.4-6), Paul explains that this unity is not to be confused with uniformity. There is indeed 'one Lord.' but that one Lord has given different gifts to His people. 'There are varieties of service, but the same

Lord' (1 Cor. 12.5). This unity-in-diversity is one of the primary reasons Paul uses the body as a metaphor for the church in passages such as Romans 12:4-8, 1 Corinthians 12.12-31, and here in Ephesians 4" (Scott, p. 62).

- 2) Note that this "each one" at the beginning of this section corresponds to the "every joint" and "every part" at the end of this section (4:16).
  - a) Thus the individuality stressed at both ends identifies a section focused on diversity that works toward a common end in one body (4:4) under one Lord (4:5), the head—Christ (4:15).
  - b) This reveals that as individuals we have received grace and are expected to take personal responsibility in using our gifts for the benefit of the body.
    1. The reality of this individual component must be reflected in a walk that is worthy of our calling (e.g. 4:25 - "each one [is to] speak truth ... for we are members of one another").
    2. The fact that we are part of one body requires that we act in ways that are in submission to the head and one another.
3. "according to the measure of Christ's gift"
  - a. Christ as head is the one who determines how we will be used in the body.
  - b. This is expressed differently in similar contexts which speak of the one body:
    - 1) Rom 12:3 - this measuring out is determined by God and ought to produce humble/sober evaluations of ourselves relative to others in the body.
    - 2) 1 Cor 12:4-12 - the Spirit is pictured as the one distributing gifts, and then more generally God is credited with appointing and composing the members of the body as He pleases (vv. 18,24,28).
  - c. To focus on *who* gets *what* gift is to lose sight of the body and its unity which has its basis in much more foundational things (i.e. Eph 4:4-6).
2. Ps 68:18 is cited in conjunction with Christ's giving grace/gifts.
  1. Perhaps it would be better to say that it is *adapted* to picture Christ's distribution of gifts to each one.
    - a. It is a song of triumph for God and His people.
      - 1) It lauds God for defeating the wicked and the salvation He offers His people.
      - 2) v. 18 may refer to the moving of the Ark of the Covenant to Mt. Zion, the successful conquests of David, and/or the blessings of God upon Israel in that time.
    - b. The curiosity lies in the fact that Paul's quotation is significantly altered from the original and what to make of that.
      - 1) The most obvious change is from God *receiving* gifts and Paul changing that to Christ *giving* gifts.
      - 2) Jeff Smelser offers a concise explanation. "But if the psalm was occasioned by a military victory, God may be pictured as a conquering king, the gifts possibly being from the king's subjects in honor of his victory. Or ... they

may be the spoils of war brought back and divided among the king's subjects ... If this is correct, then the gifts, though *received* from the vanquished, are then *given* (by implication) to the subjects of the conquering king. In this picture of a conquering king bestowing gifts on his people, the ultimate conquering King being God himself, Paul could easily see a theme that would be ultimately realized in the conquering Christ who would bestow gifts upon his people" (Smelser, p. 173).

- 3) The remainder of the psalm speaks of God's gifts/support to His people.
    - a) v. 19 - God "*daily loads us with benefits*" or "*bears us up*" (ESV)
    - b) v. 35 - God "*gives strength and power to His people*"
  - c. Paul sees in this verse a type of Christ in that He too, having ascended and led the captivity [of sin and death] captive, would then shower *His* people with gifts.
  - d. Thus we see that the alteration of the quote is actually an accurate summation of the psalm and makes it aptly applicable to Jesus Christ in His ultimate victory.
    - 1) Ps 68:20 - to God belongs escapes from death
    - 2) Eph 1:20,21 - Jesus overcame death
2. Parenthesis: The idea of Christ ascending means that He descended (vv. 9,10)
- a. This is a very interesting argument because something ascending does *not* necessarily imply that something first descended. As examples:
    - 1) The Ark of the Covenant had *not* first descended Mt. Zion then ascended.
    - 2) One may ascend stairs for the first time without having descended them.
    - 3) One day some will ascend to meet the Lord in the air (1 Th 4:17), yet that does not imply they had first descended from there.
  - b. However, Paul is not arguing that ascension *always* implies that a descent has preceded it. Paul *is* arguing that in the case of the Christ an ascension to heaven necessarily implies a previous descent.
    - 1) This is a testimony to Jesus being deity (implied by applying Ps. 68 to Christ). In the case of deity, an ascension to heaven *does* necessarily imply a descent from heaven.
    - 2) The Son of God, pre-existed in heaven prior to His coming (cf. Jn 1:1-3,10,11,14; 6:62; 16:28)
  - c. His descent was "*into the lower parts of the earth.*"
    - 1) Some see this as only a testimony to the incarnation of the Son (i.e. He came to the earth).
    - 2) Others see it as inclusive of His death on the cross - Php 2:5-11 (i.e. He came to the earth to die).

- 3) Still others see it as inclusive of His descent into the Hadean realm (i.e. He came to the earth to die and defeat death).<sup>2</sup>
- a) Hades is the realm of the dead from which David expected to be raised (Ps 16:10), and Peter affirmed that David's words were prophetic of the Messiah's resurrection from Hades (Ac 2:31).
  - b) Jesus had predicted that the gates of Hades would not prevail over the building of His church (Mt 16:18).
  - c) Jesus told the thief on the cross, "*Today you will be with me in Paradise*" (Lk 23:43).
- d. So, this One who descended to dwell among men and die as a man did *not* remain in the grave. He rose from the dead and has ascended again to the glories of heaven as a victor over death.
- 1) In doing this He led captivity captive.
    - a) Heb 2:14,15 - through death He destroyed
    - b) Rev 1:12-18 - He has the keys of Hades and death.
    - c) 1 Cor 15:54-57 - victory over death
  - 2) He ascended that He might fill all things.
    - a) His ascension to the throne of heaven was an essential step in the process of fulfilling all things. The reign of Christ is to God's glory in that it confirms the success of Christ's mission to Earth (cf. Jn 17:1-5).
    - b) He would send the Holy Spirit.
      - 1. The Spirit would bear witness of Jesus and enable Jesus' apostles to do likewise (Jn 15:26,27).
      - 2. The Spirit would convict the world of sin, of [self-] righteousness, [false] judgment, *and* the ruler of this world would be judged (Jn 16:8-11)<sup>3</sup> (cf. captivity led captive)
      - 3. He would guide Jesus' apostles into all truth (Jn 16:12-15).
      - 4. Peter's eyewitness of the resurrection and ascension combined with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is evidence that Jesus now reigns (Ac 2:32,33).
    - c) Another confirmation was to give gifts to men (Eph 4:8)
    - d) All of this culminates in Christ's body, the church, which is the fulness of Him who fills all in all (Eph 1:23; Col 1:18,19; 2:9).
- e. Why this parenthetical observation about Christ's descent and ascent?
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<sup>2</sup>See Smelser's observations about Paul's quote of Dt 30:12 in Rom 10:7 with reference to the *abyss* (Smelser, p. 178).

<sup>3</sup> See Carson for an elaboration on this convicting work of the Holy Spirit (Carson pp. 534-539).

- 1) Clearly the incarnation of Christ as well as His return to the glory that He once had are both *very* significant realities that have an impact on our theology and worldview.
- 2) Jeff Smelser offers a possible explanation, “We may well ask why this foray into the matters of ascending and descending is necessary when Paul’s point is to connect the description of the conquering king of Psalm 68 with the victorious Jesus. In Colossians, the companion epistle, the Gnostic doctrine is addressed head on. Apparently, at Colossae, this was much needed. Ephesians is written to a broader audience, but an audience that included Colossae (see the Introduction). For the Gnostics, the idea that there could be an identity between the crucified Jesus and the exalted Christ was unthinkable. And so as an aside to his main point, an aside probably having in view the Gnostic doctrine, Paul says, *He himself who descended is also the one who ascended above all the heavens*” (Smelser, p. 178).

#### IV. **Some Specific Gifts of Christ (4:11)**

1. “*And He Himself gave some ...*”
  1. This is a reiteration of the modified quote from Ps 68, “*and gave gifts to men*” (v. 8), with emphasis placed upon the One who ascended (Christ Himself) being the giver of these gifts.
  2. What follows is an abbreviated list of some specific gifts that Christ gave.
    - a. That this list is abbreviated is made evident by two things:
      - 1) In similar contexts in which the body of Christ and gifts are discussed, the list of gifts is much longer and diverse (cf. Rom 12:3-8; 1 Cor 12:1-31).
      - 2) In v. 7 the all inclusive statement “*to each one of us grace was given*” is a general affirmation that all members of the body of Christ are gifted by Him, but clearly not all were specifically one of these gifts.
    - b. In this context the gifts emphasized are *people* in specific roles relative to communicating the word of God.
      - 1) This emphasis strongly implies that teaching the word of God is critical to the unity of the body.
      - 2) So, for all the diversity of gifts and functions, those which convey the word of God, are those which are the most foundational to and critical for the maintenance of unity (cf. 1 Cor 14:1-19).

#### 2. Teaching Gifts

1. Apostles
  - a. Definition & usage
    - 1) one sent forth - In the NT it is used of:
      - a) those sent forth on missions (e.g. Barnabas - Ac 14:14; Titus - 2 Cor 8:23)
      - b) Jesus on his mission to earth (Heb 3:1)
      - c) most often used in reference to those personally selected by Jesus to serve as His apostles (cf. Mk 3:14; Ac 1:2)

- 2) In Ephesians it is used three times prior to this:
  - a) 1:1 - Paul calls himself an apostle of Jesus Christ.
  - b) 2:20 - the members of the house of God are built upon the apostles.
  - c) 3:5 - the mystery was revealed to [Christ's] holy apostles
  - d) Thus, context suggests that the *apostles* in 4:11 are apostles of Jesus.<sup>4</sup>

b. Foundational gifts for unity of the body

- 1) the foundation of the apostles was what they were specifically sent forth to teach concerning Jesus being the Son of God and Christ crucified and raised (cf. Mt 16:18).
- 2) They were chosen by Jesus and sent forth by Him with authority to lay a foundation on which others could build (cf. 1 Cor 3:10).
- 3) The revelation of the mystery was crucial to the laying of the foundation of the house or temple of God because it pertained to the fact that Gentiles would be fellow heirs of the same body (Eph 3:5,6).
- 4) As inspired men with the authority given them by Jesus Christ, they were a critical gift to the building up of the body because foundations are crucial to the building of anything.
- 5) The apostles remain as gifts to the present as the church has continued grow.
  - a) We still need the foundation that they gave their lives to lay.
  - b) The Holy Spirit who inspired them with the answers to the mystery and numerous other issues has seen fit to preserve their foundational teaching to this very day so that we in this time can be sure to build on the same foundation thereby maintaining unity.

2. Prophets

a. Definition & usage

- 1) one who speaks forth the mind and counsel of God (cf. 2 Pt 1:19-21)
- 2) Used in the NT to refer to the prophets of the OT (e.g. Rom 1:2; 3:21) as well as those so gifted by Jesus (e.g. 1 Cor 12:28,29).
- 3) In Ephesians it is used twice prior to this:
  - a) 2:20 - the members of the house of God are built upon the prophets
  - b) 3:5 - refers to His [Christ's] holy prophets.
  - c) all three uses are in conjunction with apostles

b. Foundational gifts for unity of the body

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<sup>4</sup> Hoehner believes it is *not* a reference to the office of Jesus' apostles, but others gifted with apostolic duties (e.g. Barnabas, James, Apollos, and many more unnamed (cf. 1 Cor 15:7) (Hoehner, pp. 134,135,541,542).

- 1) Jesus had said that he would send apostles and prophets whom the Jews would persecute as their forefathers had done (Lk 11:49).
  - 2) this role was crucial as Scripture was being written (2 Pt 1:19-21)
  - 3) Thus, the contexts would suggest that the prophets Paul is mentioning throughout this epistle were *then* modern prophets whose work coincided with the work of the apostles to form the foundation of the temple of God.
    - a) Just as every building continues to need its foundation, we still need the foundation that these prophets were inspired to reveal/write.
    - b) However, the foundation of the apostles and prophets has been laid and no other is needed anymore than another cornerstone (Christ) is needed.
3. Evangelists
- a. Definition & usage
    - 1) a messenger of good news
    - 2) only two other times in scripture (Philip - Ac 21:8; Timothy - 2 Tim 4:5).
  - b. As ongoing gifts given for the unity of the body
    - 1) 2 Tim 4:2 reveals the work of an evangelist.
      - a) It is to preach the word in season and out of season.
      - b) It includes convicting, rebuking, and exhorting with longsuffering.
      - c) It requires vigilance because people will tire of sound doctrine and surround themselves with those who preach what they *want* to hear rather than what they *need* to hear (vv. 3-5).
    - 2) Evangelists are those who dedicate themselves to the proclamation of the gospel and as such are an ongoing part of the spread of the gospel.
      - a) It is through preaching that God saw fit to save (1 Cor 1:21).
      - b) God intended the message to be spread from the foundation of the apostles to the work of evangelists who in turn commit these things to faithful men who teach others. This generational spread is an ongoing need (2 Tim 2:2).
4. Pastors & Teachers
- a. Definition & usage
    - 1) *Pastor* - a shepherd of a flock; used as a metaphor for men who shepherd (feed and tend) souls
    - 2) *Teacher* - one who gives instruction
    - 3) There is a debate among grammarians over whether or not these are two separate gifts or whether *teacher* is descriptive of the *pastors* work.
      - a) This list of roles follows a pattern which differs with *teachers*, and to some this suggests that in this context it is the role of pastor that is primarily under consideration with specific reference to his teaching.
      - b) To Smelser this is significant because of his understanding of what is meant by "*the work of ministry*" (v. 12). He believes that based on

context the *ministry* is specifically “*the ministry of the word*” as distinct from other kinds of ministries such as the care of widows (cf. Acts 6:1-4). (see below)

1. He writes, “Now this sheds some light on why Paul used two words [shepherds and teachers] for one category. The work of shepherds extends beyond teaching, but Paul meant to highlight their work as teachers in this particular passage because it would be through that work, shared with apostles, prophets, and evangelists, that an understanding of how to walk worthily and a resulting unity could be achieved” (Smelser, p. 182).
2. Yet, why are pastors named if *all* he meant to emphasize was their role as teachers? Why not just use *teachers* (as he does in 1 Cor 12:28) which would necessarily include pastors (because while not all teachers are pastors, all pastors are teachers)?
- c) Teaching fits very well with the role of pastor as shepherding is the job of an overseer of a local congregation (1 Pt 5:1-3; Ac 20:28).
  1. Among other things, he is required to be able to teach (1 Tim 3:2).
  2. For the protection of his flock, he is also to be able to resist and convict those who contradict sound teaching (Tit 1:9-11).
  3. For some it will be their full-time occupation (1 Timothy 5:17).
- b. As ongoing gifts for the unity of the body
  - 1) I too see *pastors and teachers* as referring to one role in this context.
    - a) I agree that the pastoral role of teaching is emphasized because it is fundamental to maintaining unity.
    - b) Yet, *pastor* is included to *also* emphasize responsibility and leadership in the development of those under their oversight.
      1. As acknowledged, tending the flock involves more than teaching.
      2. Shepherding involves leadership which includes example, guidance, urging to love and good works, and training others to use their gifts to serve in order to maintain unity with Christ.
  - 2) While oversight is limited to the flock of which elders are a part (1 Pt 5:2), the work they do in shepherding benefits the entire body (cf. Ac 20:28).
    - a) Though an evangelist never addresses the whole body, his work benefits the body as it benefits its members. So it is with pastors.
    - b) Additionally, local churches under the oversight of good pastors send forth evangelists (e.g. 1 Tim 4:14) beyond the local congregation —again for the growth and benefit of the body (cf. Php 1;1; 4:15-19).

## V. The Purpose of the Gifts (4:12-16)

1. “*for the equipping of the saints*”

1. *equipping*

a. This is the only NT usage of the noun form.



- b. However, Paul uses the verb form in a variety of contexts from restoring (Gal 6:1) to improving (1 Th 3:10; 2 Cor 13:9) to uniting saints (1 Cor 1:10).
2. Two possibilities for three prepositional phrases (v. 12)
- a. A three-fold purpose of the gifts that Christ gave: 1) For equipping saints 2) For the work of ministry 3) For the edifying of the body.<sup>5</sup>
- 1) “In three prepositional phrases, Paul explains what is to be accomplished by the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. . . . It is important to see that all three accomplishments . . . are attributed directly to the apostles, *et al*” (Smelser, pp. 180,181).
  - 2) Later Smelser explains why he believes this is important, “In Ephesians 4.12, the service is part of that process that leads to the ‘unity of the faith,’ to being ‘no longer tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine,’ to ‘speaking the truth in love.’ The kind of ministry that leads to this result is the kind that especially characterizes the work of the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. It is teaching. It is ‘the ministry of the word,’ as in Acts 6.4” (Smelser, p. 182).
- b. One primary purpose with a progression for equipping the saints to do the work of ministry with the result being the edifying of the body.
- 1) “The progression indicates, therefore, that he gave gifted people for the immediate purpose of preparing all the saints with the goal of preparing them for the work of ministry, which in turn has the final goal of building up the body of Christ. This eliminates the distinction between clergy and laity, a distinction with little, if any, support in the NT” (Hoehner, p. 549).
  - 2) “The three prepositional phrases in this verse are not coordinate one with another . . . the second and third phrases are dependent on the first, as indicated by their being introduced by a different preposition from the first” (Bruce, 349).
  - 3) “The purpose of the gifts clearly is stated. They were given for (*pros*) the perfecting of the saints. When the saints are equipped, the perfected saints are motivated by it unto (*eis*) the work of ministering, and thus unto (*eis*) the building up of the body of Christ” (Caldwell, p. 178).
  - 4) Many who hold the progression position seek to support it with a grammatical argument based on the change of prepositions used. However, Smelser demonstrates how that grammatical argument is not itself conclusive (Smelser, p. 183). However, inconclusive is not the same as incorrect.

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<sup>5</sup> This three-fold purpose is not to be confused with arguments which assert that this text identifies the three-fold “work of the church” by which many mean “the local church.” In the past, Ephesians 4:12 was popularly mis-used by those opposed to “institutionalism” as a proof-text to concisely delineate the work of local churches (e.g. Cogdill, pp. 10-13; Jackson, pp. 13,14). However, nothing contextually suggests Paul is outlining the work of local churches. He is entirely focused on the “one body” and the unity found therein facilitated by gifts Christ has given. While we *must* turn to Scripture to derive the authorized work of local churches, we must not misappropriate Scripture even to support an otherwise correct conclusion. See Smelser’s “An Excursus on Ephesians 4:12” for a fuller elaboration.

- c. Shane Scott offers a good summary statement of the two views. “On the one hand, the parallel structure of the three clauses in verse 12 would suggest that all three functions are done by the same group of people (the apostles, et al.). On the other hand, this text began with the clear assertion that serving grace was given ‘to each one of us’ (3.7) [sic], and therefore all saints are involved in the work of ministry, equipped by the teaching of the apostles et al. Regardless of the correct translation, even if Paul meant that the apostle, prophets, and so on do the work of ministry rather than equipping the saints to do the work of ministry, this passage in no way endorses a *clergy-laity* distinction among God’s people. All of God’s people have work to do for His kingdom using the abilities He has given (1 Pet. 4.10-11)” (Scott, pp. 66,67).
  - d. I lean toward the *progression* view because I believe it better fits the overall context of maintaining the unity of the Spirit.
    - 1) Yes, apostles *et al* also ministered because that is the role of all saints.
    - 2) The reason that Christ gave the gifts of the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors/teachers was to fully prepare the saints for ministry and thereby edify the body of Christ.
3. “for the work of ministry”
- a. *ministry*
    - 1) *service* - from the Greek word from which we get our word *deacon*.
    - 2) It is a work of service to which all are variously called in the body of Christ.
  - b. Service is the work of all saints, each and every saint.
    - 1) Mt 20:25-28 - Christ came not to be served, but to serve, and as His disciples, we are to follow His example of service.
    - 2) Heb 6:9-12 - service was the work of these saints, and they are encouraged to press on in growth and service as things that accompany salvation.
    - 3) 1 Pt 4:9-11
      - a) The gifts, talents, abilities and roles that have been given to us are to be used for service to one another.
      - b) Our speaking is harmonious with God’s word, our service is with God-given ability, thus, whether speaking or serving, God is glorified.
    - 4) 1 Cor 12:4-6 - Note the use of Spirit, Lord, and God as in Eph 4:4-6.
  - c. Smelser observes, “ Our understanding of who performs the work of ministry that Paul has in mind—whether apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, or on the other hand, those perfected by their efforts—will partly be determined by the sort of ministry we imagine” (Smelser, p. 181).
    - 1) He then proceeds to acknowledge and document both the broader use of the word *ministry* as well as the more specific use of *ministry* as teaching and suggests that this latter teaching ministry (“‘ministry of the word,’ as in Ac 6:4”) is contextually the kind meant (see Smelser p. 182).
    - 2) I am inclined to agree with that assessment. It *does* appear that Paul’s emphasis in Ephesians *is* upon *teaching* of the gospel as the specific ministry in mind.

- a) However, this does not tip the scale to “*the work of ministry*” being a reference to *only* the aforementioned apostles *et al* and not the saints.
- b) Thus, I affirm that the apostles *et al* were given by Christ to equip the saints for the work of ministering *in the word*.
  - 1. 2 Tim 2:1,2 is an explicit example of this progression.
  - 2. Heb 5:12 suggests a general expectation of growing to teach.
  - 3. Teaching is “*one another activity*” - Col 3:16.
  - 4. Indeed, even some of those who were chosen to “*serve tables*” in contrast to “*the ministry of the word*” soon found themselves involved in the latter (cf. Ac 6-8).
- 4. “*for the edifying of the body of Christ*”
  - a. The goal of the equipping of the saints is the edifying of the body.
  - b. The means to that end is not *only* found in equipping, but in the work of ministry as well. Saints are equipped to serve and thereby edification results.
  - c. All of this contributes to and works together for the maintenance of unity.
  - d. That equipping saints to do the work of ministry to edify the body *is* what is meant is confirmed by its reiteration at the close of this section when it states that the growth and edification of the body is accomplished by “*what every joint supplies ... by which every part does its share*” - vs. 16.<sup>6</sup>
- 2. “*till we all come to the unity of the faith*”
  - 1. “*We all*” refers to the saints which comprise the body of Christ.
  - 2. “*The faith*” is the “*one faith*” of v. 5.
    - a. It is the basis on which *we all* can be unified.
    - b. It includes an understanding of the knowledge of the Son of God, which is likely the mystery of Eph 3:3-11 and Col 2:2,3.
    - c. The purpose of the gifts that Christ gave to the church is to bring each member of the body to a common understanding of His will.
  - 3. “*to a perfect man*”
    - a. Is this *perfect man* a status in reference to individual saints or the body of Christ?
      - 1) Much to commend that it refers to individual saints maturing.
        - a) Spiritual maturity in contrast to being children/immature (v.14).
        - b) Perhaps most significantly is Paul’s use of this word in Colossians 1:28; 3:14; 4:12.

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<sup>6</sup> Consider Smelser’s acknowledgment of the meaning of v. 16 - (Smelser, p. 182, n. 14).

- c) It is not God's will for any to remain spiritual infants (Heb 5:12-6:1).
- d) Thus, it is asserted, the purpose of the gifts that Christ gave to the church is to bring each member of the body to maturity.
- 2) However, the context suggests that the *perfect man* is the body of Christ.
  - a) This is suggested by the number (singular) and gender (male) used.
  - b) The "*we all*" corresponds to the "*saints*" (v. 12) which corresponds to "*each one*" (v. 7) whereas "*a perfect man*" which is equated with "*the measure of the fullness of Christ*" (cf. v. 7) corresponds to "*the body of Christ*" (v. 12; cf. 1:23; 3:19-21; 4:10).
- 3) Yet, Paul is not speaking of when *the body of Christ* would be perfected, but when "*we all*" come to the perfection only found in the body of Christ.
  - a) We attain that by being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets (cf. 2:20-22)
  - b) "Just as our physical bodies attain maturity, but individual cells continue to be produced and nourished to maturity, so it is with the Lord's church. It remains for each of us to grow up into Him" (Smelser, FC Lecture, p. 138).
- b. It is important for us to understand that the unity of the Spirit (v. 3) and the unity of the faith (v. 13) is only found in the body of Christ and we must come to Him.
  - 1) cf. 2:14-16 - Christ is our peace and he created "*one new man*" of Jews and Gentiles reconciled to God in one body, *a full-grown man*.
  - 2) Again, this is the status of what Christ has accomplished whether or not we come to Him. However, if we want to enjoy the blessings of Christ, then we must come to Him and therefore walk worthily.
- 3. "*that we should no longer be children ...*"
  - 1. This refers to the purpose of the teaching gifts in a negative way, "*that we should no longer*"
    - a. *We* again refers to saints in general
    - b. "*should no longer*" presents a contrast with having "*a walk worthy of the calling with which you were called*" (v. 1).
      - 1) He is going to further elaborate on how we should no longer walk as the world walks with specific examples and applications (4:17ff).
      - 2) Yet, here the concern is not first with the worldly lifestyles, but the problems of ignorance and immaturity.
  - 2. What he means by *children* is clearly delineated:
    - a. "*tossed to and fro and carried about by every wind of doctrine*"
      - 1) As we can we literally pick up children, hang them upside down, twirl them, and find perverse enjoyment in watching them attempt to walk a straight line, so we can do this with their minds with teasing and jokes and such like.
      - 2) Children are easily confused by the myriad of messages they are given, and in their aim to please they can be quite open and gullible to anything and everything suggested to them.

- b. *“by the trickery of men”*
    - 1) We all have little games that involve sleight of hand and other tricks wherein it is easy to impress and confuse the immature.
    - 2) So Satan and his minions major in *“cunning craftiness by which they lie in wait to deceive”* (cf. Gen 3:1-5; 2 Cor 11:13-15).
  - c. While there are childlike characteristics that are good for us to retain we are to *“not be children in understanding ... in understanding be mature”* (1 Cor 14:20).
  - d. The purpose of the gifts that Christ gave to the church is to bring each member of the body to maturity *in Him* so that we can resist evil and stand firmly for truth.
    - 1) Those who do not grow are spiritually unstable, unreliable, and swayed by the fads of men whether carnal or that which masquerades as spiritual.
    - 2) Where this failure to mature leads is illustrated by Paul in 1 Cor 3:1-4.
4. *“but speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head”*
- 1. Speaking the truth in love is presented as a contrast to the deceitful wiles of evil as a means of persuading men, including ourselves.
  - 2. Key to growth is truth (1 Pt 2:1,2) and that is what Christ’s gifts to the church provide.
    - a. Caution: our presentation of truth must be in love or we are nothing (1 Cor 13:2).
    - b. Truth in love brings growth in Christ and willing submission to Him as head.
  - 3. Christ is the head of the body.
    - a. This reiteration of the body imagery from v. 12 bookends this section on the purpose of the gifts Christ has given.
    - b. The growth of individual saints and their subsequent ability to resist evil and stand for truth causes the growth of the body.
      - 1) The one body of Christ is joined and knit together by what every joint (saint) supplies.
      - 2) This participation in unity is according to the effective working in which every part (saint) does its share (in the work of ministry) through the gifts supplied by Christ (v. 7).
      - 3) The individual saint’s effort to speak the truth in love and thereby grow with Christ as head causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.
      - 4) This is what the saints are equipped to do by heeding the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers (vv. 11,12).

## Conclusion:

Christ has given each of us all we need to be fully equipped for service in His body. Now it is our responsibility to grow under the influence of these gifts. The essential words of the divinely inspired apostles and prophets have been preserved for us to this day. The message they revealed and the doctrine they taught with Jesus as the chief cornerstone remain the foundation upon which we are to continue building (2:20-22). We all have what we need to fully know Jesus and be united with others in the one faith (4:5,13). God’s word is able to bring us to spiritual maturity in Christ’s body. This will enable each of us to

stand firm against the deceitful winds of error “*and having done all, to stand*” (6:13). “*Each one of us*” (4:7) has a function in the body of Christ and a contribution we can make toward the strengthening of others in the word (4:12). The body will continue in good health, but each of us must strive “*to have a walk worthy of the calling with which [we] were called*” (4:1) in order to remain a part of that ever-growing body of Christ (cf. Jn 15:1-8; Rom 11:21,22) and not face “*the wrath of God*” (5:6).

Andy Diestelkamp  
323 E Indiana Ave, Pontiac, Illinois 61764  
[andydiestelkamp@gmail.com](mailto:andydiestelkamp@gmail.com)

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EndLesson4

## OLD MAN / NEW MAN *Scott Smelser*

**TEXT: Eph. 4:17-5:21**

### **Introduction:**

A. Jesus died for sinners, the righteous one sacrificed for the children of wrath. He died for the prostitutes, the drunkards, and the thieves. He died for the malicious, the unforgiving, and the covetous. But he didn't die for them so they could continue to prostitute, get drunk, or steal, nor be malicious, covetous or unforgiving. Yes, he redeems us from our sins, he also calls us out of that darkness and into marvelous light.

The first half of Ephesians is about God's plan, and our need, of redemption. The second half of Ephesians (beginning at 4:1) is about walking worthy in light of that great calling. Not that our record is worthy, for like the lost son coming home as a failure out of the pigsty, we also are not 'worthy' to be called God's sons.

But when the Father offers unmerited mercy, forgiveness, and even elevation to son status, it is clearly our privilege and duty to turn from those paths of darkness and walk worthily in our calling. Not because we deserve his grace (Luke 17.11), but because his grace deserves our gratitude (2 Cor. 5:15).

#### ***Illustration:***

*Twin brothers: One is healthy; he eats right, exercises daily, takes care of himself. The other is the opposite, and his organs are failing from a wasted lifetime of substance abuse. The healthy brother is in an accident, and his dying wish is for his corrupt brother to receive his healthy and life saving organs, and for his corrupt brother to live a changed life. Q: Does the drunkard crackhead deserve a spotless new liver? Perfect kidneys? A strong healthy heart? No.(Luke 15:21). But with unmerited grace on the table, what is the hope of all who loved the donor brother? Of all who love the derelict brother? And what is the duty of the derelict? That he continue in sin, that grace may "abound"? Or to be moved by grace, live a renewed life, and walk worthily in light of his brother's life saving gift?*

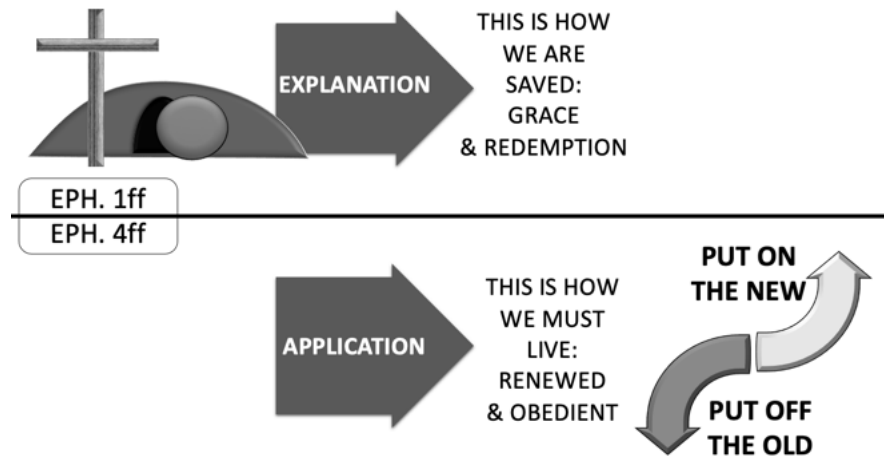
B. Much confusion, doctrinal misrepresentation, and disobedience has resulted from people making simplistic assumptions from what Paul writes about grace (in the first part of his letters), and not taking seriously what he says about obedience (in the second half of his letters).

#### 1. The structure:

In both Ephesians & Romans esp(and somewhat in Col. & Gal.), the pattern is:

- a. PART ONE- EXPLANATION: this is why you need God, and what God has done to save you

- b. PART TWO - APPLICATION: this is how you should live. [Eph. 4.1ff; cf. Rom. 12.1ff.]



c.

2. The misconception:

Since the Reformation, there has been a tendency to relegate the application instructions (how we are to live) to a desired-option status. In other words, God prefers that you live righteously, but he doesn't demand that you live righteously. Having been saved by grace, not our works, submission and obedience are seen as requests, not requirements. This misconception has involved or led to both:

a. abuses and disrespect of grace

- 1.) doing despite to the spirit of grace [Heb.10:29]
- 2.) grieving the Spirit [Eph. 4:30]
- 3.) cf.. Mt. 18:32-35: you wicked servant ...should you not also have had mercy?

b. An assumption that grace and faith make submission optional.

- 1.) Rom. 3&4 and Eph. 2 make clear that salvation is by grace, not by our works [cf.Tt.3:5].

But they are inaccurately taken to mean not only that works do not save, but that they are thereby unnecessary. This is not what Paul, John, Peter, or Jesus were saying. Note:

- a.) Redeemed by works? No: Eph. 2.8; Rom.3; Gal. 2
- b.) Judged by works? Yes:  
Paul: Rm.2:6; Peter: 1Ptr. 2:15; John: Rev. 20:12; Jesus: Mt.: 25.31ff).
- c.) The unforgiven cannot survive judgment by works, for their sins are not removed.



Those saved by grace can survive judgment by works, for their sin is washed away.

d.) In Eph. 5:3-6 Paul also makes it clear here that obedience is not optional: “sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints... For **you may be sure of this**, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous... **has no inheritance** in the kingdom of Christ and God. **Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.**” [Eph 5:3, 5-6 ESV]

3. Jesus is both Lord and Savior. As Savior, we cannot save ourselves, we must trust in him. And as Lord, we must not serve ourselves, we must serve him. Let us walk worthy of that calling.

## WALKING WORTHILY (generally) [4:17-24]

1. No longer walk (cf. 1Ptr.4:3; Titus 3:3):
  1. in vanity (Luke 15:13)
  2. in darkened understanding (cf. Prov. 1-4)
  3. alienated from God (Gen. 3; Isa. 59:1-2; Eph. 2:12)
  4. because of hardened hearts (Ps. 95:7; Ac.17:51)
    - a. past feeling (calloused, 1 Tim. 4:2),
    - b. given up to lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness
2. But you did not so learn in Christ
  1. That you put away the old man (cf. Luke 9:23; Gal. 2:20; Rom.6:)
  2. Be renewed in the spirit of your mind (cf. Col. 3:1-3)
  3. Put on the new man (cf. John 3:5; 2Cor. 5:15,17)

***Illustration:** You’ve seen the before-and-after detergent commercials. You see the child playing in the dirt, getting his clothes filthy. The mom holds up the clothes, puts in the detergent, and the commercial ends with the clothes coming out fresh and clean. That is the purpose of washing clothes. What would be the point if the before and after picture are the same? What are we saying to the world if our “new” man is still acting and looking like our “old” man; if we, like the proverbial pig, after being cleansed, return to wallowing in the mire? (2 Ptr. 2:22)*

## WALKING WORTHILY (specifically):

## A. Honesty

Put away lying (cf. the list of abominations in Prov. 6: 2x)

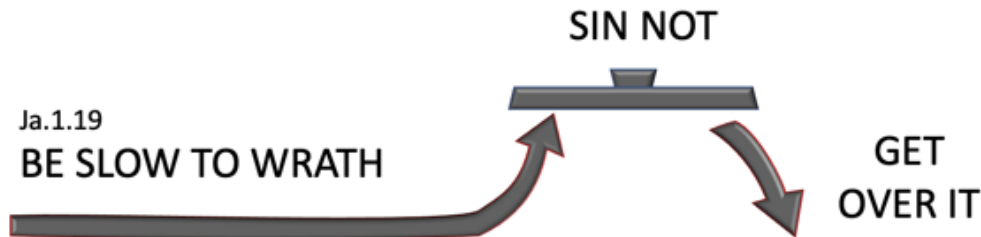
Put on speaking the truth

1. with brethren (we are members one of another, which is what the text here addresses)
2. but also with outsiders (Mt.7:12; cf. Mt.5:46-47); which includes the IRS (Rm.13:7; Mt. 22:21)

## B. Anger

Paul does not say all anger is wrong, all the time (cf. Jesus in Mark 3:5). But like flammable fuel, it needs to be handled carefully, and kept where it should be kept. Combining Eph. 4:26; “be angry and sin not, let not the sun go down on your wrath,” with James 1:19 (and Proverbs); be “slow to wrath,” we can note three important things about anger:

1. Be slow to anger (Ja. 1:19; Pr. 16:32)
2. While angry, do not sin (Eph.4:26); i.e.; don’t lose control
3. Don’t let the sun go down on your wrath (Eph. 4:26)

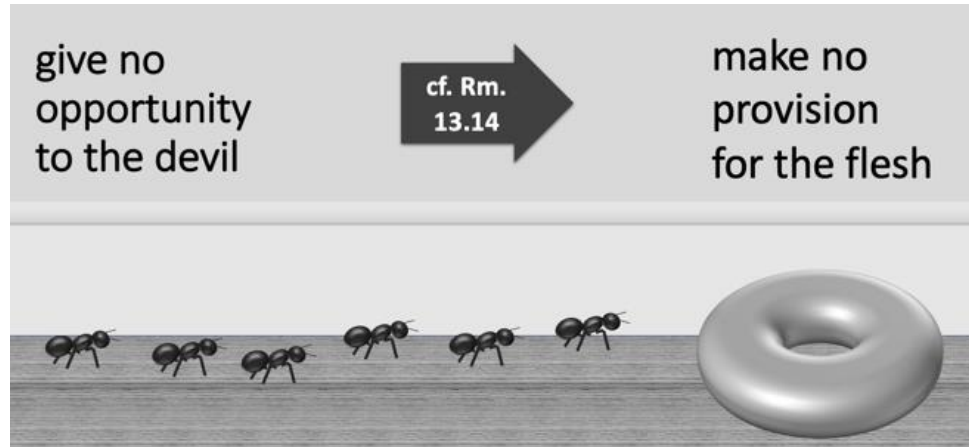


We can err by being short fused (violation of principle 1), err by losing our heads when angry (violation of principle 2), or err by holding on to anger (violation of principle 3), which becomes toxic.

## C. “Neither give place to the devil.” (Eph. 4:27).

1. This statement, in the text, follows the warnings on unrighteous anger. But the principle is very significant and merits much wider application. Compare similarly in Rm.13:14; “make not provision for the flesh”.

2. **Illustration:** *If you drop sugar on the floor, don’t be surprised when you get ants, for you made provision for them. If you leave tuna on the porch, don’t be surprised when you “get a cat,” for you made provision for it.* Stop and consider temptations and challenges we have failed at. Were we resisting the devil, and he fled from us (Ja. 4.7)? Or were we giving place to the devil? Were we making provision for the flesh? This is very important, and if we don’t walk away from anything else from this chapter, let’s remember this.



**D.Acquisitions:**

Notice the transition from selfishness to unselfishness

1. He that stole: Selfish, disrespectful and intentionally harmful to others for his own benefit
2. The laborer who provides only for himself. He is not taking from others. He is providing for himself. But he is selfish, and disregarding of others (cf. the rich fool in Lk. 12:16-21).
3. The new man in Christ: he labors, and provides for himself, and for those in need.

**E. Communication**

(cf. Prov. 18:19, the power of life and death are in the tongue)

Put away corrupt speech

Put on “such as is good for edifying as the need may be, that it may give grace to them that hear”

**F. Exhortation:**

“Grieve not the Holy Spirit, in who you were sealed unto the day of redemption.” Do not disrespect the grace we’ve been called into (again, Heb. 10:29; Mt. 22:21)

**G.Attitudes and behaviors**

put away: bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, railings

put on:kindness, being tender hearted, being forgiving (as exemplified by God forgiving us in Christ)

**H Immorality:**

fornication, all uncleanness, covetousness; filthiness,

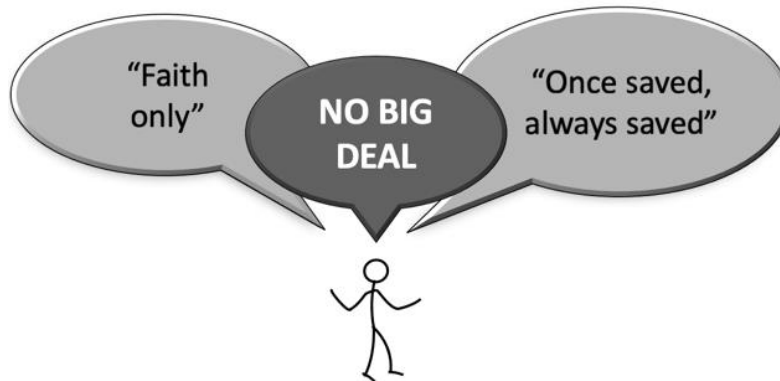
put away: foolish talking, jesting which are not befitting

.....put on:Giving of thanks

## I WARNING:

[Eph 5:5-6 ESV] **For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. 6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.**

1. No inheritance. Not: “fewer jewels in your crown.” Not: “rusty old halo, skinny white cloud, second hand wings full of patches, rusty old halo, skinny white cloud, robe so wooly that it scratches.” No inheritance.
2. **LET NO MAN DECEIVE YOU WITH EMPTY WORDS**
  - a. Creedal deceptions:
    - 1.) “faith only” [cf. Jn. 12.42, Rom.1:5; 16:26; Rom. 6)
    - 2.) “once saved always saved” (see [3minutebiblestudy.com](http://3minutebiblestudy.com) on OSAS)



- b. self made excuses and deceptions: (cf. James 1.22,26; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; cf also Mt. 7:21 & 1Jn. 1:6)



3. Light vs. Darkness:
 

“Therefore do not become partners with them; for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of

darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

- a. Pr. 4:18-19: The way of the wicked is like deep darkness; they do not know over what they stumble [ESV]
- b. 1 John 1:6-7: what is the difference in these two men? One walks in darkness. One walks in light.  
 1) Notice, it is not that the man in 1Jn.1.7 never sins (1Jn.1:8-9). But sin is not where he walks.

**Illustration #1:** *Two boys walking to school decide to walk on the curb. The first boy walks on the curb. His walk is not perfect. From time to time he may stumble, and his foot falls in the gutter. But the gutter is not where he wants to walk, and he refuses to stay there. Like Peter, he gets back up, and he walks on the curb. The other boy falls in the gutter, and prefers the gutter. He is not repentant. He doesn't get back up. He continues where he is. The first boy corresponds to the brother who walks in the light, who confesses his sins, and who walks in the light. The second boy corresponds to the brother who walks in darkness.*

**Illustration #2** *A pest may infiltrate our house. But there is an important difference between how we treat pests and pets. One is an unwelcome intruder not to be tolerated. The other is allowed and provided for.*



**J. Using our time wisely**

(cf. Col. 4:5; cf. also the slothful servant the buried his talent, Matt. 25)

**K. ELEVATION: WINE VS. SINGING**

- 1 Put away: being drunk with wine
- Put on: being filled with the Spirit, speaking one to another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs

- a. Both of these heighten the mood, and effect brain chemistry
- b. One produces riot. One produces praise in thanksgiving.

Note on *psallo*: This audience will be familiar with discussions relative to the general transition over time of the verb *psallo* from pluck, to play, to sing. But as is often the case, general realities can get over stated, and this is certainly true in discussions of biblical terms. Regarding *psallo*, I would recommend to the reader that he consult the notes in Jeff Smelser’s commentary on Ephesians, Walking Worthily, for the discussion there on the use of *psallo*, both here and elsewhere. While noting the recognized evolution of the word: “We need not doubt that the word was well on the way to meaning merely ‘sing,’ and that this was the meaning in most of its NT occurrences,” the author also gives clear examples from later 1st and 2nd century usage that *psallo* was still also being used in the older sense of “play.” Also, drawing from similarities from Psalms (in the LXX) where a particular instrument is called to be played, he makes a case that: “The similarity to the language of Psalm 32.2 and 146.7 suggests that in Ephesians 5.19, Paul uses the word *psallo* in the older sense of playing an instrument, and then identifies the heart as that instrument.” (Walking Worthily, pg. 230).

Note the chap. numeration diff. of 1 from those references in the LXX, so in Psa 33:2 in our English Bibles: “make melody to him with the harp of ten strings!” [ESV]. And indeed, in Eph. 5.19, Paul has already employed another verb for “sing” before the next phrase: “make melody... with your heart.” Note also that this instruction fits well in the nature and distinctions between the OT scriptures and the NT scriptures, as seen in the chart below.

← OLD		NEW →		
TEMPLE:	PHYSICAL	TEMPLE:	SPIRITUAL	1Pt. 2.5
TERRITORY:	LAND	TERRITORY:	HEART	1P.3.15
WARFARE:	PHYSICAL	WARFARE:	SPIRITUAL	2C. 10.4
SACRIFICES:	ANIMAL	SACRIFICES:	LIVING	Rm.12.2
CIRCUMCISION:	FLESH	Be circumcised:	in HEART	Rm.2.29
Sing & play:	INSTRUMENTS	sing & make melody:	in HEART	Ep. 5.19

### L Subjecting yourselves one to another (5:21).

A proud look is the first of the 6, yea 7 abominations. The first 3 beatitudes all deal with humility. To come to Christ we must first “deny self” (Luke 9:23). Let greatness be found in service. May those who

exalt themselves continue to be humbled, and may the humble be exalted: *"You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."* [Mat 20:25-28 ESV]. May the first be last, and the last be first, and may there be no "old man" of Diotrephes be found among us.

Scott Smelser  
P.O.box 592 Arendtsville PA 17303  
[sbsmelser@comcast.net](mailto:sbsmelser@comcast.net)

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EndLesson5



## God and the Family *Justin Brewer*

### Introduction:

Our core text for this time period will be Ephesians 5:22-6:4. In this passage, the Apostle Paul instructed those who would raise godly families on their respective roles; husbands and fathers, wives and mothers, and children. Especially important is the connection between those roles and their individual relationship with God. While the in-depth explanations from the original Greek will be left to better equipped men, the approach taken during this hour will be the examination of the original passage and the practical application of it to a Christian family.

Raising a godly family is of the utmost importance. Further, the fundamental methods required to lead/raise a godly family remain unchanged by time period, location, culture, governments, and/or politics. Focusing our families on God is to be the number one priority of every single Christian, which is a principle that is accentuated even in the passages that discuss the qualifications of elders and their wives (reference 1 Timothy 3:1-7 & Titus 1:5-16). While the world offers advice of all manners on the topic of the family, none of it is worthwhile when compared to the instruction found in the Word of God.

On this topic, Irven Lee (1976) wrote:

Let us remember that God has spoken in matters that relate to the home and make it our daily motto to go by the Bible whether we are talking about the woman's place, the man's place, or the child's place. Let the psychologists and the philosophers say what they will, let us believe that what God has said about marriage through His Son nearly two thousand years ago is just as up to date now as the sun and moon are up to date. We do not need to change the law of God, because it is the perfect law (p. 13-14).

The sentiment expressed here clearly denounces the so-called "wisdom" of this world (reference 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:16) and places complete faith in the revealed will and instruction of the Lord God Almighty.

Our approach within this time period will be based partially upon the words of the Apostle Paul found in Titus 2:1-8 where we read the following:

*But as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine: that the older men be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in the faith, in love, in patience; the older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things – **that they admonish** the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own*

*husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed. **Likewise**, exhort the young men to be sober-minded, in all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you.*<sup>42</sup>

In this passage, the Apostle Paul established that older Christian men and women are to teach the younger, and that even Titus was to teach his fellow young men through his own example. From passages such as this, we learn two very important principles: 1.) learn from older Christians, and 2.) teach/learn from good examples. On the other hand, passages such as 1 Kings 12:1-15 illustrate why going to the inexperienced an ungodly will result in dire consequences (see also 1 Kings 12:16-20).

With these principles and passages in mind, let us consider briefly the approach that we will take today. As Jesus responded to Satan numerous times with “It is written<sup>43</sup>,” we will look first to the words of God because they were recorded by inspiration by the Apostle Paul in Ephesians. In addition to this examination, we will also follow the words of Paul in Titus 2:1-8 and will review the advice and teachings of faithful Christians that have raised or are in the middle of raising good, godly families.

The core text:

*Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.*

*Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.*

*Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.” Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.*<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Titus 2:1-8 (ESV)

<sup>43</sup> Matthew 4:1-11

<sup>44</sup> Ephesians 5:22-6:4 (ESV).

## The Background:

- 1) The Apostle Paul's discussion of familial roles is predicated first upon the Christian's role; therefore, husbands and wives are to be Christians first, and then they raise their children within that context. The submission of wives to their husbands, husbands to Christ/God, and children to their parents is all based upon the principles established within the epistle of Ephesians.
  - (i) The New Man – Ephesians 4:17-24
  - (ii) Living as the New Man – Ephesians 4:25-32
  - (iii) Walking in Love (as imitators) – Ephesians 5:1-7
  - (iv) Walking in Light – Ephesians 5:8-14
  - (v) Walking in Wisdom – Ephesians 5:15-21
  
- 2) If Christians are living righteously, then they will adhere to the familial requirements laid out by the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 5:22-6:4. How are they to do so? By becoming the “new man,” living as a “new man,” and walking in love, light, and wisdom. Therefore, Ephesians 5:22-6:4 is the logical progression of those qualities as they apply to our relationships within the family. Likewise, the Apostle Paul established the same basic principles in Colossians 3:1-25; if we are truly converted and have become like Christ, then our personal preferences are of no matter. We submit ourselves fully to His will, which means that we are willing to submit to one another, especially within the family.

## To Wives & Mothers:

- 1) The Apostle Paul began this section of the Ephesian letter by addressing wives about being in submission to their husbands.
  - i) This is not a popular passage or concept in 2021 America
  - ii) All too often, it is even unpopular within the body of Christ
    - (a) How often do Christians seek to explain away this passage, along with similar passages, in order to placate the feelings of the world rather than simply trusting that God knows best?
  - iii) On this topic, Lee (1976) wrote, “The Bible does not change with the changing of philosophy and the reasoning of psychologists. The Bible is right and has always been right” and also that we “do not have to wonder if that [*God's instruction for submission –JB*] is appropriate or if it is out of date. It may not be in harmony with the thinking of some of the political figures of our day, but when Heaven speaks there is wisdom behind what is said” (p. 52).
  - iv) More importantly, God, through the prophet Isaiah, wrote/said, “*For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven*

*and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to Me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it” (Isaiah 55:8-11).*

- (a) God’s word will always accomplish His goal(s). Will we submit and reap the benefits, or will we rebel and reap the consequences?

2) Let us consider three additional passages:

- i) *Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything (Ephesians 5:22-24).*
- ii) *Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord (Colossians 3:18).*
- iii) *Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct. Do not let your adorning be external – the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear – but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God’s sight is very precious. For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening (1 Peter 3:1-6).*

- (a) Note that in 1 Peter 3, Peter pointed to ancient times to strengthen his argument about his own time. Why, then, would we view the perspectives presented in these passages as being outdated or limited by time?

3) Three passages, two authors, and yet they all three start with the same basic command: Christians wives must submit/be in subjection to their husbands.

- i) Note that the husband’s obedience to God is not a factor in whether submission is required of the wife by God.
- ii) Why is submission required?
- (a) It is not only submission to the husband, but to God.
- (b) “...as to the Lord” (Ephesians 5:22), “...as is fitting in the Lord” (Colossians 3:18), and is inherent in 1 Peter 3:4 (“...quiet spirit... which is God’s sight in very precious”).
- (c) Similar principles are established for bondservants in Ephesians 6:5-8 and Colossians 3:22-24 – it is about submission and service to God.
- (d) Husbands are the head of their wives, just as Christ is the head of the church.
- (e) Christ is the Savior, so what does this say about the husband?

1. Then he must take the responsibility as seriously as Christ took/takes His responsibility (more on this later).
- (f) The church is subject to Christ – likewise, wives are to be in subjection to their husbands.
  1. Note: Ephesians 1:22-23 identifies the church as the body of Christ, and this is within the context of a discussion of His authority.

#### 4) Application:

- i) “Woman has a very important place to fill. She has work to do in the home, in the community, and in the church. The Bible has much to say about her place...The Bible does not change with the changing philosophy and the reasoning of psychologists. The Bible is right and has always been right” (Lee, 1976, p. 52)
- ii) “Now, the husband is the head of the wife, and the wife is to be in subjection to her own husband. I do not have to wonder if that is appropriate or if it is out of date. It may not be in harmony with the thinking of some of the political figures of our day, but when Heaven speaks there is wisdom behind what is said” (Lee, 1976, p. 52).
- iii) “The wife is to be shielded from some of the blows that must fall in marriage. She is to be shielded from some of the decision making. She has another role to fill, and only she can fill it” (Lee, 1976, p. 53).
- iv) “What is a good woman worth? How would you measure the worth of a good wife or mother? The wise man did not attempt to tell us. He said her price is far above rubies. (Prov. 31:10.) He did not measure her value in coins or in precious stones. He said her price is “far above rubies.” There is no way to measure it” (Lee, 1976, p. 54).
- v) “This good wife [referring back to 1 Peter 3:1-6 – JB] has adorned herself, not in clothes for the outward body that will attract attention and be gaudy and expensive, but rather in a meek and quiet spirit. Hers is an inner adorning which is in the sight of God of great price. While she is quiet, unassuming, and submissive, she is exercising an influence for good over her husband. If she has a husband who is not a Christian and who has not been touched by the word of God, he may yet be won when he sees the good example she sets before him” (Lee, 1976, p. 55).

## To Husbands & Fathers:

- 1) The next focal point of the Apostle Paul is the role of husbands/fathers.
  - i) Insinuated within this passage is that husbands/fathers are to be in submission to Christ.
    - (a) This point is further accentuated in 1 Corinthians 11:3: “But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.”
  - ii) Husbands are commanded first to love their wives, which is again substantiated by numerous passages.

- (a) *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her* (Ephesians 5:25)
- (b) *Husbands, likewise, dwell with them [wives] with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered* (1 Peter 3:7)
- (c) *Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them* (Colossians 3:19).

iii) Why is this command the first in line and what does it mean?

- (a) As Christ loved the church (Ephesians 5:25) – How did He love us?
  1. *Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another* (1 John 4:7-11).
- (b) Presented with honor - “...that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish” (Ephesians 5:26-27)
- (c) Submissive, godly wives are honored – the world views this as bad, but why?
  1. They lack all the qualifiers found earlier in Ephesians (discussed in the background)
  2. However, there is a tender, loving care depicted here: “...*He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word...*”
  3. Further, Paul referenced that “two shall become one flesh” in Ephesians 5, and consider also that Paul wrote “for the sake of His body, which is the church” in Colossians 1:24
  4. Thus the analogy of the husband/wife, Christ/church relationships continue
  5. “For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones” (Ephesians 5:29-30).
  6. If Christ so loves us and we are His body, then our wives are to receive the same love as they are of our own bodies (Ephesians 5:31 – “...and the two shall become one flesh.”)
  7. NOTE: Love and care for the wife is not negated if they are not Christians, just as the submission of a godly wife is not negated by being married to a non-Christian husband

iv) Jumping a bit ahead, Paul also instructed fathers directly: “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4).

- (a) While mothers, generally speaking, tend to be more nurturing, fathers often expect more of their children and might tend towards being too harsh. They might even come across as unreasonable, so thus Paul addresses fathers directly

## 2) Application

- i) “God made him the head, and every member of the family should recognize his position. This position as head however is not a pedestal on which he sits from which he issues orders to servants under him. It is rather a position of leadership, and he is to lead in a direction which will be right for his family to follow. That means first of all that he is walking as God directs. He must be a Christian to be the kind of head the home needs. Christ provides proper leadership for His church, which is His bride. The man likewise is to provide proper leadership for his wife and love her as Christ also loved the church. Whereas the man is head of the wife, and she must recognize him as such, he makes her position easy and pleasant by loving her and providing for her” (Lee, 1976, p. 44).

- ii) Lee (1976) frequently refers to Christ and His relationship with the bride (the church), which is clearly applicable. Did Christ sit on a pedestal or did He lead by example?

(a) Consider –

1. Christ gave Himself for her – Ephesians 5:25; 1 John 3:16
2. Christ learned obedience, not just authority – Hebrews 5:7-9

iii) Additional advice:

- (a) “Pray – a lot! For you, for their mother, and for your children. Husbands and fathers – be a man – accept and fulfill your God given responsibilities. Lead – children can’t follow unless they are lead – think “shepherd”. This is first and foremost of the father’s responsibility” (Supplemental Three).

“Love your spouse. Nothing spells security to a child like knowing their parts are devoted to right and happy together. NEVER criticize/ridicule your spouse before children or friends. To do so is selfish; does not put the other first. Sometimes we say things in jest that are hurtful/harmful. [Also, regarding privacy, I am a great believer in preserving intimacy by keeping it private. The more you reserve to yourselves as a couple, the more special your relationship becomes. If you think about it, this can fall into the category of modesty]” (Supplemental Seven).

- (b) “Some fathers will not take their job seriously, as they are supposed to. Men, do not place burdens upon your wife that are yours to carry” (Supplemental Nine).

## To & About Children:

- 1) *Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother," which is the first commandment with promise: "that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth" (Ephesians 6:1-3).*
  - i) The commands here are directed towards children, but there is an inherent connection to the parents
  - ii) How will children know to obey their parents without first having godly parents who will teach them?
  - iii) Further, Paul directly references Deuteronomy 5:16 – “Honor your father and your mother, as the Lord your God has commanded you, that your days may be long, and that it may be well with you in the land which the Lord your God is giving you.”
    - (a) Although the original pointed to the earthly blessings (and in turn, spiritual blessings), the latter could easily be read in one of two ways:
      1. First, literally that a child may live long on the earth (through obedience and listening to the wisdom of their parents, they avoid many pitfalls that may shorten their physical lives)
      2. Second, one could read it as pointing to spiritual life, in addition to the blessings that a faithful, godly family provide physically in this world
  - iv) Additionally, learning from and being obedient to parents ties into yet another Old Testament passage:
    - (a) *And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. <sup>7</sup> You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. <sup>8</sup> You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. <sup>9</sup> You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates (Deuteronomy 6:6-9).*
    - (b) Inherent in this earlier command from God is the necessity of a faithful life concerning parents and the passing on of God’s word to their children
  - v) The idea of “training” is prevalent throughout the Scriptures, particularly as it pertains to children:
    - (a) *Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it (Proverbs 22:6).*
    - (b) *Apply your heart to instruction and your ear to words of knowledge. Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you strike him with a rod, he will not die. If you strike him with the rod, you will save his soul from Sheol (Proverbs 23:12-14).*

## 2) Application:

- i) Starting Note: **You will notice that there is a significant amount of information concerning raising children, and perhaps more than some of the other sub-topics. Why might that be? Because raising godly children requires that the parents are in tune with God’s word and that they are living faithfully themselves. If that is not true, then the advice offered below will be pointless.**
  - (a) “We have spent a great deal of time in thinking of how difficult it is to bring up godly children in a skeptical, vulgar world. We do live in a skeptical, vulgar world, but this age has no monopoly on skepticism and vulgarity. Every age since the world began has had its problems. It was possible in the days of Noah to bring up worthy sons. It was possible in the days the New Testament was being written to bring up young men like Timothy and Titus. It is possible



now. It is being done now. There are some of the finest young people living now that have ever lived. They make a sharp contrast to the “natural brute beast” type of young people that we have mentioned so often. They are bright lights shining in a dark world” (Lee, 1976, p. 143-144).

- (b) “Spanking into submission without reproof will be fruitless and even counterproductive. Once the discipline is past – hold them, hug and kiss them. Repentant children are to learn the principle of being forgiven” (Supplemental Three).
- (c) “Consistent discipline – this is perhaps the most difficult thing to do – be consistent. It is vital and necessary. It takes self-control and concentration – daily. I’d certainly try harder to accomplish this” (Supplemental Three).
- (d) “Make sure both parents are on the same page – Mom must enforce Dad’s rule and Dad must enforce Mom’s rules (if you disagree – you must still show a united front and discuss differences privately). Children will divide and conquer” (Supplemental Three).
- (e) “Make sure both parents agree in ideas of raising a child/discipline. Do not counter a discipline in front of the child. Discuss in private between the parts if there is a disagreement (Proverbs 22:15, 23:13-14)” (Supplemental Four).
- (f) “Parents – work as a team. Discuss goals, methods of discipline. If you can’t come to agreement, follow the leader. Don’t you dare undermine a father’s authority by setting a different standard in his absence. That’s just wrong. When we work as one, kids won’t choose sides. Another win for security” (Supplemental Seven).
- (g) “Be willing to admit when you are wrong – and apologize sincerely if you have been wrong. They will respect you, love you AND learn the principle of being able to admit wrongs themselves. One mistake parents sometimes make is to think apologies make them appear weak. They will know when you are wrong or unjust even when you won’t admit it and this will cause resentment” (Supplemental Three).
- (h) “Guard influences. Never be afraid to separate your child from someone who is a bad influence – in talk and actions. This includes family members! (Proverbs 20:11)” (Supplemental Four).
- (i) “Communicate...talk to your children. Respect their mind by filling it with frequent references to truth (Deut. 6). Amplify the words with loving touch, smiles, song and laughter. (Silly practicality – changing diapers is a fun time to sing and laugh). I don’t understand how to take care of children’s practical needs without talking to them – period. Nina used to tell Bible stories to the kids as she sewed or washed dishes. It doesn’t have to be a sit-down study...But do have daily sit-down studies. Repeat: do have daily sit-down studies. Every. Day. Doesn’t need to be a marathon. Short times with informal reverence but be consistent. Besides, it is the best way to train little ones to sit still for formal worship services” (Supplemental Seven).

- (j) “God’s word is the only manual that we need on parenting...there is no other way that will work...following His plan assures us; gives us confidence and comfort...if we are doing it God’s way, we can’t be wrong” (Supplemental 10).
- (k) “Parents, it is our job, our duty, our life to shape the souls of our children for heaven. The mind of a child is as moldable as soft clay. And when it grows up it will be as permanent as fired clay – BRICK” (Supplemental 11).

## Conclusion:

There is a lot of material included in the supplemental section that is not included in this lecture. There is a lot of GOOD material included there; please take the time to study through that material and carefully consider the advice, pleas, and passages that are provided. The advice included, alongside the inspired word of God, will help direct you...whether you are a single man, married man, father, or grandfather. Likely, it will step on your toes...it certainly stepped on my own. One can be offended by the bluntness of the material (the passages and the advice), or one can put it into application. One can be upset that it goes against, perhaps, what we’re already doing...or one can put it into application and reap the benefits.

Much of what the Bible says and much of the advice provided by the good, godly Christians parents is not popular in 2021 America. It certainly is not politically correct. But there is one question that is of vital importance: why do we care if the world likes it or not? We are not seeking to please men, but rather God (Galatians 1:10). We cannot please the world and be the “new man.” We cannot please the world and be godly husbands/fathers, wives/mothers, or children. The world preaches rebellion and going against “societal” norms, but God instructs us to be submissive and obedient. Those who listen to God will, like the children in Ephesians 6:1-3, reap great and wonderful benefits.

Let us close with one final passage: “The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man” (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

EndLesson6

## Slaves and Masters (Philemon) *Gardner Hall*

Philemon, Ephesians 6:5-9, Colossians 3:22 - 4:1

### Introduction

A. I've taught Philemon before, focusing primarily on Paul's use of tact and the importance of it.

B. In this lesson I want to focus on its implications regarding slavery and other social evils.

1. "Although Philemon is the least commented upon of Paul's letters, from an African American perspective, it deserves as much attention as Romans, Galatians and the Corinthian correspondence and should be situated within those letters' conceptual framework." (Introduction by an unnamed editor, "Onesimus our Brother")

### I. Slavery in the Bible

A. Theme throughout the scriptures

1. Slavery in Egypt and liberation – References all through the N.T. to this.

2. These were shadows of our liberation from slavery to sin – Romans 6,7,8

"Paul clearly regards slavery as the most apt metaphor to describe the human condition under the power of sin." (James A. Noel)

3. Abraham, Hagar and Ishmael in Galatians

B. How to understand the Law of Moses regarding slavery -

1. In the Old Testament the word "servant" is often a better word than "slave"

2. The idea is of "indentured servants." Those who had a contract to work for another, usually to deal with poverty or debt. Jacob agreed to work seven years for Rachel (Gen. 29:18).

3. Though even this setup, common in the Ancient Near East, wasn't ideal, it had to be regulated.

4. Old Testament laws regarding these servants were universally designed to protect them, eventually release them in the year of Jubilee.

5. Some texts which show the respect that God commanded towards servants/slaves.

a. Exodus 21:16 - If this were followed, no slavery would have been possible in America.

"Now one who kidnaps someone, whether he sells him or he is found in his possession, shall certainly be put to death.

b. Deuteronomy 23:15, 16 - What were Israelites to do with runaway slaves?

“You shall not hand over to his master a slave who has escaped from his master to you. He shall live with you in your midst, in the place that he chooses in one of your towns where it pleases him; you shall not mistreat him.”

- i. Was Paul following this law? He convinced Onesimus to return voluntarily.
- c. Great rights and privileges to Jewish indentured servants
- d. Foreign indentured servants had less privileges - still protected
- 6. There are difficult verses – Especially in Exodus 21 (2-6; 20,21) – Understood in light of next point
- 7. A key - The law of Moses was never meant to reflect God's ideal. Matthew 19:8
  - a. We know background – question about divorce, reference to Deuteronomy 24
  - b. According to Jesus in vs. 8, why did God tolerate such? **Hardness of heart**
  - c. Laws regarding divorce in Deut. 24:1-4 never meant to reflect God's ideals
  - e. Law of Moses was written to a hard-hearted (primitive) people.
- 8. Other passages back this up - Hebrews 8:6-13. God was going to give a new covenant – Old - obsolete
  - a. Galatians 3: 25 - Law called a "tutor" KJV, to bring us to Christ,
- 9. The law was designed to take Abraham's descendants **incrementally** towards the ideal expressions of Christ. Man had fallen far from God's ideal mentioned in Genesis 1 and 2.

### C. Slavery in the New Testament

- 1. The Roman Empire had a full-blown system. Some estimates between 30-50% of population
- 2. Generally three kinds:
  - a. Worst kind - Those owned by a business – mining, rowing a ship
    - i. By the light of lamps long tunnels are cut into the mountains... The miners carry the ore out on their shoulders, each man forming part of a human chain working in the dark, only those at the end seeing the daylight... men may not see daylight for months on end. (Pliny the younger, A.D. 77)
  - b. Public slaves – kept streets cleaned, other civic duties
  - c. House slave – better off than others if... the owner was kind.
    - i. However, of course, there were many abuses, sexual and otherwise.
- 3. No rights
  - a. “Similarly, the Romans legally conceived of the slaves they owned as cut off from all the rights and rituals of human society. Slaves could have no family. In practice, slaves formed relationships and had children. But they had no legal authority to

protect these relationships. If you were a slave who had borne or fathered a child, the child was not yours.” <http://abacus.bates.edu/~mimber/Rciv/slavery.htm>

4. The New Testament gives principles that eventually overturned slavery.

## II. Summary of the book of Philemon

- Into this world, Christianity exploded. Key book that gives insight

- As we read book, notice family references

A. Introduction to Philemon, Apphia, Archippus, church (Read vv. 1-3)

1. Philemon – wealthy friend of Paul’s, converted by him.
2. Apphia – Wife? Good probability, perhaps another Phoebe
3. Archippus –

B. Thanksgiving and prayer (Read vv. 4-7)– Always a part of Paul’s letters

1. Philemon was a godly man, close to Paul.

C. Opening plea (Read vv. 8-11) Not on the basis of command, but love

1. “My son Onesimus.. . became my son.”
2. “Now useful” (v. 11)

D. The voluntary return of Onesimus (Read vv. 12 - 16)

- ‘1. Paul would have preferred him to stay (vv. 12-14)
2. The ultimate blessing (vv. 15,16) - Now Philemon had more than a slave – He had a brother.

E. Paul’s confidence of obedience (Read vv. 17-21)

1. v. 17 “As you would welcome me.” – He considers himself an equal with slave, Onesimus.
2. vv. 18, 19 – Charge me for anything he owes (Although you owe me your soul)
3. v. 20,21 – Confidence

F. Final requests (vv. 23-25) – For lodging, greetings. The companions mentioned were in Rome.

## III. Different readings of the book

(Will not discuss in detail, but here are notes if anyone wants them.)

\* When reading commentaries about women’s roles, slavery or other social evils, you hear much today about the “feminist” interpretation, or the “African” interpretation. What about “the correct” interpretation, one that strives to read from the text, the original intent of the inspired writer? However different approaches have `been popular through the centuries.

A. John Chrysostom – Earliest commentator gave the “normative” approach.

1. Paul is returning a runaway slave to Philemon.

2. Primary application – Humility and tact in the lives of disciples

B. Post reformation through the 1990's – Some challenges to the “normative approach.”

1. John Knox (not the reformer) - Archippus was the slave owner, and that Philemon was being asked to intervene. (However, Philemon is the first mentioned in the intro.)

2. Wolfgang Schenck – Onesimus was sent voluntarily by Philemon to Paul, who was asking that he be released to him for work in the kingdom.

3. Albert Barnes – Onesimus wasn't necessarily a slave, but a simple servant. He argued that *doulos* didn't necessarily refer to slaves but to servants. (See his commentary)

a. Probably given in answer to those who used Philemon to defend slavery.

b. Pro-slavery writers compared Barnes “to Satan quoting scripture” (Harrill, p. 182).

C. Modern readings – Often give a Postmodern slant to promote political/social revolution.

1. Verse 16 is often the discussed passage – “no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, a beloved brother, especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.”

2. Allan Callahan – Onesimus was not a slave, but the blood brother of Philemon. (Harvard Theological Review, 1993)

a. “He was figuratively a slave and literally a brother” (Demetrius K. Williams, *Onesimus Our Brother*, p. 40)

b. Callahan believes the idea of the first part of the verse is “No longer as though he were a slave.”

c. The idea – Stop treating him as if he were a slave and treat him as your (literal) brother.

d Strong arguments in context against this position:

Philemon is obviously in the position of “master.”

i. Vs. 11 acknowledges Onesimus' previous status as being defined in terms of value

ii. Vs.14 takes it for granted that Philemon has authority over activities of Onesimus.

iii. The word “have” in 15 “That you would **have** him back forever”

- Interesting word several uses – Jeff gave me a brief summary. -
- Implies having something having of value – fits slave, not brother

## IV. Questions

### A. With uncertain answers

1. How exactly did Onesimus arrive in Rome?
  - a. As a runaway?
  - b. Was he sent by Philemon and overstayed his allotted time?
2. Was Paul pushing for the manumission of Onesimus?
  - a. The language of vv. 12-14, 16 and others seems to indicate at least a strong hint for it!
  - b. V. 16 “no longer as a slave, much more than a slave, a brother”
  - c. He’s family! Not a slave.
3. How did this situation resolve itself? Nothing certain.
  - a. Ignatius (107 A.D.?) Onesimus was the name of “the bishop” of Ephesus.
  - b. Who knows if this is the same Onesimus?

B. A question with a definite answer – Are all of God’s people equal before him? Yes!

## V. . How does the N.T. deal with slavery?

Philemon has a big part in understanding. Three interpretive approaches:

A. Promote Slavery? Two extremely different groups have said yes.

1. Pro slavery theologians before the Civil War
2. Modern atheists and those who want to discredit the Bible.
3. Answer the following simple question I think will answer whether it does or not. - “What would have happened had a slave in the antebellum South returned with Paul’s letter to Philemon in hand and invited his or her master to apply it to their immediate relationship”? (Question in a Bible class)

B. Does the Bible prohibit slavery? View of abolitionists

1. There was a war between these two perspectives, especially before the Civil War

C. A third approach is more accurate. The N.T. presented spiritual truths that transcended slavery and led to its decline and disappearance. This is apparent in Philemon.

1. If those spiritual truths are taken seriously today, slavery cannot exist.
2. These truths were ignored by pro-slavery “theologians.

3. “The New Testament established principles that would eventually lead to the abolition of the institution (principles exhibited in Gal. 3:28; cf. 1 Cor. 12:13; Col. 3:11). It is also supposed that Ephesians (6:5,9) Colossians (3:22-4:1), as well as Philemon seek to inculcate a new attitude among both slaves and matters—a spirit of Christian charity, since all are servants of the same Lord. This spirit grew with the expansion of the church, eventually leading to a mitigation of slavery in the later Roman empire, and to its virtual disappearance in the Western world by the time of the Renaissance.” (Robert McLachlan Wilson, summarized by Demetrius K. Wilson, *Onesimus Our Brother*, p. 31).

a. Of course the North Atlantic slave trade was an aberration of the above principle.

## VI. New Testament teaching that is incompatible with slavery.

### A. Various texts

#### 1. Luke 4:18, 19

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me,  
Because He anointed Me to bring good news to the poor.  
He has sent Me to proclaim release to captives,  
And recovery of sight to the blind,  
To set free those who are oppressed,  
<sup>19</sup>To proclaim the favorable year of the Lord.”

a. Jesus came to free the captives and oppressed?

b. Though he was talking of spiritual oppression, indirect applications to slavery as well.

i. One usually accompanies the other.

#### 2. Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11 - Slaves equal with free men in God's eyes.

a. If we truly have a new life in Christ. This is a truth that will resonate in our hearts.

#### 3. Paul condemns "slave trading" (NIV) in 1 Timothy 1:10. (Other versions say "kidnappers.")

#### 4. Rev. 18:13 condemns "Babylon" for trading in "the bodies and souls of men."

### B. In Philemon

#### 1. Family relationships – Notice

a. “Brother” – four times

b. “Sister: - v.2

c. “Child” – v. 10 – My child

d. “Father” – v. 10

\* Relations in Christ are familial, not master/slave

#### 2. Twice Paul identifies himself as “a prisoner of Jesus Christ” (v.1,9 also Eph. 3:1; 4:1; 2 Tim. 1:8)

a. Identifying himself with slaves?



b. Many parallels between prisoners and slaves

i. No freedom – You are not in charge of your time, where you can go.

c. Paul also calls himself a slave of Christ (Rom. 1:1; Titus 1:1) Also James (1:1); Peter (2 Peter 1:1; Jude 1)

i. Word “*doulos*” means slave. “Servant” is a euphemism in translations.

3. Illustration - During the cold war – John Kennedy went to Berlin and wanted to express his sympathy with Berliners who were surrounded by Communist East Germany.

a. Gave a classic speech - Kennedy “Ich Bin Ein Berliner” – I am one of you

b. Paul is identifying himself with prisoners and slaves – broader sense – all downtrodden

c. If we follow his example, we will as well.

C. It is true that accommodation was made in the New Testament for slavery- Household codes

1. Ephesians 6:5-9, Colossians 3:22-25

2. Emphasize submission on the part of slaves, respect and good treatment on part of masters

3. Both emphasize equality – Masters have their own Master in heaven (Col. 4:1)

## VII. . Applications –

How to respond today to social evils? How much do our spiritual lives overlap “social justice”?

A. In broad terms

1. Identify with downtrodden

2. Emphasize spiritual principles of equality.

B. But specifically? Churches – Uniquely spiritual entities in the scriptures. Must zealously maintain spiritual uniqueness in the face of Social Gospel pressure.

1. Fundamental fact - Churches in the N.T. never involved in politics, social movements –

2. Presented spiritual truths

a. Equality of man – Galatians 3:28; 1 Cor. 12:13 “All baptized into one body.”

b. Life in the womb is considered life, etc.

3. Dad at North Birmingham on September 15, 1963

4. Spiritual truths affect social change – A factor in abolition movement

5. The Kingdom and culture have some overlapping concerns – equality, sanctity of life.

a. But their tactics are always different:

C. Individuals – More liberty than congregations. Many tough questions regarding individuals and social justice.

1. I've often wondered to what level individuals should involve themselves in just social causes.

a. Should I have given shelter to runaway slaves? Absolutely

i. This was a big issue among known brethren after 1850 – The Fugitive Slave Law.

ii. Law of the land – you must return slaves.

iii. Alexander Campbell, who generally opposed slavery, said, “yes” Slaves should be returned.

iiii. I believe that this would be an occasion to obey God rather than man.

iiiii. Paul did and though he sent Onesimus back, Onesimus went back voluntarily.

iiiiii. I think the spirit of Deut. 23:15,16 still applies

iiiii. Congregation in Minnesota let others know that members would give refuge to run away slaves. (A bit off of the underground railroad, but admirable.)

b. What about abortion? An evil

i. Should I support anti abortion groups? Sympathize, maybe financial

ii. Should I march with them? Doubt that Jesus would have done it.

c. Should I have marched with Martin Luther King? Though I admire many things about him and his movement, I doubt that Jesus would have marched with him.

i. Should I support elements of that movement financially? Perhaps

iii. Should I join in boycotts? Don't think I should be vocal in doing so.

d. Some of you are saying, “Of course you should.” Others, “Of course not.”

i. Totally sympathize with ends pursued –end abortion, racial equality

ii. What would Jesus have done? What would Paul and other faithful early Christians have done?

iii. I doubt they would have allowed them to become absorbed in such movements.

2. The kingdom of God and elements of 21<sup>st</sup> century Western culture have some overlapping concerns: racial equality, sanctity of life.

3. However, their tactics are completely different.

a. Vertical emphasis versus horizontal;

b. Focus on eternity vs. focus on here and now;

- c. Change through the spread of Christ's love versus change through boycotts, political rallies, etc.
4. Though we share some concerns of those who cry for political social justice, we get into trouble when we try to adapt their tactics.
5. An objection from a sincere brother =
  - a. In the 1940's and 1950's the cry was "preach the gospel, don't get involved in the politics of the matter."
  - b. However, it took politics - the civil rights act, the Protest marches, etc. to actually end segregation. Some who proclaimed "preach the gospel," actually promoted segregation and racism.
  - c. There are some shocking quotes from preachers from the 1940's and 1950's.
6. I responded this way. Would like to hear of the way some of you responded.
  - a. Political activism is a two edged sword – Though you can see some good from it, you can also see much evil when it isn't motivated by spiritual principles – Ex. Nazi Germany.
  - b. Brethren who I feel took a proper approach – David Lipscomb (although some of his terminology was 19<sup>th</sup> century.) Leslie Diestelkamp. Wish there had been more like them.
  - c. I never thought I would be praising Oral Roberts, but regarding race, he had it right. His services were notable for their inclusion of all races. No concern at all for politics, or governmental change. But the racial openness made a powerful statement.
  - d. As I look back at the 1940's and 1950's, I feel that his model was more compatible with the tactics of the kingdom, though he was so wrong in other areas, than the protest marches.
7. I look forward to hearing some of your views.
8. Here's several things I know – Whatever level of participation you feel is needed by individuals-
  - a. The change that matters is change in the heart – that is accomplished only through the gospel. It is not accomplished through legislation, boycotts, marches, etc.

b. Therefore, whatever level of participation in social movements we feel is justifiable, our primary allegiance and self identification must be with Christ.

## Conclusion

– I haven't been able to answer all the questions, but hope the general principles have been helpful.

A. Sum up in one – the best and only medicine for the evils of the world is the change in hearts through the gospel of Christ. That was the emphasis of Jesus and his inspired apostles. Should be our emphasis.

EndLesson7

## Problems at Colossae *Steve Wolfgang*

### Introduction:

This Introduction may serve as a “road map” or survey of topics to follow: Where is Colossae situated? Who were the Colossians? Who wrote this epistle? Who were his audience? What were “the problems” at Colossae? What warning about potential crises does it contain? What spiritual opponents does it identify (if any)? What strategies regarding spiritual warfare? What spirals of spiritual growth, and regulations of personal situations and relationships, does the letter enjoin? How can it spur us to greater devotion and service to King Jesus, conqueror of “the powers,” Lord of heaven and earth?

- A. “Colossians, like many books, and for that matter like most symphonies, plays or poems, is not the sort of work that can be simply split up into successive units, like the separate inches marked on a ruler. A simple analysis of contents is therefore not sufficient to show what the book is really about. It is more like a flower, growing from a small bud to a large bud and then gradually opening up to reveal, layer upon layer, the petals that had all along been hidden inside.” (Wright, *Tyndale NTC*, 1986, p. 22).
- B. On the other hand, “It is not a miscellaneous collection of ‘helpful thoughts’. It is a particular letter written to a particular congregation at one point in its (very early) history. To believe, in fact, that Colossians is inspired Scripture is to believe that God intended to say just these things to this church—and in so doing to address, somehow, the church as a whole.” (Wright, 1986, p.21)
- C. A useful survey of the varying approaches to the structure of Colossians, comparing the outlines from other popular commentaries is in Scot McKnight’s commentary (NICNT, 2018, pp. 66-72).
- D. On the value of commentaries and other research “assistive devices,” I recall a quip by Charles Spurgeon (maybe in his book, *Commenting and Commentaries*), to the effect that “it is amazing that those who prize so highly what Scripture has revealed to them, think so little of what it has revealed to others.” If he didn’t say it, he should have!
- E. “The man who attempts to gain a knowledge of the Bible by his own unaided powers, while the aid furnished by a multitude of learned predecessors is at hand, seems to declare himself the equal in exegetical power of all who have gone before him. In no other department of human study do we reject the aid of our fellow-students; why should we reject it in this?” (J. W. McGarvey, *Missouri Christian Lectures*, 1883)
- F. The ideal interpreter would be one who has entered  
 into that strange first-century world,  
 has felt its whole strangeness,  
 has sojourned in it until he has lived himself into it,  
 thinking and feeling as one of those to whom the Gospel first came;  
 and who will then return into our world,  
     and give to the truth he has discerned  
 a body out of the stuff of our own thought.  
     -- C. H. Dodd, Inaugural Lecture at Cambridge, in F. W. Dillistone, *C. H. Dodd:  
     Interpreter of the New Testament*

## Body:

### I. Colossae Situated: In the fertile Lycus Valley, near Laodicea and Hierapolis

A. “The ancient city of Colossae in southwest Turkey has only been identified in the last two hundred years. The toponym probably originates from Hittite occupation in the second millennium BC, and later was accepted as Greek. The site is now almost completely bare and has not been excavated. The elevation and expanse of the biconical mound belies a simple GPS location (37°47'12.3" N, 29°15'36.2" E). It covers 23 acres (9.3 ha) and its apex (1215 feet [379.3 m] above sea level) rises nearly 200 feet (61 m) above the plain, witnessing to a longevity that stamped it as one of the premier cities of southwest Phrygia.” (Cadwallader, *Lexham Geographic Commentary*, 2019, pp. 569-570)

B. “The ancient writers, Herodotus (VII, 30) and Xenophon (*Anab* 1, 2, 6; c. 400 B.C.) speak of Colossae as large and flourishing. Herodotus actually speaks of it as a large city in Phrygia, and Xenophon calls it prosperous (εὐδαίμων *eudaimōn*), large and inhabited.”

“The whole area suffered a calamity in the first century A.D. Somewhere between A.D. 60 and 64 an earthquake struck the area and, according to Tacitus (*Annals*, 14.27), overthrew Laodicea. It may be assumed that nearby Colossae and Hierapolis were also affected. Tacitus goes on to say that Laodicea recovered herself without any material help from Rome, and no doubt Colossae did the same.

“Though commercially less successful, Colossae continued to be a place of importance in the Roman imperial period, as is shown by an inscription of this time and by second and third century A.D. coins that depict the usual city officials, showing that it had the rights of a city under the Romans.” (Mare, 1976, pp. 42-43)

C. “Opposition to the message of the Apostles strengthened and followed them on their way. Indeed, the pursuit by Paul’s Jewish opponents from Pisidian Antioch and Iconium to Lystra may indicate the ease of access between these cities on the Via Sebaste. At Lystra they stoned Paul and left him for dead, but he survived and set off with Barnabas to Derbe (Acts 14:19–20; cf. 2 Tim 3:11).” (Rainey & Notley, *Sacred Bridge*, p. 373).

D. “Colossae’s history extended from the fifth century BC to about AD 800. Its mixed population of Phrygian natives, Greek colonists and Jews prospered quite well commercially in its earlier history because of its wool industry and its location on the southern highway through the Lycus Valley, which connected countries to the east, as far as Persia, with Ephesus on Asia Minor’s west coast. Although affected by an earthquake, as was also Laodicea, in about 62 AD, Colossae survived as a viable city, even minting its own coins.

“Although Paul could have visited the area when he went ‘throughout the region of Galatia and Phrygia’ (Acts 18:23), there is no indication that Paul founded the church at Colossae; it could have been founded by the converts of his ministry at Antioch in Pisidia (Acts 13:13–51) or by converts of his ministry in Ephesus in the nearby Roman Province of Asia (Acts 19).

“In the summer of 1975, W. Harold Mare and Donald W. Burdick, representing an American archaeological team, conducted a rough survey of the main mound and the

surrounding area, anticipating the opportunity of possibly getting permission from the Turkish Government to excavate Colossae, a permission we pursued for several years with the aid of the United States Embassy, but without success. (Mare, NTBC, 2004, pp. 324-325).

- E. “The collection of the temple tax implies a fairly regular communication between the cities of the Lycus valley and the land of Israel. These would no doubt be facilitated by the good system of roads... which would probably bring a steady stream of Jewish travelers through a region where there were so many Jews resident. In the same connection we should note that residents of Asia and Phrygia are reported among the crowd gathered in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2:9–10. A further interesting confirmation is given by the tradition reported in Eusebius (*Historia Ecclesiastica* 3.31.2–5) that Philip the apostle (he must mean evangelist, unless the two were the same) settled in Hierapolis with his virgin daughters...” (Dunn, NIGCT, 1996, p. 22)
- F. “Concern about harmony with the cosmos became acute in the face of earthquakes. The immense forces of the Eurasian, African, and Arabian Plates pressing on Anatolia have an epicenter in the Lycus Valley.” (Cadwallader, LGC, 2019, p.571).
- G. “The emperor Augustus engineered a revolution in governance that included a massive ideological program proclaiming cosmic approval for the emperor. The emperor was credited not merely with dominion over land (and sea) and its produce (a cosmically ordered geography). But precisely because that dominion was (asserted to be) cosmically ordered, the fecundity of the realm was promoted as issuing from the imperial person, ‘the benefactor of the world.’” (Cadwallader, LGC, 2019, pp. 579-580).

## II. Authorship

- A. “The belief that Colossians is a pseudepigraphical work, a letter written by a follower of Paul’s in his name after his death, is widely held in the scholarly community. Raymond Brown estimates that 60 percent of current scholars think that Paul did not write Colossians. Yet this view of the authorship of the letter is relatively recent. No early Christian doubted Paul’s authorship, and the letter to the Colossians was received into the developing Christian canon of Scripture with no apparent controversy. ‘[T]here is no shred of evidence that the Pauline authorship of the whole or any part of this epistle was ever disputed until the nineteenth century.’ (Guthrie, NTI, 576) It was at this time that the rise of historical criticism led to challenges of many traditionally accepted views of Scripture.” (Moo, PNTC, 2008, pp. 29-30)
- B. The fuller quotation from Donald Guthrie’s *New Testament Introduction* is:  
 “There is no shred of evidence that the Pauline authorship of the whole or any part of this epistle was ever disputed until the nineteenth century. It formed part of the Pauline corpus as far back as can be traced, and evidence of such a character cannot lightly be swept aside. This strong external attestation is further supported by the close link between the epistle and Philemon, whose authenticity has been challenged by only the most extreme negative critics.” (Guthrie, NTI, 1996, p. 576)
- C. “Linguistic differences between Colossians and the rest of the New Testament have regularly been drawn upon as evidence that the author of Colossians could not be Paul. For instance, Colossians contains 34 words that are unique within the New Testament and 28 words that are unique within the Pauline corpus. However, the variations of vocabulary and style could be the result of writing different letters for different occasions (Witherington, *The Letters to Philemon*, 10–19), or they could reflect someone else composing the letters on Paul’s behalf. Also, the possibility of pre-Pauline traditions—e.g., a hymn (Col 1:15–20)—could explain the presence of material that seems foreign to

expected Pauline conventions. Among more recent treatments, the arguments from vocabulary and style have been downplayed.” (Barclay, *Colossians and Philemon*, 31–33).

D. “Looming over the discussion of Colossians’ authenticity is the assumption (apparent in some scholarship) that Paul meant to articulate similar vocabulary, themes, and theology within every letter that he wrote. This assumption may derive from the view that in one particular letter (e.g., Romans) Paul has given the church a systematic outworking of his theological thinking that can be used to evaluate his other letters—a theological litmus test. In fact, Paul never provides a systematic outworking of his theology.” (Ehorn, LBD, 2016).

E. In 2014, I was asked to write about “New Testament Documents: Date and Authorship” for *Expository Files*. Here’s what I said about Colossians:

1. **“Antilegomena: Disputed Documents – Colossians.** Due consideration of the arguments adduced by some to question authenticity is perhaps the best exercise for those who have been introduced to doubts about the authorship and dates of some the letters attributed to the apostle Paul. A common argument is that there are a relatively large number of words (48) which appear in Colossians but are found nowhere else in Paul’s writings (33 of which are not found in the other New Testament documents). But the number of these hapax legomena (words used only once, and not found elsewhere in the New Testament) are no greater in Colossians than in other undisputed Pauline epistles (Galatians, for example, has 35 such hapax legomena in an undisputed epistle of similar length).”

2. “Other common arguments challenging Pauline authorship are that the style of writing has more hymnic or ‘liturgical’ characteristics not found to the same extent in Paul’s other writings, and that themes relating to eschatology or, by some accounts, even the church, are supposedly present in Colossians to an extent that seems to these critics to have no parallel in undisputed Pauline letters.” (Wolfgang, “New Testament Documents,” 2014, pp.87-88).

3. More Wolfgang: “Reading and considering the arguments of some academic challengers can leave a distinct impression that any such objection, like proverbial beauty, is very much in the eye of the beholder. And such ‘stylistic’ objections not only do not seem to come to terms with plausible explanations for stylistic variations (e.g., different circumstances or occasions for writing, use of various amanuenses, or just plain human variability), but conveniently ignore the fact that the Colossian epistle does, in point of fact, contain indisputably Pauline stylistic characteristics, found nowhere else in non-Pauline documents.”

4. “Those who claim that Colossians is ‘non-Pauline’ are often unable to agree among themselves, and have proposed several hypothetical scenarios – many of which still place the letter’s composition in the 60’s and often involve ‘partial Pauline authorship’ or composition by someone in Paul’s close circle of co-workers, or the ‘Pauline school.’” (Wolfgang, “New Testament Documents,” 2014, p. 88).

5. “A recent critical introduction to the New Testament identifies the ‘most attractive’ version in this way: ‘Timothy, the co-sender of the letter, wrote the letter during Paul’s lifetime and even under his supervision. Some envision that Paul’s circumstances in prison had changed – that his situation had become more dire and that his movement had become



more restricted. Yet, eager to address the threat posed by the ‘deceptive philosophy’ in Colossae, he commissioned Timothy to compose a response. Timothy may have submitted the letter to Paul for his approval, at which point Paul added the personal greetings and made some editorial changes or additions. Once approved, it was then sent to Colossae from Paul and Timothy with Paul’s full authorization.’ (Holladay, 2005, p 394/p.557 in Expanded CD-ROM Version”; quoted in Wolfgang, “New Testament Documents,” 2014, pp. 88-89).

- F. “True, ‘some envision’ various explanations about what ‘may have’ occurred, while ignoring more obvious explanations based on accepting authorial claims at face value. The same critical introduction also observes: ‘How the destruction of Colossae by an earthquake in 60– 61 C.E. relates to the question of authorship remains a puzzle. The simplest explanation is that the letter was written prior to the earthquake...’ Indeed.” (Wolfgang, “New Testament Documents,” 2014, p. 89).
- G. “Thus we are faced with an interesting conundrum that shows how difficult it is to draw neat lines around authors and their thought. Scholars are notoriously unwilling to admit ignorance or indecision [the Latin for ‘we do not know’ is ‘ignoramus’!], but it is not the object of this guide to give ‘answers’, only to indicate by what means readers might assess the matter for themselves... Whether by Paul, by a secretary, by an associate or by a pupil, Colossians is clearly a ‘Pauline’ letter.” (John M.G. Barclay, 2001, p. 35).
- H. For a recent analysis of authorship issues, see “Excursus 1: The Problem of Using the Criteria of Vocabulary and Writing Style to Discern Purportedly Non-Pauline Letters” (Beale, BECNT, 2019, pp. 439-443), which includes the following observation: “More precise studies in stylometrics have ... concluded that there is not enough data in the entire Pauline corpus to be able to make legitimate comparisons and thereby distinguish between authentic and supposedly inauthentic epistles” and demonstrating that “numerous past studies have committed the fallacy of ‘statisticulating,’ which is ‘engaging in the unprincipled and statistically unjustified use of numbers to support a particular point’” (pp. 439-440)

### **III. Examples of Overlap Between Ephesians and Colossians: Parallelism and Intertextuality**

- A. Colossians 1:1–2 and Ephesians 1:1–2;
- B. Colossians 1:17–19 and Ephesians 1:22–23;
- C. Colossians 1:20–22 and Ephesians 2:13–18;
- D. Colossians 1:25 and Ephesians 3:2
- E. Colossians 2:19 and Ephesians 4:16
- F. Colossians 3:16 and Ephesians 5:19
- G. Colossians 3:18–19 and Ephesians 5:22–23;
- H. Colossians 3:20–21 and Ephesians 6:1–4;
- I. Colossians 3:22–4:1 and Ephesians 6:5–9.

### **IV. Colossian Christians:**

- A. Epaphras, Aristarchus, Demas, Jesus/Justus, Onesimus, Philemon, Apphia, Luke, et.al.

B. To say nothing of Paul himself: “Strategically, Paul is one of the most fascinating figures in all middle-eastern and western history. According to the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 22:3) he was a Diaspora Jew, born and brought up in Tarsus, a centre of Hellenistic influence in what is now south-east Turkey, and a Roman citizen to boot. At the same time, however, he was brought up as a strongly traditionalist Jew—not just a ‘Hebrew’ (2 Cor. 11:22), itself a traditionalist title, but a ‘Hebrew of the Hebrews’ indeed (Phil. 3:5)—and he evidently chose to return to Jerusalem to train as a Pharisee (where else would an aspiring Pharisee complete his education?). So fierce was his ‘zeal’ for the ancestral customs that he persecuted those of his fellow Jews who proclaimed Jesus of Nazareth to be the Jewish Messiah (Gal. 1:13–14; Phil. 3:6), because, it would appear, they took the message of this Messiah Jesus to Gentiles, offering them a share in Israel’s heritage. But then in a classic turn-about, he was converted to this very same ‘sect of the Nazarene’ (Acts 24:5), turned his back on what he had previously counted so precious (Phil. 3:7–8), and became, for the rest of his life, a missionary for that sect among the Gentile nations...Saul, traditionalist Jew, become Paul the Christian, or should we say Paul the apostate?—the Diaspora Jew become Pharisee become apostle to the nations.” (Dunn, “Diversity in Paul,” 2001, p. 107).

## V. “We have not ceased to pray for you” (1:9)

A. It is instructive to compare some of Paul’s other prayers:

1. Romans 15:5-6
2. Romans 15:14-33
3. 2 Corinthians 13:7-9
4. Ephesians 1:15-23
5. Philippians 1:9-11
6. 1 Thessalonians 1:3-12
7. 2 Thessalonians 1:2-12
8. 1 Timothy 2:1-2, 6-8

B. See D.A. Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation: Priorities From Paul and His Prayers* (Baker, 1992)

## VI. Spiraling Spiritual Growth: Colossians 1:9-12

A. A “problem” at Colossae (or anywhere else), is a failure to consistently grow spiritually. Paul’s fervent prayer for these young Christians is that they may seek and achieve an upward spiral of spiritual development.

B. My early understanding (50 years ago!) of the “cycle” of spiritual growth characteristics enumerated here was that of a circle – derived from text and diagram in Lawrence Richards, *Creative Bible Teaching* (1970, p. 72).

C. It is perhaps preferable to see it rather in a multidimensional spiral, perhaps like a staircase (though this may reflect more my fascination with Fibonacci spirals and the “Golden Ratio” – a feature of God’s good creation, after all – than the text itself).

D. Do these characteristics occur sequentially, linearly, or in circular or spiral motions, or something altogether unrelated?

1. Filled with the knowledge of his will
2. In all spiritual wisdom

3. and understanding (differing from knowledge and wisdom?)
4. Walking in a manner worthy of the Lord
5. Fully pleasing to him (cf. texts on this central theme)
6. Bearing fruit in every good work
7. Increasing in the knowledge of God (cf. #1)
8. Strengthened with all power according to His glorious might
9. For all endurance
10. and patience (differentiated from, or synonymous with endurance?)
11. With joy
12. Giving thanks to the Father

## VII. A Christ-Hymn: Colossians 1:15-20

- A. Colossians is “at every point Christological” (Wm. Barclay, *Colossians and Philemon*, p. 77), and this is nowhere more clearly seen than in the hymnic material of 1:15-20
- B. “Creation and New Creation: The Christ-hymn (Col 1:15–20) has strong overtones of creational imagery... and echoes descriptions of ‘Wisdom’ as an agent of creation within Jewish literature (Prov 8:22–31; Sirach 24:9; Wisdom of Solomon 6:12–25; 7:21–10:21). Christ as ‘the image of the invisible God’ (Col 1:15; 2 Cor 4:4) recalls Gen 1:27, in which Adam is first described as ‘the image of God.’ A Jewish text, not much later than Colossians, makes the similar connection with Adam who is described as ‘the image ... of our unseen Father and God’ (*L.A.E. [Apocalypse]* 35; compare Philo, *Planting* 18–19; Mos. 2.65; first century AD). The language of ‘firstborn,’ further clarified by the expression ‘before all things’ (Col 1:15, 17), recalls the same designation as a description of Israel (*Sirach 36:17*; Philo, *Flight* 208; 4 Ezra 6:58; Psalms of Solomon 18:4)—a corporate figure of Adam. Christ is described as both the cause and reason for creation: ‘all things have been created through him and for him’ (Col 1:16). Moreover, He sovereignly maintains His creation (Col 1:17).” (Ehorn, LBD)
- C. “The majority of scholars think that the figure of ‘wisdom’ (*sophia*), as portrayed in some Old Testament texts and especially as developed in Judaism in association with the concept of the “word” (*logos*), is the major influence on the hymn. Based on Old Testament texts such as Proverbs 8:22–31, and seen in its most developed form in Philo, the tradition personified the concepts of wisdom and the ‘word’” (Moo, pp. 111-112)
- D. “Whereas Col 1:15–17 celebrates Christ’s role within the first creation, 1:17–20 celebrates His role with respect to the new creation inaugurated by His resurrection. Christ is again described as ‘firstborn’ (1:18; compare 1:15), only this time with the clarification ‘from the dead.’ He brings about peace “by his blood,” which will ultimately ‘reconcile to himself all things’ (1:20). The reconciliation of ‘all things’ is cosmological. However, this certainly includes believers, who are reminded that God has ‘made you alive together with him’ (2:13) and that they are to put on ‘the new self ... renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator’ (3:10) ...” (Ehorn, LBD)
- E. “Is it, after all, quite so clear that vv. 15–20 could not have been composed by Paul? Syntactical distinctiveness and parallelism might point to careful composition of a ‘hymn’-like passage, but could not Paul, either before Colossians, or as he writes the letter,

have been its author? Unusual vocabulary is always a slender basis for conclusions about authorship, since authors often employ unusual vocabulary for distinctive purposes. Moreover, some of the ideas in the ‘hymn’—such as ‘image of God,’ Christ as ‘head of the body,’ and the language of reconciliation—are distinctively Pauline. Furthermore, the language and concepts of the passage are picked up throughout the rest of the letter, as the following chart reveals.” (Moo, 2008, p. 109)

- F. Moo’s chart compares 1:16 with 2:10b; 1:18a with 2:19; 1:19 with 2:9; 1:20 with 2:15.
1. “in him all things were created, things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him” (v. 16) – cf. “He is the head over every power and authority” (2:10b)
  2. “He is the head of the body, the church” (v. 18a) – cf. “They have lost connection with the head” (2:19)
  3. “God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him” (1:19) – cf. “in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form” (2:9)
  4. “And through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross” (1:20) – cf. “having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross” (2:15)
- G. “Paul obviously uses the language and concepts of the hymn as his Christological ammunition in fighting the false teachers.” (Moo, 2008, 109-110)

## VIII. What was “The Problem” – The “Colossian Philosophy/Heresy”?

### A. Overview

1. “Some say Paul’s opponents were pagans who were influenced by the mystery religions of the day. Others think they were Judaistic in outlook, with such differing perspectives as Merkabah mysticism or apocalyptic Essenism. Still others believe the opponents were of a Gnostic stripe that was either Jewish or pre-Christian in nature. Another theory is that the foes at Colossae represented a syncretistic group who shared views from several of the above groups.” (House, *BibSac*, 1992, p. 46).
2. What would the “Colossian heresy” look like from the standpoint of those advocating it? What might their “Epistle to the Colossians” contain? Gupta proposes “an imaginary (and imaginative!) letter, as if the philosophers had written to the Colossians. Certainly this hypothetical correspondence is reading into the situation; however, ...it may be helpful to see a coherent reconstruction, even if it may be a bit too artificial. (The words in bold represent particular terms distinctive to Colossians.)”
 

“Dear Colossians, we know you are experiencing **hardships**: no doubt you are aware that there are evil **spirits** and **powers** that have **authority** over our mortal world. These powers prey on the weakness of human **bodies** and **flesh**. Thus our world is fraught with cosmic chaos. We can offer, though, **knowledge**, **wisdom**, and **teachings (traditions)** that can protect you from these malevolent forces. By controlling, combating, and **disciplining** your own frail **body**, you can resist these **powers**. **Circumcision** and strict **ritual** Torah obedience are particularly effective in counteracting these hostile spirits. Once you have submitted yourself to such

**disciplines** of the **body**, you will gain access to the celestial world—receiving divine **wisdom, visions**, and provisions to fight against the weakness of the flesh that the evil powers use against you. We can offer you the proper route to **spiritual fullness and perfection.**”

3. Gupta’s preferred term for this teaching is the “transcendent-ascetic philosophy” rather than “heresy” or other descriptions. He further notes that “Christ is not mentioned in the above letter at all. That is because it is unclear whether Paul’s supporting of the supremacy and authority of Christ in his letter was opposing direct teaching against the power and rule of Christ, or whether Christ was simply ignored or set aside. My own impression is that if the philosophers came out against Christ explicitly, Paul’s rhetoric would probably have been more condemnatory, much like in Galatians where he calls their message a different gospel (Gal 1:6–7). [Perhaps] the philosophers simply ignored the full impact of Christ precisely because Jesus had a body of weak flesh, like the rest of humanity, and such physicality had its limitations in view of the hegemony of invisible powers.” (Gupta, 2013, pp. 18-19).

#### B. Judaism at Colossae

1. “In recent years the pendulum has begun to swing back toward recognition of more distinctively Jewish features in the Colossian threat, stimulated in large part by the continuing impact of the Dead Sea Scrolls... We need to recall the information already provided above, that Colossae, and the other Lycus valley cities, probably had substantial Jewish ethnic minorities. This implies the presence of (probably) several synagogues in Colossae...” (Dunn, 1996, NIGCT, p.29)
2. Acts 15:21 affirms that Moses had representatives in every city. As Wright describes the first-century landscape, “Each town would have one or more synagogues, and it has been calculated that around this period the adult male Jewish population in the neighbouring area of Laodicea was about eleven thousand. (Rome at this time had between forty and fifty thousand Jews, out of a total population of around a million, excluding slaves.) We know from a variety of sources that Judaism, in one form or another, was attractive to many pagans weary of the confused, often amoral religion of their own background, and it is likely that Christianity would make a similar impression on pagan hearers. It would therefore be easy (as we know from Galatians) for young converts to Christianity to become muddled, and to imagine that, having become Christians, they must complete the process by becoming Jews. It is this tendency that Paul is resolutely opposing in, for instance, Galatians, and in Philippians 3. It is my contention that a similar danger was the reason for the writing of Colossians, at least chapter 2. But this is a controversial claim...” (Wright, 1986, pp. 24-25)
3. “A significant feature of the Lycus valley cities, including presumably Colossae, was the presence of a substantial Jewish minority. According to Philo, Jews were very numerous in every city in Asia Minor (*Legum Allegoriae* 245: Ἰουδαῖοι καθ’ ἐκάστην πόλιν εἰσὶ παμπληθεῖς Ἀσίας). In the late third century BCE Antiochus the Great had settled two thousand Jewish families in Lydia and Phrygia to help stabilize the region (Josephus, *Antiquities* 12.147–53), and in the middle of the second century a *sequence* of letters sent by the Roman Senate to Asia Minor in support of Jews living there indicates a sizeable Jewish population (*Antiquities* 14.185–267; 16.160–78). Certainly we know that Hierapolis had a Jewish community (a κατοικία, a “colony,” *CIJ* 2.775) from its earliest days as a city” (Dunn, NIGCT, 1993, p.21).

4. Scot McKnight quite properly observes: “At the core of Colossians are expressions for Israel from the story of Israel that Paul uses for the church: ... the exodus in 1:12–14, wisdom in 1:15–20, and the Torah in Christ (1:25, 27; 2:2, 4, 6–7, 14).” (*Colossians*, NICNT, 2018), p. 30.
5. “We know too little of diaspora Judaism in this period, but what we do know gives us a number of clear pointers. First, there is a persistent record of Jews being anxious to maintain their distinct religious identity and of being given the right to do so. Most often mentioned are the rights of assembly and places of prayer (synagogues), payment of the temple tax, freedom from military service, and the right to live according to their own laws, often with particular reference to sabbath and food laws. Laodicea features in one of these decrees (Josephus, *Antiquities* 14.241–42), and a Jewish inscription from Hierapolis (CIJ 777) also mentions the feasts of Passover and Pentecost.” (Dunn, *NIGCT*, 1996, p.29)
6. “We cannot, however, assume from this that the Judaism of the Colossian synagogues was wholly uniform—any more than was the Judaism (or Judaisms) in the land of Israel, of which we have more information. Around their common features, the ‘sects’ of Palestinian Judaism displayed a striking diversity of specific belief and halakhic practice... We should hesitate to envisage or speak of a regular pattern of orthodoxy as the norm. Rather we might expect that something at least of the diversity of Palestinian Judaism was reflected in the diaspora. This is not to suggest that there were flourishing groups of Pharisees and Sadducees in Colossae, but it does suggest that the older idea of Lightfoot that the Colossian ‘heresy’ was a form of or shared characteristics with Essenism may have more credibility than at first appears.” (Dunn, *NIGCT*, 1996, p.30).
7. A case for “Jewish legalism” as an explanation is clearly outlined by Ian Smith (*Heavenly Perspective*, p. 143): “The world of evil elemental spirits was both recognized and feared. This fear of the powers of evil led Jews to participate in legalism. The philosophy stressed distinctively Jewish practices such as circumcision, Sabbath observance and dietary restrictions as means whereby the adherents could release themselves from the powers of evil. Such ‘good’ practices would help the errorists overcome the “evil” forces. These practices, however, inasmuch as they were centred upon human obedience rather than divine grace, actually enslaved the Colossians to the very forces from which they wanted to be liberated. Furthermore, submission to such practices denied the sufficiency of the atonement by Christ and his lordship over creation, especially over the elemental spirits.”
8. “There are those who argue for a strictly Jewish character of this false teaching, especially the type of Jewish legalism that lies behind other Pauline writings. Insofar as the phrase ‘the elemental spirits of the world’ (τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου, 2:8; cf. 2:20) had already appeared in Gal 4:3, 9, where ‘it is clearly linked into the Jewish law, understood as itself a kind of power set in charge over Israel like a slave-custodian or guardian (Gal 3:23–25; 4:1–3, 9–10),’ some have suggested that the false teaching Paul is encountering in this letter is similar to what he fought against in Galatians. Additional parallels further strengthen the connection between these two letters: circumcision, Sabbath and feast days, food laws, and the definition of God’s people in inclusive terms.” (Pao, *ZECNT* 2018, p. 28)
9. “Now there certainly were active ‘troublemakers’ in the Galatian churches (probably other Jewish Christian missionaries) whom Paul denounces in no uncertain terms (see,

e.g., my Galatians). But there is nothing in Colossians like the fierceness and explicitness of the denunciations that are such a feature of Galatians (Gal. 1:6–9; 3:1–3; 4:8–10; 5:2–12). Most striking is the contrast between the polemical epilogue to Galatians, summing up Paul’s continuing deep anxieties (Gal. 6:11–17), and the relatively calm and untroubled conclusion to Colossians (Col. 4:7–17).” (Dunn, NIGCT, 1996, p. 25).

10. “While the significance of the presence of Jewish elements in this false teaching cannot be denied, Jewish legalism is unable to explain other elements in 2:16–23 that appear to move beyond this conceptual framework... Equally important is the fact that while the word “law” (νόμος) appears more than thirty times in Galatians, it is not used at all in Colossians. Jewish legalism should not, therefore, be considered the primary target of Paul’s discussion in this letter.” (Pao, ZECNT, 2018, p. 28)
11. Beale argues for a connection between the Colossian threat and Old Testament idolatry: “Among the four times that the tripartite formula ‘feasts, new moons, and Sabbath days’ occurs in the OT, two refer to them as having become idolatrous (see Isa. 1:13–14 and the direct association with bdelygma [‘abomination’], a common reference to idolatry in Isaiah and the OT; cf. Hos. 2:11 in the context of 2:6–13). Thus there is already a precedent for the transforming of OT festivals into idolatrous activities. In Gal. 4:8–10 virtually the identical phrase (‘you observe days and months and seasons and years’), together with the word ‘elements’ (cf. Col. 2:20), is directly linked to objects of idolatry. That Col. 2:16–23 describes idolatrous traditions may also be suggested by 3:3–7, where at least part of the saints’ former unbelieving life is summarized as ‘idolatry’ (in this respect, note the verbal and conceptual similarity of ‘you have died’ and ‘put to death the members [of your body] upon the earth’ in 3:3, 5 to ‘you have died ... from the elements of the world’ in 2:20, the latter closely linked to the Isa. 29:13 allusion in 2:22 and to the ‘worship of angels’ in 2:18).” (Beale, CNTUOT, 2007, p. 861).

#### C. Gnosticism

1. “The questions of when and from what source Gnosticism arose have been hotly debated. Did Gnosticism originate as a Christian heresy, or did it originate as a non-Christian movement, whether pagan or Jewish? The Nag Hammadi documents give new evidence, but each position still has adherents. The new Gnostic texts do not solve the chronology of Gnosticism—none is demonstrably earlier than the New Testament. On the other hand, the collection witnesses to non-Christian expressions of Gnosticism and so reopens the question of the possibility that Christians in the formative period drew on external Gnostic concepts, imagery, and terminology to express their faith, even though at a later stage they found it necessary to combat extreme developments of Gnostic thinking.” (Ferguson, *Backgrounds*, 2003, p. 307).
2. “The view of the church fathers, which prevailed into the nineteenth century, is that the gnostic movement was a second-century heresy within the Christian church that had its ultimate roots in Simon Magus (see Acts 8), who was understood as the father of all heretics in the church. The modern debate, now fueled by the Nag Hammadi discoveries, has involved opening the issue of origins. Thus some scholars argue that the gnostic movement began in the first century as a non-Christian and pre-Christian movement..., while others maintain that the gnostic movement is a second-century Christian deviation.” (David M. Scholer, “Gnosis, Gnosticism,” in DLNTD, 1997, p. 402).

3. “Most forms of Gnosticism that we know seem to contain elements from pagan thought, Judaism, and Christianity. Elements of Gnosticism bear striking similarities to Neopythagoreanism and Middle Platonism, suggesting that some fusion of Greek speculative thought brought about Gnosticism. It has even been characterized as ‘Platonism run wild.’ Here we may note the idea of a remote supreme being, the soul as immortal and in bondage to the body, and a disparagement of the material world: these were ideas for which Gnosticism found philosophical support although extending them to an extreme beyond what philosophers advocated.” (Ferguson, 307)

D. Pagan philosophy

1. “Focusing on elements that appear to be outside of the boundaries of typical Jewish practices, a small minority of scholars continues to argue for a predominantly pagan background of this false teaching. The emphases on cosmic speculations and ascetic practices have been taken to reflect a general mixture of Middle Platonic thought and other local traditions that encourage a particular path in the pursuit of wisdom, or a form of Cynic philosophy in particular whose adherents criticize the ritual and calendrical practices of the Colossian believers. Parallels to Middle Platonic thought can indeed explain certain phrases and expressions in this letter, but we should not ignore the significance of the Jewish elements as noted above. The problem of attempts to identify the specific school of philosophy such as Cynicism is the lack of linguistic parallels that would secure such a link.” (Pao, *ZECNT*, 2012, pp. 27-28)
2. Pythagoreanism: “Pythagoras had the brilliant idea that number is related to the structure of the universe. This idea came from his discovery of the numerical ratios of the principal intervals in the musical scale. The idea that the universe obeys mathematical laws has been of profound importance, apart from the more dubious speculation about number symbolism encouraged by this idea... Pythagoras taught the theory of metempsychosis, or transmigration (the passing of a soul at a body’s death into another body)...Pythagoras apparently was an important source for Plato’s distinction between soul and body. Pythagoras formed a close group of disciples with the cohesion of a religious group, whose patron deity was Apollo. This religious enthusiasm was something new among pre-Socratic philosophers. Other philosophers were lone thinkers, but Pythagoras created a brotherhood (the first thing approaching a “church”) and gave his followers a distinctive way of life. He established an ascetic discipline. A member of his group had to live by rules. Purifications were to improve the soul. The Pythagoreans became complete vegetarians.” (Ferguson, *Backgrounds*, 2003, pp. 382–383).
3. Middle Platonism: “This analysis reaches the following conclusions and results. It criticizes the tendency among existing reconstructions of the philosophy to classify it as either Jewish or pagan, or to label it syncretistic without accounting for why that particular blend of elements arose. This study offers instead a portrait of philosophically-inclined Gentiles drawn to the Jewish community and then to the Christian congregation by ideas and practices congenial with their view of the world. Central to the Colossian philosophy’s outlook was the pursuit of divine knowledge or wisdom through (1) the order of the cosmic elements (2:8, 20), (2) a bodily asceticism that sets free the investigative mind (2:18, 23), and (3) intermediaries between heaven and earth (angels or demons; 2:18). These features are typical of Middle Platonism in the NT period. At the same time, the philosophy’s calendar (2:16) and stress on humility (2:18, 23) indicate Jewish and Christian influences. Hence, the Colossian philosophy appears to be a distinctive blend of popular Middle Platonic, Jewish, and



Christian elements that cohere around the pursuit of wisdom” (DeMaris, *Colossian Controversy*, 1994, pp. 16-17).

4. For an introduction to the processes by which Greek philosophy (particularly “natural philosophy,” which later in Western Civilization became known as *scientia*, or science) abandoned explanations of natural phenomena as being caused by the capricious behaviors of a multitude of deities, and became more “natural” events which could be quantified, described, explained logically, and in some cases, predicted, a standard text like Lindberg and Numbers (*Beginnings of Western Science*, 1986), is helpful as a place to begin.
- E. Syncretism?
1. Syncretism “defined”
    - a. “The history of the use of the term syncretism...has acquired vague meanings. Because of the potential scope of its application it has become an expression covering every kind of religious or even cultural contact. Used to describe different religious phenomena, it creates an illusion that each of them is related to the rise of a mixed religion. This pattern of thought was especially popular among scholars of the nineteenth century. It still affects the modern investigations of the Mediterranean religious situation of the Hellenistic and Roman periods...Language possesses an ability to shape our thoughts and to play games with us through words. This can sometimes create confusion. The term syncretism epitomises the problem...” (Levinskaya, 1996, pp.197-198)
    - b. “These conflicting definitions reflect a situation where the word, having the status of a technical term, is nevertheless used by different scholars in different ways in the manner of Lewis Carroll’s Humpty Dumpty. This makes the process of reading some articles similar to the complexity of solving a crossword. A survey of the history of this term’s use illustrates the same problem.” (Levinskaya, 1996, pp.198-199)
  2. The most thorough examination of syncretism with reference to Colossians is Clinton Arnold, *The Colossian Syncretism*. Lawrence Hurtado provides a succinct synopsis:
    - a. “Arnold draws heavily upon evidence from inscriptions, magical amulets, and a variety of literary sources as he builds his picture of the religious setting of the letter. In the end, whether one agrees with Arnold’s position on every issue or not, the book is a treasure-trove for any serious student of Colossians and of the religious atmosphere of earliest Christianity.” (Hurtado, 2000)
    - b. “The first four chapters provide a valuable discussion of evidence for the place of angel/spirit beings in pagan and Jewish practices, focusing especially on local veneration of “angels” (the term appears in both Jewish and pagan sources in the area of Colossae. This part of the book alone makes it a valuable contribution to recently renewed interest in the roles of “intermediate” beings in Jewish and Christian circles (see also L. T. Stuckenbruck, *Angel Veneration and Christology* [WUNT 2/70; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1995])” (Hurtado, RBL, 2000)
    - c. “In Arnold’s view, the main relevant feature of the religious background of Colossae was the prominence of heavenly beings that were variously called “angels” or other designations, and were invoked to give aid and feared as powerful threats. Arnold sees concern about these beings reflected in the

reference to various categories of created beings in Col 1:16, the mention of στοιχεια (2:8, 20), and in the θρησκεια των αγγελων of 2:18 (which, Arnold insists, must refer to veneration directed to these angel beings).” (Hurtado)

3. Hurtado then offers his own reservations about Arnold’s emphasis on syncretism as the major issue or “problem” at Colossae.
  - a. “I am not persuaded that the ‘root issue’ in the epistle is a ‘fear of the powers’ among the Colossian Christians. To be sure, angels are mentioned in the epistle, but there is no reference to fear of heavenly powers, no exhortation against such fear, no command against any of the sorts of invocations, amulets, and spells that Arnold so richly documents, nor any explicit reference to heavenly beings as ‘demonic’ (language the epistle’s author had at his disposal if he had wanted to make the point). The στοιχεια may well be (or include) angels, but if so it is not clear that the στοιχεια are ‘demonic’ or represent more than a now inferior regime or authority for living. Christ is presented as superior to all creatures, including various ranks of beings (1:16). But does this assertion of superiority over them mean that they are necessarily malevolent?” (Hurtado, RBL, 2000)
  - b. Moreover, “The thanksgiving section of Colossians (1:9–14), where we would expect to find a Pauline anticipation of the author’s main concerns, seems more focused on ethical behavior, patient endurance, and thankfulness for redemption (vv. 10–14), rather than anxiety over powerful spirit-beings. Likewise, the hortatory section (3:1–4:6) is entirely concerned with right ethical behavior, not with re-ordering cultic practices away from angel-veneration or with steering anxious Christians away from fear of demonic powers....I also must register some hesitation about Arnold’s minimizing of the significance of more familiar Jewish practices and themes in the letter.” (Hurtado, RBL, 2000).

F. That there is a strong Jewish component to any syncretistic expression of “the philosophy” is evident. Nijay Gupta differentiates between a “Syncretistic Jewish Approach” (ala Arnold) and a “Variegated Jewish Approach,” in which “no non-Jewish religious idea or component is deemed necessary or self-evident in the problematic philosophy described in Colossians. It presumes that interest in mysteries, ascetic practices, wisdom and perfection, and heavenly ascents were not uncommon in certain strands of Judaism and relies on evidence that Jewish communities in Asia Minor sought to preserve their exclusive religious identity and that many such groups would have been seriously hesitant about pagan religious beliefs and practices.” (Gupta, 2013, p. 17).

G. SUMMARY: Scot McKnight’s recent commentary offers a succinct survey of the proposed suggestions for “What was ‘the problem’ at Colossae?” as follows: “First, the opponents were operating with a Jewish set of ideas and practices, and Paul chose to call this a vain kind of Jewish-shaped “philosophy” (2:8 uses “philosophy,” while 2:23 uses “wisdom”). I hold the Jewishness to be firmly rooted in what is said about the opponents’ practices in Col 2:16–17, 21–22.

“Second, allied to this Jewish-Christian theology is a kind of dualism that can be found among Jews but probably owes its origins in some kind of Hellenism, and the most recent proposals for Middle Platonism are at least suggestive of further clarity.”

“Third, we note the Colossian errorists’ propensity to entangle themselves with what Paul calls the ‘elemental powers of this world,’”

“Fourth, this Jewish-Christian-Hellenistic and dualistic worldview of the opponents led rather inevitably to a kind of world-denying asceticism. This self-denying asceticism was tied by the opponents to a desire to enter into the depths of mystical experiences and ascent into the heavenly world. For now, we have in hand a set of observations that helps us to define the so-called opponents: Jewish, Christian, Hellenistic, dualistic, and ascetic.” (McKnight, *Colossians*, NICNT, 2018), pp. 29-32.

#### H. What shall we say then?

1. “The definition of a religion by quoting historical names and by incorporating individual phenomena in timeless -isms, and the distinction of theory and practice, of theology and liturgies, or of cosmology and soteriology, etc., reveals more of the surgical skill and the synthetic gifts of Western scholars than of the character and faith of a religious group. As a consequence, the Colossian Religion remains an unsolved puzzle. While the available facts are insufficient to settle the issue, the only way to explain the subject is by close examination of every scrap of information provided by the text of the epistle. Barring the discovery of new pertinent data from outside sources, that remains the best procedure.” (Barth and Blanke, *Colossians*, AYB, 20008, p. 39).

2. “We may simply have to accept that that is an unsolved, and insoluble, mystery, and redirect our attention to the content of the letter’s response; while that too concerns a ‘mystery’ (2:2), at least we have in this case direct access to a body of evidence, the letter itself.” (John M.G. Barclay, 1997, p. 54)

3. My in-house psychologist, Bette, has tried for a half-century to teach me to say: “I don’t know.”

### IX. **Worship of Angels and Visions – The “Unseen Realm”**

A. Definitions: Anthropologists studying cross-cultural psychology define alternate states of consciousness as conditions in which sensations, perceptions, cognition, and emotions are altered. Such states are characterized by changes in sensing, perceiving, thinking, and feeling. When a person is in such a state, the experience modifies the relation of the individual to the self, body, sense of identity, and the environment of time, space, or other people. One scholar (Crapanzano 2001: 632) has identified more than thirty-five different levels of awareness: dreaming, sleeping, hypnagogic (drowsiness before sleep), hypnopompic (semi-consciousness preceding waking), hyperalert, lethargic, rapture, hysteric, fragmentation, regressive, meditative, trance, reverie, daydreaming, internal scanning, stupor, coma, stored memory, expanded consciousness, and “normal,” among others. In trance or in any other alternate state of consciousness a person encounters, indeed enters, another level or

aspect of reality registered physiologically in the brain in the same way “normal” experiences are. Culturally “normal” or consensual reality is that aspect or dimension of reality of which a person is most commonly aware most of the time. Alternate reality describes that dimension of reality in which nonhuman personages such as spirits and/or the deity reside, and which human beings from culturally “normal” reality can sometimes visit in ecstatic trance by taking a journey (variously called “sky journey” or “soul loss” and the like), and to which people go when they die. The experience of alternate reality is nonrational but not irrational, as claimed by those who do not believe any of these things. From the perspective of these latter persons, such experiences would be appropriately described as experiences of nonconsensual reality.” (Malina and Pilch, 2013, p. 223)

1. “Paul himself seems to have experienced or practiced mystical ascent (2 Cor. 12:1–7—a period of his life probably to be located in Cilicia [Gal. 2:21; Acts 11:26]) ... the seer of Revelation’s characteristically Jewish apocalyptic visions are said to have taken place in Patmos (Rev. 1:9; note the often observed parallel between Rev. 3:14 and Col. 1:15)” (Dunn, 1996, p.30 – noting at n.29 that “Sibylline Oracles 4, which is sometimes thought to have originated in Asia Minor (4.107 refers to the destruction of Laodicea by earthquake and 4.150–51 to the Meander), has some curious parallels with Colossians that may indicate that it underwent a sectarian Jewish redaction (6–7, 33–34, 165–70).” (Dunn 1996, p. 30, n. 29).
2. Without question, even our “modern” and post-modern culture is fascinated with paranormal phenomena, including those described on both Old and New Testaments: “People are fascinated by the supernatural and the superhuman. Just think about the entertainment industry in recent years. Thousands of books, television shows, and movies in the past decade have been about angels, aliens, monsters, demons, ghosts, witches, magic, vampires, werewolves, and superheroes. Many of Hollywood’s blockbuster franchises feature the supernatural: the X-Men, the Avengers, the Harry Potter series, Superman, and the Twilight saga. Television shows like Fringe and, of course, Supernatural and X-Files have dedicated followings even long after filming new episodes ends. And really, haven’t these things always been popular—in tales, in books, in art?” (Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 2015, p. 17).

B. Michael Heiser is the most recent scholar to place the supernatural and paranormal phenomena in the Bible on a front burner (see also prior works by Unger, and others). It is not necessary to agree with all of Heiser’s conclusions or speculations to agree with his baseline perspective:

“The proper context for interpreting the Bible is not Augustine or any other church father. It is not the Catholic Church. It is not the rabbinic movements of late antiquity and the Middle Ages. It is not the Reformation or the Puritans. It is not evangelicalism in any of its flavors. It is not the modern world at all, or any period of its history. The proper context for interpreting the Bible is the context of the biblical writers—the context that produced the Bible. Every other context is alien to the biblical writers and, therefore, to the Bible. Yet there is a pervasive tendency in the believing Church to filter the Bible through creeds, confessions, and denominational preferences.” (Heiser, *Supernatural*, 2015, p. 16)

1. “Why is it that Christians who would strenuously defend a belief in God or the virgin birth against charges that they are unscientific or irrational don’t hesitate to call out academic SWAT teams to explain away ‘weird’ biblical passages? ... There are many

other passages [besides Psalm 82] whose content is curious or ‘doesn’t make sense’ and so are abandoned or glossed over. Here’s a sampling of them:

- Gen 1:26
- Gen 3:5, 22
- Gen 6:1–4
- Gen 10–11
- Gen 15:1
- Gen 48:15–16
- Exod 3:1–14
- Exod 23:20–23
- Num 13:32–33
- Deut 32:8–9
- Deut 32:17
- Judg 6
- 1 Sam 3
- 1 Sam 23:1–14
- 1 Kgs 22:1–23
- 2 Kgs 5:17–19
- Job 1–2
- Pss 82, 68, 89
- Isa 14:12–15
- Ezek 28:11–19
- Dan 7
- Matt 16:13–23
- John 1:1–14
- John 10:34–35
- Rom 8:18–24
- Rom 15:24, 28
- 1 Cor 2:6–13
- 1 Cor 5:4–5
- 1 Cor 6:3
- 1 Cor 10:18–22

- Gal 3:19
- Eph 6:10–12
- Heb 1–2
- 1 Pet 3:18–22
- 2 Pet 1:3–4
- 2 Pet 2:4–5
- Jude 5–7
- Rev 2:26–28
- Rev 3:21

“All are conceptually interconnected, and all help illuminate the more commonly studied passages—those that do ‘make sense.’” (Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 2015, pp. 18-19).

#### C. Worship of Angels

1. “The phrase translated ‘worship of angels’ (thrēskeia tōn angelōn) has generated some disagreement among scholars. Does the phrase describe worship given to angels (i.e., they are the object) or participation with angels in their worship?” (Heiser, *Angels*, 2018, p. 130).
2. One interpretation, explained by O’Brien, is that “The phrase has normally been taken (with the genitive being regarded as objective) to denote ‘the worship directed to the angels’.... This statement concerning angel-worship seems to go beyond speculation about angels present in the Jewish schools and denotes an actual cult of angels. The principalities and powers might have been in view but Paul here refers to angels as a class.... There is little evidence for the worship of angels among the Jews.... [A]nd so it is argued that the expression is evidence of the syncretistic character of the ‘philosophy’ at Colossae. It was Jewish mixed with pagan elements.” (O’Brien, 1982, p. 142).
3. O’Brien recognizes that others who have examined the text extensively, such as Francis, interpret the text differently: “(taking the genitive as subjective) denotes ‘the worship which the angels perform.’ Using a wide range of sources representing what he terms ascetic-mystic piety Francis drew attention to the many descriptions of angelic worship.... Accordingly, the false teachers claimed to have joined in the angelic worship of God as they entered into the heavenly realm and prepared to receive visions of divine mysteries.” (See Francis, “Humility and Angelic Worship in Col 2:18,” 1975, pp. 163–95).
4. “No matter the alternative, Paul’s warning is comprehensible. Angels are neither the correct object of worship, nor is the worship of God defined by religious performance. Paul was clear that spiritual worship was about the heart—sacrificially presenting one’s life to Christ, not being conformed to the world, but being transformed by a renewed mind or heart (Rom 12:1–2).” (Heiser, *Angels*, p. 131).

D. Another feature of the “angel references” in Colossians is the question of whether the reconciliation of “all things” includes fallen angels (and perhaps other cosmic concerns): “It is argued that the freeing of creation from its bondage to decay so that it obtains the glorious liberty of the children of God (Rom 8:19–21) is a future eschatological

event. Three related questions, therefore, arise: (a) What is the meaning of the phrase “to reconcile all things to him” ... (b) What is the relationship of this expression to the words which follow, “having made peace through the blood of his cross” ... (c) Is it possible or even desirable to equate verse 20 with the notion of God’s leading the evil powers in his triumphal procession at chapter 2:15?” (O’Brien, 1982, 153-154).

- a. “The reconciliation of Colossians 1:20 ...is rooted in creation, and now, after the cross, it is moving toward its consummation, which itself is expressed as the dominion of the Son over all things...The link connecting the reconciliation language of Colossians 1:20 (and the original creation order of Col 1:16) to the kingship of the Son derives from Colossians 2:15 ... The basis for its relevance in understanding Colossians 1:20 is that it also references supernatural powers—spirit beings “in heaven” that were created by the Son (Col 1:16) and which now have been reconciled to him through the cross.” Heiser, *Angels*, 2018, p. 149. See also Barth, *AYB 34B*, 1994, p. 215).
- b. Dunn seems to recognize this cosmic perspective: “The defeat of these powers is also the means of reconciling heaven and earth, unusually ‘to him’ ...in some contrast to Eph. 2:16, which has in view specifically the reconciliation of Jew and Gentile to God, more typical of Paul (cf. Rom. 11:15; 2 Cor. 5:18–20). The thought is coherently Jewish: ... God as ‘peace-maker’ among the various parts of the universe ... in sharp contrast to later Gnosticism, for which such a reconciliation would be unthinkable. The implication is that the purpose, means, and manner of (final) reconciliation have already been expressed by God, not that the reconciliation is already complete.” (p. 103).
- c. Thus, “What is being claimed is quite simply and profoundly that the divine purpose in the act of reconciliation and peacemaking was to restore the harmony of the original creation, to bring into renewed oneness and wholeness ‘all things,’ ‘whether things on the earth or things in the heavens’ (see on 1:16). That the church has a role in this is implied in the correlation of 1:18a with 1:20. And when we include the earlier talk of the gospel ‘in all the world (κόσμος) bearing fruit and growing’ (1:6), and the subsequent talk of the ages-old mystery being made known among all the nations (1:27), the implication becomes clear: it is by its gospel living (1:10) and by its gospel preaching (1:27) that the cosmic goal of reconciled perfection will be achieved (1:28).” (Dunn, 1996, p. 104).
- d. “Heaven and earth have been returned to their divinely created and determined order and this has occurred through the resurrection and exaltation of Christ. The universe is again under its head, and cosmic peace—a peace which according to some apocalyptic expectations would only occur at the end time—has returned.... The principalities are stripped of their power (cf. 2:14, 15) and the reconciliation of all things has taken place.... Victory over these powers, presumed to be hostile toward God or Christ, does not mean they are done away with or finally destroyed. It is evident that they continue to exist, inimical to man and his interests (cf. Rom 8:38, 39). Nevertheless they cannot finally harm the person who is in Christ, and their ultimate overthrow in the future is assured (1 Cor 15:24–28; see on Col 2:15).” (O’Brien, 1982, pp. 54-56; see also Lohse, 1971, pp. 59-60).
- e. “The vision is vast. The claim is mind-blowing. It says much for the faith of these first Christians that they should see in Christ’s death and resurrection

quite literally the key to resolving the disharmonies of nature and the inhumanities of humankind, that the character of God’s creation and God’s concern for the universe in its fullest expression could be so caught and encapsulated for them in the cross of Christ (cf. already 1 Cor. 1:22–25, 30). In some ways still more striking is the implied vision of the church as the focus and means toward this cosmic reconciliation—the community in which that reconciliation has already taken place (or begun to take place) and whose responsibility it is to live out (cf. particularly 3:8–15) as well as to proclaim its secret (cf. 4:2–6).” (Dunn, 1996, p. 104)

- f. “In Colossians 1:20, “reconciliation” means the return to creation order and the re-installment of Christ to his position of rulership at the right hand of God (Acts 7:55–56; Eph 1:20; Col 3:1; Heb 1:3, 13; 1 Pet 3:22; Rev 5:1) after his incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension. An offer of salvation to angels is not in view. Instead, the aberration of their dominion over the affairs of men is corrected. Their authority is now illegitimate.\*22\* Of course, they will not willingly surrender power, and so that must be—and will be—taken from them. Humans still estranged from God are thus deceived and enslaved by powers unauthorized by the true king. That is the point of the Great Commission—setting captives free.” (Heiser, *Angels*, 2018, pp. 151-152).
- E. “Principalities and Powers” – earthly governments? Or cosmic rulers?
1. Heiser contends that *stoicheia*, “strongly rooted in Graeco-Roman cosmological thinking” can refer to “one of four things: (1) basic principles of religious teaching (e.g., law); (2) rudimentary substances of the physical world; (3) astral deities (astrological myths); (4) spiritual beings in general.” (UR, 2015, p. [327@n.17](#))
  2. Earthly “powers” as “rulers of this age”
    - a. “Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. 7 But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. 8 None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.” 1 Cor. 2:6-8 ESV
    - b. “Since World War 2, there has been a growing trend among scholars in the West to interpret Paul’s references to principalities and powers almost exclusively as the structures of our existence. The powers of darkness are ‘demythologized’ and described in terms of religious structures (especially tradition), political and economic structures (as, for example, imperialism, nationalism, dictatorship, socialism and capitalism), the set of values held by a given social grouping (accepted morality, public opinion and interest, ideas of social status, concept of justice and so on) and intellectual structures (ologies and isms). All of these structures and values exert a controlling influence on society. They are also capable of becoming evil (‘demonic’) and may stand in the need of redemption.” (Arnold, *Powers of Darkness: Principalities & Powers in Paul’s Letters* 1992), p. 194.
    - c. Some expositors see one manifestation of “the powers” as those in control of earthly governments, human minions doing Satan’s bidding and captivating the minds and lusts of humanity for evil purposes. “Mainstream” Protestant commentators such as Walter Wink analyzed the power structures of our own day and the capacity for evil to flourish within them, challenging churches to



play a role in bringing about social justice in the face of the “powers of evil” (See Wink’s trilogy on “The Powers” in the bibliography). This summary of the LOGOS version of Wink’s *Unmasking the Powers: The Invisible Forces That Determine Human Existence* fairly captures the essence of his work:

“Angels, Spirits, principalities, powers, gods, Satan—these, along with all other spiritual realities, are the unmentionables of our culture. The dominant materialistic worldview has absolutely no place for them. ... [But] materialism itself is terminably ill, and, let us hope, in process of replacement by a worldview capable of honoring the lasting values of modern science without succumbing to reductionism. ... [Therefore] we find ourselves returning to the ancient traditions, searching for wisdom wherever it may be found. We do not capitulate to the past and its superstitions, but bring all the gifts our race has acquired along the way as aids in recovering the lost language of our souls. ... In *Naming the Powers* I developed the thesis ... that the New Testament’s ‘principalities and powers’ is a generic category referring to the determining forces of physical, psychic, and social existence. ... In the present volume we will be focusing on just seven of the Powers mentioned in Scripture ... [which are] representative, and open the way to comprehending the rest. They are: Satan, demons, angels of churches, angels of nations, gods, elements, and angels of nature.”

<https://www.logos.com/product/188976/selected-works-of-walter-wink>

- d. Examples of “evangelical” works emphasizing the social and political interpretation of “the powers” include John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), especially chapter eight: “Christ and Power”; Richard Mouw, *Politics and the Biblical Drama* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976); Ronald J. Sider, *Christ and Violence* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1979), and Robert Webber, *The Church in the World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986).
- e. “The primary practical danger in limiting our interpretation of the powers to the structures is that it is reductionistic. It unreasonably restricts how we understand the work of the devil in Paul’s day and in our day. Specifically it overlooks the direct and immediate work of an evil spirit in the life of an individual—either through overt demonization (‘giving a place to the devil’) or the devil’s classic work of directly tempting people to sin.” (Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*, 1992, p. 196).
- f. “When Hitler took the helm in Germany in 1933, the Powers of Volk, race, and state took a new grip on men...No one could withhold himself, without utmost effort, from the grasp these Powers had on men’s inner and outer life. While studying in Berlin (1937) I myself experienced almost literally how such Powers may be ‘in the air.’ At the same time one had to see how they intruded as a barrier between God’s Word and men. They acted as if they were ultimate values, calling for loyalty as if they were the gods of the cosmos. I allude to this example solely because it makes so strikingly clear the sense of Paul’s expressions (not only his meaning but also his actual terms). Nor should it be difficult for us to perceive today in every realm of life these Powers which unify men, yet separate them from God. The state, politics, class, social

struggle, national interest, public opinion, accepted morality, the ideas of decency, humanity, democracy—these give unity and direction to thousands of lives. Yet precisely by giving unity and direction they separate these many lives from the true God; they let us believe that we have found the meaning of existence, whereas they really estrange us from true meaning.” (Berkhof, *Christ and the Powers*, 1977, pp. 32–33). See also Chapter 6, “Crisis and Christianization of the Powers.”

- g. A thought occurs: Much as Americans might like to fancy themselves “God’s New Israel” or the divine “city on a hill,” the stubborn fact is we are not God’s “chosen people.” Some citizens of the USA may fear being overtaken by some “evil empire,” a modern-day Babylon or Rome – but perhaps we should ask ourselves whether WE may be, or become, the earthly “powers,” pagan Babylon rather than Israel, a decadent empire roaming the globe and inflicting punishment on other nations whose sins we deem “worse” than our own. Some days, it certainly feels like we are living in Babylon.

## X. Baptism and Circumcision

A. Everett Ferguson’s magisterial *Baptism in the Early Church* places Colossians 2:11-12 in the larger context of Colossians: “Christ came to occupy his position of headship through his death and resurrection. By sharing in that experience of Christ, his followers enjoy the results of his triumph over the spiritual powers (2:15)...Between the “in whom (Christ)” of verse 11 and the “in which (or in whom)” of verse 12 there are three phrases with the preposition “in” that are not only formally parallel but also factually identical: stripping off the flesh, circumcision of Christ, and baptism... The description of Christ’s death as a circumcision may have been aided by Jewish ideas of death and a new life in connection with a proselyte’s circumcision... When one enters into Christ’s death, that person receives a spiritual circumcision, a circumcision that is not done by a human hand. The baptism is not itself the spiritual circumcision, for baptism is performed by human hands. Rather, the circumcision is received in baptism.” (pp. 159-160)

B. Ferguson observes that “Baptism brings a person into this circumcision of Christ on the cross” and reminds readers that “This passage says explicitly what Romans 6:3–4 only implied, that in baptism one not only is buried with Christ but is also raised with him... Baptism is a confession of faith in the resurrection of Jesus by God. It is done in faith in the activity of God, who raised him from the dead. God is at work throughout the passage: the passive voices—were circumcised, were buried, were raised—are the “divine passives” for what God did. Not only did he raise Christ, but he also made the one baptized alive and forgave his/her sins. The “with Christ” emphasis is obvious: “buried with him,” “raised with him” (2:12), and “made alive with him” (2:13).” (p.159)

C. On baptism and circumcision: “This passage has been the basis of the view that baptism is Christian circumcision; but if that was the equivalence intended here, there would have been a ready answer to Judaizers who insisted that Gentile converts be circumcised, for the reply was at hand that Gentiles already had the equivalent and so had no need of circumcision. It is likely that circumcision was one of the practices that the errorists in Colossae were promoting along with other features of the Jewish law (2:16). Christ’s death has made it unnecessary for Gentiles (2:17). When dead in uncircumcision, they were made alive by God (through his Spirit). The forgiveness of transgressions made this possible. (Ferguson, *Baptism*, 2009, p. 159)

D. Also of interest: “According to the preferred reading, the passage does not use for baptism the usual Christian word βάπτισμα, but the word used more generally for other

baptisms or washings, βαπτισμός. Many manuscripts, including the later Byzantine texts, give the more familiar Christian word. All transcriptional probability favors that the more common Christian term was substituted for the other, since Christian baptism is obviously under consideration. Why would Paul use the more general word? My conjecture would be that he borrows the term from the language of the opponents, who were treating baptism as they did other ritual ordinances. Hence, Paul fills it with its Christian content of association with the death and resurrection of Christ as the unique means of coming to fullness in Christ, having the bond of indebtedness erased, and sharing in his triumph over the spiritual forces.” (Ferguson, *Baptism*, 2009, p. 160)

- E. Consider also these observations from a recent Baptist commentary: “In the final reference to ‘faith’ in Colossians (2:12b: ‘you were also raised with him through faith’), Paul’s use of *pistis* is noteworthy. Burial in baptism is not viewed as a ritual of initiation per se, but as a form of dying. Paul is calling for a type of co-crucifixion with Christ that requires trust in God. While religious enthusiasts devise ways to work their way up to heaven and glean celestial insights, the cross calls the follower of Christ downward into the grave, to be done with sin. Who can stand this seemingly backwards approach? Who can stomach this message? This requires *pistis* with a view toward the God who vindicated God’s self, proving the means right by raising Jesus up from the domain of the dead.” (Gupta, *Colossians*, S&H, 2013, pp. 94-95)
- F. “Baptism has two dimensions: (1) death (or burial) and (2) resurrection. We begin with death: “having been buried with him in baptism.” Here Paul evokes the simplest and earliest of gospel confessions: he lived, he died, he was buried, he was raised, and he was exalted (1 Cor 15:3–8). The burial stands for the death of Christ and evokes what Paul will write to the Romans (6:1–11). The theology at work is that the consequence of sin is death, and therefore Christ must enter into death to eradicate its cause: sin. The believer is summoned to enter into that death of Christ in order that through this co-death, sin and death may be undone by a co-resurrection, which is what Paul moves to next.” (Scot McKnight, *Colossians*, NICNT, 2018, pp. 239-240)
- G. Circumcision: Students of the Old Testament understand that the physical act of circumcision was intended to signify a deeper, spiritual commitment to a covenant relationship with Yahweh. “This was a symbol expressing that a true Israelite was one whose heart had been cut apart from a condition of unbelief and sin (Deut. 10:16; Jer. 4:4b; 9:26; Ezek. 44:7, 9) and was set apart to God (Jer. 4:4a; see Gen. 17 below). Similarly, Paul compares this physical circumcision to the spiritual reality of the new-covenantal relationship with Christ.” (Beale, *Colossians*, BECNT, 2019, p. 451)
- H. “So, in line with this, Paul views the circumcision of Christ and of the believer to be a setting apart not only from death and the old corruptible world (and from sin for the believer) but also to resurrection life in Col. 2:11–13... Part of the purpose in pointing out the dual significance of circumcision up to this point is to prepare to see circumcision as quite parallel to baptism, which also signifies separation from the old world and being set apart to life (i.e., in Christ). Both circumcision and baptism are physical sacramental rites that convey a spiritual meaning. If this is on the right track, then spiritual baptism in Col. 2:12 (and, in the background, water baptism as its corresponding sacramental sign), like spiritual circumcision, is the fulfillment of that to which physical circumcision pointed.” (Beale, *Colossians*, BECNT, 2019, pp. 453-454).

## XI. Haustafeln – Household Codes

- A. A “problem” at Colossae, and many other places, is tension and conflict in marriage and other familial relationships. What more obvious place to demonstrate concepts of

reconciliation, mutual love and respect reflecting Christ and His church, than in these relationships? Familial relationships can and should be visible manifestations of compassion, kindness, humility, patience, forgiveness, love, harmony, peace and other virtues? (terms from Colossians 3:12-15, ESV). Empty words not lived out are useless.

- B. “Christian homes in pagan cities (3:18–4:1) – “Paul offers brief guidelines for family life. These early Christian household codes (here and in Ephesians and 1 Peter) are about the ways in which the lordship of Jesus will be manifest in the most obvious social unit. Pagan critics were poised to accuse the Christians of threatening the social order; Paul’s resistance to this has nothing to do with ‘patriarchy’ as normally conceived and everything to do with mutual, humble love.” (Wright and Bird, 2019, p. 465).
- C. Moo observes that parallel texts compose “a popular early Christian ‘form’ of teaching that focused on household affairs. Lending support to this suggestion is the relatively loose connection between this paragraph and its surrounding context as well as the rapid-fire command style of the passage. And this possibility is turned into a strong probability when we recognize that the same pattern is attested in various other ancient writings. Luther dubbed this form of teaching the *Haustafeln*, ‘household table,’ and considerable attention has been devoted to it and its implications for New Testament teaching...Recent scholarship has quite rightly settled on the general Greco-Roman ethical topic of ‘household management’ (*oikonomia*) as the source of these passages. A good example, and one of the earliest, comes from Aristotle, who divides the essential relations of the household into three—master and slave, husband and wife, and father and children—and stresses the natural superiority of the master over the slave and the male (as husband or father) over wife and children. The *Haustafeln* appears in various Greco-Roman writers and was taken up by Philo and Josephus in the Jewish world. This form of teaching, then, was ‘in the air,’ and it is not surprising that New Testament writers utilize it to instruct early Christians in their household responsibilities...But this hierarchical pattern stands in some apparent tension with the New Testament teaching about the ‘equality’ of all people in Christ...vv. 12–17 reinforce this point with exhortations that call on Christians to flesh out the mutuality of their ‘one body’ existence.” (Moo, 2008, pp. 293-294; see also Barth/Blanke, AYB, pp. 426-475; Dunn, 243-244; Pao 2012, pp. 263-266).
- D. The relevance of the “household codes” to a discussion of the “powers” is that they can be seen as “aimed at counteracting the devastating effects of the powers upon human relationships and in transforming relationships within appropriate hierarchical structures. The solution that Paul provides does not involve overthrowing such structures, but rather subjecting them to new creation dynamics” (Gombis, 2005, p. 320).
- E. While these social instructions may have apologetic value (reflecting such codes going back at least to Aristotle), Paul is not “merely trying to shield early Christian communities from imperial pressure. Rather, his exhortations are radical in that they directly confront and subvert the social structures of contemporary society” which have been “corrupted by the malign influence of the powers and authorities” since “those in positions of power manipulate, dominate, and exploit those who are weaker in order to increase in social status and honor.” (Gombis, 322)
- F. On slavery specifically, see Beale, 2019, “Excursus 5: The Master-Slave Relationship” (pp. 455ff.), and commentary on Philemon. Of interest: on how Biblical critiques and defenses of slavery played out in American contexts, particularly in family relationships, start with Eugene Genovese and Elizabeth Fox-Genoveses’ *JAAR* article, or *Roll, Jordan Roll*, still a leading monograph on American slavery, slave families, etc.

## XII. Other considerations: Discussion

### Conclusion: Christ Triumphant Over “the powers”

#### I. “The Problem” at Colossae (or anywhere else!) was “not holding fast to the Head (1:19) but rather following “human traditions” – whatever might be their source.

- A. There was, indeed, a looming cluster of erroneous ideologies – false doctrines – which were either already present, or at least potential threats (“trends pointing in the direction of an apostasy?”) which deserved to be exposed, refuted, and rebuked.
- B. Whether we can discern, two millenia later, exactly what these false teachings were, the 1<sup>st</sup>-century Colossians almost certainly knew what Paul was identifying.
- C. Resulting problems included embracing the seduction of false teaching and “philosophy,” and manifested in attitudes such as arrogance in imagined “superior knowledge,” deceitfulness, misguided religious dietary regulations and ascetic rituals, and unacceptable behaviors in families, with fellow Christians, and in the wider world.
- D. It is very easy to fall victim to one of the most fundamental “Colossian errors:” to be “puffed up without reason” by a carnal mind-set (cf. 1 Corinthians 13:4) due to what we imagine is our “new” or “superior” knowledge about (fill-in-the-blank \_\_\_\_\_) angels, demons, our knowledge of Colossian cultural influences or any other such thing, including imagining that our supposed “simon-pure” orthodoxy make us special or immune to other heresies.

#### II. Solutions include continual spiritual growth: modeling burial and resurrection in baptism and including being filled with the knowledge of God, developing wisdom and insight, walking in a manner worthy of the Lord, bearing fruit in every good work, including fervent prayer, Christ-centered hymnody and developing Biblical familial and other relationships.

- A. “But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles (KJV: ‘weak and beggarly elements’) of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more?” (Galatians 4:9, ESV)
- B. An eschatological conclusion: “The End”

Steve Wolfgang  
 1236 63<sup>rd</sup> Street, Downers Gove, IL 60516  
[stevewolfgang@aol.com](mailto:stevewolfgang@aol.com) or [wolf@uky.edu](mailto:wolf@uky.edu)

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EndLesson8

## **Excursus *Jeff Smelser***

The following observations about a once popular misuse of Ephesians 4:11-16 were included in the early drafts of my commentary on Ephesians. In the end, I decided against including them in the published work. Subsequently, these remarks were posted to the Facebook group “Preacher Talk” December 19, 2019. - *JTS*

### EXCURSUS ON EPHESIANS 4.12 AND THE DEBATE REGARDING CONGREGATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Roy Cogdill and others influenced by him turned to Ephesians 4.12 to find a description of the scope of the work of a local congregation. They opposed many entanglements of congregations in various endeavors that might seem beneficial but were foreign to the practices of New Testament churches. But they based this opposition on a misreading of Ephesians 4.12 whereby they thought they could define three areas of divinely authorized activity for the local church, those three areas being evangelism, benevolence, and edification. As much as they were right to oppose the tendency to turn churches into entities designed to serve our own agendas rather than the Lord’s, the argument they made from Ephesians 4.12 was unrelated to Paul’s point in the context.

It is important to distinguish between the merit of their ultimate point and the means whereby they attempted to sustain it. Their conclusion was intuitively appealing to many inasmuch as it was in keeping with the self-evident fact that the focus of churches today is foreign to what we see in New Testament churches. It is inconceivable that the church at Thessalonica, or the church at Philippi, or the any other New Testament church, would have concerned itself with the kinds of efforts and activities that today are often the primary focus of so many churches. This much is easy to see. It is inconceivable that the church at Thessalonica would have sponsored a journey for a youth group to camp on one of the islands of the Aegean Sea, or that it would have equipped a chariot racing team to compete against the team sponsored by the church at Philippi. Can anyone reasonably imagine that the church at Ephesus might have rented out the theater in that city for a musical performance featuring the most talented Christian artists of Asia? Do we suppose for a minute that the churches of Colossae, Hierapolis and Laodicea might have banded together to build a hospital for residents of the Lycus River Valley? However much benefit can result from the presence of a hospital, such was not the focus nor the concern of churches in the New Testament, though certainly such good deeds might have been performed by individual Christians. Luke, of course, was a physician. But why do we not see the churches he visited with Paul starting health clinic ministries? It is only by a self-congratulatory assumption that we are simply more creative in our good deed doing that we can suppose they would have done these things if only they had thought of them. They would not

have thought of such endeavors, but not because they were limited in their ability to think of ways to do good. New Testament churches would not have thought of such endeavors because they were fundamentally different, differently constituted and differently motivated and differently focused, than are churches today.

But the effort to expose the folly of churches preoccupied with similar activities in our own era, when arising out of the premise that in Ephesians 4 Paul laid down three and only three areas of activity for the local church, was misbegotten. **Paul's point pertains to the unity of the one body rather than the scope of activity of the respective local assemblies.** The one body, composed as it is of individual Christians and not of congregations, does indeed work in this world through the various mundane activities of the saints in their various life endeavors. **The fallacy is in confusing the body of Christ with the local church, or in confusing the body of Christ with the aggregate of all local churches.**

It will be useful to present some examples showing specifically how Ephesians 4.12 has been misused. In 1949, Cogdill set out to explain the scope of the work of the church. He wrote,

“There is no more comprehensive statement of the nature, plan, and purpose of the church in the New Testament scriptures than that found in Ephesians 4:1-16. We need to study this passage carefully, and fix in our minds the place God intended the church to fill in serving his purposes and the plan by which it is to be done. Especially should we notice verses 11 and 12:

‘And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfection of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.’

“Here is outlined a divine order for a divine purpose and both are the plan of God. From verse 12 we learn that the purpose and mission of this divine arrangement are three-fold: (1) for the perfecting of the saints; (2) for the work of the ministry; and (3) for the building up of the body of Christ. This sets forth the mission of the church in its entirety. Any other purpose or act would be ultra vires— without warrant or authority.” [Roy Cogdill, “The Mission Of The Church -- No. 1” Gospel Guardian, VOLUME 1, December 22, 1949 NUMBER 33, PAGE 2,6b]

In 1950, in a context where Roy Cogdill was discussing the benevolent work of congregations, he wrote, “The second great phase of the church's mission, as outlined by Paul in Ephesians 4:11, 12, is ‘for the work of the ministry.’” [Gospel Guardian, “The Mission Of The Church -- No. 2” VOLUME 1, January 5, 1950, NUMBER 34, PAGE 2]

Cogdill had in mind, not the body of Christ functioning distributively through the activities of individual Christians in their daily lives, but the activity of organized churches.

In 1954, John Cox made it clear that the application was to be made to the activities of the local church when he wrote of “the church, under the oversight of the elders” and wrote of “the work of any congregation.” In these phrases and numerous others, he made it perfectly clear that his concern was the nature of activities in which a local congregation might become involved. Under the heading, “The Work Of The Church As Suggested By Ephesians 4:11, 12,” Cox laid out the three areas of activity to which churches were to confine themselves under the sub-headings, "The perfecting of the saints," "Unto the work of ministering," and "Unto the building up of the body of Christ." [“The Berney Points Series: The Mission Of The Church” John D. Cox, Gospel Guardian, VOLUME 5 March 25, 1954 NUMBER 45, PAGE 5-6a]

In 1961 Thomas O’Neal also made explicitly clear his view that this three-fold description defined the scope of the work of the local church and that this was established in Ephesians 4. He wrote, “This local body has the responsibility to preach the gospel, edify herself, care for her own in a benevolent way (Eph. 4:12)” [Searching the Scriptures, Vol 2, no. 1, Jan. 1961, p. 4 “Authority in Religion – IV].

In each of these instances, the error was reading into Ephesians 4.12 a description of the collective work of the local church.

End Excursus