

CALLED, SEALED, *and* FILLED

A Study of Paul's Letter to the Ephesians



ΕΦΕΣΙΟΥΣ 1:1

1 Παῦλος ἀπόστολος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ...
οἱ καὶ ὅτι, καὶ ποθένις τὴν ἔγεαναν...

To The saints who are in Ephesus...

Called, Sealed, and Filled

BY DR. PAUL CRAWFORD

Ephesians

Walking in the Riches of Christ

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Ephesians

Walking in the Riches of Christ

INTRODUCTION

Called, Sealed, and Filled: A Study of Paul's Letter to the Ephesians

The book of Ephesians is one of the richest and most powerful letters ever written concerning the identity, calling, and spiritual life of the believer. Written by Paul the Apostle while imprisoned, this letter was sent to the believers in Ephesus to strengthen their understanding

of who they were in Christ and how they were to live in a world filled with darkness, temptation, and spiritual opposition.

In many ways, Ephesians is the believer's handbook for the Christian life. It begins in the heavenly places, revealing the eternal plan of God, and ends on the battlefield, calling believers to stand strong in spiritual warfare. Between those two points, Paul unfolds some of the deepest truths in all of Scripture concerning salvation, grace, the church, unity, holiness, marriage, family, and the work of the Holy Spirit.

The title Called, Sealed, and Filled captures three major themes that run throughout this letter.

First, believers are called by God.

Ephesians teaches that salvation is not an accident or human achievement but part of God's eternal purpose. Before the foundation of the world, God had a plan to redeem a people for Himself through Jesus Christ. Every believer has been called out of darkness into a new life of purpose, holiness, and spiritual inheritance.

Second, believers are sealed by the Holy Spirit.

Paul explains that those who trust in Christ are marked by the Spirit of God as a guarantee of their salvation and future redemption. This seal represents ownership, security, and assurance. In a world full of uncertainty, Ephesians reminds us that our identity is anchored in Christ and secured by God Himself.

Third, believers are to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

The Christian life is not meant to be lived in human strength alone. Paul calls believers to walk in wisdom, love, purity, unity, and spiritual power through the continual filling of the Spirit. This filling transforms every area of life -- from personal conduct to relationships, worship, ministry, and spiritual warfare.

This study will walk verse by verse through Paul's letter, examining both its doctrinal depth and practical application. Ephesians is not merely a theological document to be studied intellectually; it is a life-changing message meant to transform the heart and renew the mind.

As you journey through this book, may you come to understand more fully who you are in Christ, what God has called you to become, and how the Holy Spirit empowers you to live faithfully in a fallen world. May you be strengthened in grace, rooted in truth, and encouraged to walk worthy of the calling you have received.

Ephesians

Walking in the Riches of Christ

PREFACE

Preface

By Dr. Paul Crawford

The letter to the Ephesians has long been considered one of the crown jewels of the New Testament. Within its six chapters are some of the deepest truths ever written concerning salvation, grace, the church, spiritual identity, and the believer's walk with God. It is a letter that lifts the reader from the struggles of earth into the eternal purposes of heaven, reminding us that in Christ we are far more blessed, secure, and called than we often realize.

As I began writing *Called, Sealed, and Filled: A Study of Paul's Letter to the Ephesians*, my goal was not simply to produce another commentary, but to create a verse-by-verse study that would help believers understand both the theology and the practical power of this remarkable book. Too often Christians know isolated verses from Ephesians but fail to grasp the larger message Paul was communicating to the church. My prayer is that this study helps connect those truths together in a way that strengthens faith and transforms daily living.

The world today is filled with confusion about identity, purpose, morality, and truth. Yet Ephesians answers these issues with clarity and authority. Paul reminds believers that they are chosen by God, redeemed through Christ, sealed by the Holy Spirit, and called to walk worthy of their salvation. He teaches that the church is not merely a human organization, but the living body of Christ on earth. He also reveals that the Christian life is not passive, but a spiritual battle requiring strength, wisdom, and the full armor of God.

This study is designed for pastors, teachers, Bible students, small groups, and everyday believers who desire to go deeper into God's Word. Throughout these pages, I have sought to explain Scripture clearly while remaining faithful to the text and focused on practical application. My desire is that readers will not only gain knowledge but experience spiritual growth and renewed passion for Christ.

The themes of being called, sealed, and filled are not abstract doctrines -- they are living realities for every child of God. We have been called out of darkness into His marvelous light. We have been sealed by the Holy Spirit as God's own possession. And

we are commanded to be continually filled with the Spirit so that we may walk in holiness, love, unity, and power.

As you read this book, I encourage you to approach Ephesians prayerfully and expectantly. Ask God to open your understanding and allow His Word to shape your life. The truths found in this letter are not only meant to be studied but lived.

It is my sincere prayer that this study draws you closer to Jesus Christ, strengthens your faith, and equips you to walk boldly in the calling God has placed upon your life.

In Christ,
Dr. Paul Crawford

Ephesians Chapter 1

A Deep Expository Study: Blessed in the Beloved -- Election, Redemption, Inheritance, and the Spirit's Seal in the Eternal Purpose of God

Introduction to Ephesians Chapter 1

The Highest Ground in All of Paul's Letters

If Galatians is a letter written in crisis -- urgent, confrontational, theologically fierce -- then Ephesians is a letter written from the summit. There is no emergency in Ephesians. There is no false gospel to refute, no specific congregation sin to address, no immediate pastoral crisis demanding resolution. What there is, instead, is something rarer and in many ways more demanding: an unobstructed view of the whole of God's saving purpose, laid out with a comprehensiveness and a majesty that has caused readers across twenty centuries to put the letter down and simply worship.

Ephesians chapter 1 is the foundation of that view. It is, by almost any measure, one of the most theologically concentrated chapters in the entire Bible. The first fourteen verses constitute a single sentence in the original Greek -- a long, sweeping, architecturally magnificent doxology that moves from eternity past to eternity future, from the Father's election before the foundation of the world to the Spirit's sealing as the guarantee of the final inheritance. It covers the entire sweep of God's saving purpose in one unbroken movement of praise. The middle section of the chapter moves into intercessory prayer -- Paul praying that

the Ephesians would know the hope to which they have been called, the riches of their inheritance, and the surpassing greatness of God's power already at work in those who believe. And the chapter closes by placing the risen, ascended, exalted Christ at the center of everything -- head over all things, filling all in all.

This is not a chapter to be read quickly and moved past. It is a chapter to be inhabited -- to be returned to repeatedly, with increasing attention and growing wonder, as each reading reveals new depths of what God has done, is doing, and will do in those who are in Christ.

The Setting of the Letter

Ephesus was one of the most significant cities in the ancient world -- the fourth largest city in the Roman Empire, a major commercial and cultural hub, home to the Temple of Artemis (one of the seven wonders of the ancient world), and a center of religious pluralism, occult practice, and intellectual sophistication. Paul had spent three years there -- longer than anywhere else in his missionary travels (Acts 20:31) -- and the church at Ephesus was the fruit of sustained, costly, Spirit-attended gospel ministry.

The letter Paul writes to this church is remarkably free of local, situational concerns. It reads less like a pastoral letter to a specific congregation and more like a theological meditation addressed to the church universal -- which is why many scholars believe it may have been a circular letter, intended for multiple congregations in the region with Ephesus as its primary destination. Its vision of the church as the body of Christ, the fullness of the One who fills all in all, the dwelling place of God by the Spirit, the display of God's wisdom to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places -- this vision is the permanent, defining self-understanding of the church in every age.

The Structure of Chapter 1

The chapter moves through three major sections. First, the great doxology of verses 3-14, which is itself structured around the work of the three persons of the Trinity: the Father who elects and predestines (vv. 3-6), the Son who redeems and reveals (vv. 7-12), and the Spirit who seals and guarantees (vv. 13-14). Second, Paul's report of his thanksgiving and prayer for the Ephesians (vv. 15-19), in which he asks for three specific things: that they would know the hope of their calling, the riches of their inheritance, and the immeasurable greatness of God's power. Third, the declaration of Christ's exaltation and cosmic lordship, which is both the answer to Paul's prayer for power and the foundation on which all the promises of the letter rest (vv. 20-23).

Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father, we approach Ephesians chapter 1 with the awareness that we are standing on the highest theological ground in all of Scripture. This chapter will take us from before the foundation of the world to the final inheritance that awaits all who are in Christ. It will show us a love that preceded our existence, a plan that no human rebellion could derail, a redemption that cost everything and accomplished everything, a Spirit who has sealed us for a day that is coming and cannot be stopped.

Lord, we are not equal to this chapter. Our minds are too small, our attention too scattered, our affections too easily captured by lesser things. Give us what Paul prays for in this very chapter -- the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of You. Open the eyes of our hearts. Let us see what there is to see here. Let what we understand move from our heads into

our hearts and out through our hands, until the knowledge of Your eternal purpose in Christ produces in us the same thing it produced in Paul: uncontainable, articulate, doxological praise. We ask this in the name of the One who is above every name, to whom every knee will bow, who fills all in all. Amen.

Ephesians 1:1-2 -- The Greeting: Apostle, Saints, and the Source of Grace

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To God's holy people in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

IN SIMPLE AMERICAN ENGLISH

This is Paul writing -- and he is writing as an apostle, someone sent with full divine authority, not because he applied for the job or a church committee voted him in, but because God willed it. He is writing to the holy ones in Ephesus -- the people God has set apart through faith in Christ -- and to the faithful, those who are actively trusting in Jesus. His greeting is short and packed: grace and peace to you, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace comes first -- always -- because peace is the fruit of grace received, not the condition for it. And notice both the Father and the Son are named as the single source of both gifts. That is a massive claim embedded quietly in two lines.

"An Apostle by the Will of God"

Paul's self-identification in the greeting is compact but theologically loaded. He is an apostle - one sent with authority and commission -- not by his own ambition, not by institutional appointment, not by the recognition of a religious establishment, but by the will of God. In Galatians, this claim was a defense against those who questioned his authority. In Ephesians, it is simply a statement of identity -- the foundation from which everything he is about to say flows. He writes as one commissioned by the will of God, which means the content of his letter carries the weight of divine authorization. The will of God is a theme that will run through the entire chapter and the entire letter. It is sovereign, purposeful, and comprehensive -- and Paul's apostleship is one expression of it.

"To God's Holy People... the Faithful in Christ Jesus"

The recipients are described with two overlapping phrases. 'God's holy people' (hagiois -- saints, holy ones) is not a title reserved for exceptional Christians. In Paul's usage, it refers to all those who have been set apart by God through faith in Christ. Every genuine believer is a saint -- not because of moral achievement, but because of the sanctifying work of God. 'The faithful in Christ Jesus' adds the dimension of personal trust and allegiance -- the active, ongoing posture of trust in Christ. Both phrases together describe the Christian: one who has

been set apart by God (the objective) and who is actively trusting in Christ (the subjective). These two are always held together.

Grace and Peace

As in all of Paul's letters, the greeting is itself a theological statement. Grace precedes peace -- always and necessarily. Peace with God is the fruit of grace received, not the condition for grace given. The source of both is 'God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ' -- two persons named as a single source of a single gift, which is itself a high Christological claim embedded quietly in the opening greeting. The Lord Jesus Christ is not an instrument through whom God's grace passes on its way from the real source. He is, with the Father, the source itself.

Ephesians 1:3-6 -- The Father's Work: Chosen Before the Foundation of the World

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will -- to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.

IN SIMPLE AMERICAN ENGLISH

Let's give praise to God -- the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ -- because He has already given us every spiritual blessing there is, and He has done it in Christ, in the heavenly realm where all of it is kept safe. Before God ever created the universe, He chose us -- you and me -- in Christ. Not because we were good candidates. Before we existed. He chose us so that we would be holy and blameless before Him. And He predestined us for full adoption as His sons and daughters through Jesus Christ -- not grudgingly, but because it was His joy and His will to do it. The whole point of all of this? The praise of His glorious grace -- the grace He lavished on us freely in His beloved Son.

"Who Has Blessed Us with Every Spiritual Blessing"

The great doxology opens with a declaration that sets the tone for everything that follows: God 'has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.' Three elements deserve extended attention. First, the completeness: every spiritual blessing -- not some, not the blessings available to the most faithful or mature, but every spiritual blessing -- the entire inheritance of the redeemed -- has been given to those who are in Christ. Forgiveness, adoption, the Spirit, access to the Father, hope of resurrection, the promise of final glorification -- all of it, already given, already secured, already possessed in Christ.

Second, the location: in the heavenly realms. The Greek word (*epouraniois*) refers to the realm of spiritual reality that exists above and behind the visible world -- the domain where Christ is enthroned (1:20), where the spiritual forces of evil operate (6:12), and where the church's true life is located (2:6). Third, the ground: in Christ. This phrase appears eleven times in these fourteen verses alone, and over thirty times in the letter as a whole. It is the key

that unlocks everything in the chapter. Every blessing, every election, every redemption, every inheritance -- all of it is 'in Christ.' The blessings belong to Christ, and they become the believer's by virtue of union with Him.

"He Chose Us in Him Before the Creation of the World"

Verse 4 contains one of the most staggering declarations in all of Scripture: 'he chose us in him before the creation of the world.' Before a single atom of the universe existed, before time itself had begun its movement, before any human being had drawn a breath or made a choice -- God chose. The act of election is placed decisively before creation, before history, before any human response that could conceivably have influenced or motivated it. This is sovereign, unconditional, grace-driven choice. The purpose of the election is equally important: 'to be holy and blameless in his sight.' God did not choose people because they were already holy. He chose them in order to make them holy -- the election is the cause of the holiness, not its consequence.

"In Love He Predestined Us for Adoption to Sonship"

Verse 5 adds the word 'predestined' (proorizo -- to mark out beforehand, to determine in advance) and names the specific destination: adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ. What Galatians 4 described as accomplished through the sending of the Son, Ephesians 1 traces back to its ultimate origin: the Father's predestining love before the world began. 'In love' is placed with deliberate grammatical emphasis: the entire movement of election and predestination is a movement of love. This is not a cold decree issued from a distance by an indifferent sovereignty. This is the warm, purposeful, costly love of a Father who determined before time began that He would have a family -- and who paid the price in the blood of His Son to make it so.

"In Accordance with His Pleasure and Will"

Verse 5 closes by grounding the predestination not in anything in the chosen ones but in 'his pleasure and will.' The Greek word (eudokia) translated 'pleasure' carries the sense of delight, of something God freely and joyfully chose because it pleased Him to do so -- not under any external compulsion, not in response to any human merit, but according to His own sovereign, joyful, purposeful will. This is the most radical ground possible for election: God's own delight. He chose because He wanted to. He predestined because it pleased Him.

"To the Praise of His Glorious Grace"

Verse 6 names the ultimate purpose of the entire movement of election and predestination: 'to the praise of his glorious grace.' This phrase appears three times in the doxology (vv. 6, 12, 14), once at the conclusion of each person's work. It is the refrain of the entire passage and the answer to the question: why did God do all of this? For His own glory. For the eternal display of the magnificence of His grace. The redemption of human beings from sin and death is not primarily about human benefit -- though the benefit is incalculable. It is primarily about the display of God's grace in a way that will call forth praise for all eternity. The grace has been 'freely given' -- lavished -- 'in the One he loves,' the Beloved, the eternal Son in whom the Father's love finds its supreme expression.

Key Observations

- **Every spiritual blessing the redeemed will ever possess is already given, already secured, already held for them in Christ.**
- **Election precedes creation** -- it is grounded entirely in God's sovereign will and love, not in foreknown human response.
- **Predestination is a love word** -- it describes the Father's purposeful, joyful, costly determination to bring a people into His family.
- **The purpose of election is holiness and blamelessness** -- the chosen are chosen toward something, not merely from something.
- **The ultimate goal of the entire movement is the praise of God's glorious grace** -- the eternal glorification of the God who gives freely.

Ephesians 1:7-12 -- The Son's Work: Redemption, Revelation, and the Mystery of God's Will

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of his grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment -- to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ. In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.

IN SIMPLE AMERICAN ENGLISH

In Christ, we have something real and specific: we have been bought out of bondage -- redeemed -- through His blood. Our sins have been forgiven. And God did not do this reluctantly or minimally. He did it according to the riches of His grace, and He poured that grace out on us lavishly, with all wisdom and insight. He also let us in on the secret -- the mystery of His plan that had been hidden: His intention from the beginning was to bring everything together -- everything in heaven and everything on earth -- under one head: Christ. That is the plan. And in Christ, we have been included in that plan -- predestined to be part of it according to the purpose of the One who is working everything out in accordance with His will. The goal is that we would be for the praise of His glory.

"In Him We Have Redemption Through His Blood"

The doxology moves from the Father's work of election to the Son's work of redemption. 'In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins.' Redemption (apolytroton) is the language of the marketplace and the battlefield -- it means to purchase someone's freedom by paying a price, to buy out of bondage, to liberate by ransom. The price Paul names is not abstract: it is the blood of Christ. The blood is shorthand for the entire self-giving death of the Son of God -- His bearing of sin's penalty, His satisfaction of divine justice, His

absorption of the curse that rested on humanity. The redemption has a specific content: 'the forgiveness of sins.' This is the cancellation of actual guilt, the removal of real moral debt, the legal and relational clearing of a record that stood against us.

"The Riches of His Grace That He Lavished on Us"

Paul does not merely say that God gave grace in sufficient measure. He says God 'lavished' it -- the Greek word (*perisseuo*) means to overflow, to pour out in abundance beyond what is needed, to give with the extravagance of someone who cannot seem to give enough. And this lavishing is 'in accordance with the riches of his grace' -- the measurement of the giving is not the recipient's need (though the need is total) but the giver's riches (which are inexhaustible). God does not give grace carefully, conservatively, in precisely measured doses. He lavishes it. He pours it out. The overflow is the point.

The Mystery of His Will: To Unite All Things in Christ

Verses 9-10 introduce one of the most breathtaking declarations in the letter: 'he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment -- to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.' The 'mystery' in Paul's usage is a secret that has been hidden but is now being disclosed. The mystery of God's will is the previously hidden plan now being made known through the gospel: God's intention to bring all things -- everything in heaven, everything on earth, everything in the entire created order -- into a unified wholeness under the headship of Jesus Christ. The Greek word (*anakephalaiōsasthai*) means to sum up, to bring to a head -- to take all the scattered, broken, fragmented, disordered pieces of creation and bring them together under one head.

This is the cosmic scope of redemption. Paul is not describing merely the salvation of individual souls. He is describing the healing and unification of everything -- the reconciliation of the entire created order, which has been groaning under the weight of sin and death and fragmentation since the fall (Romans 8:19-22), being brought finally into the unity and wholeness that God always intended. The universe has a head: Jesus Christ. Every rebellion, every fracture, every division, every disorder in the created order is temporary -- the final word belongs to the One under whom all things will be summed up.

The Plan of the One Who Works All Things

Verses 11-12 return to the theme of predestination with one of the most comprehensive descriptions of God's sovereign working in the New Testament: 'the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will.' The word translated 'works out' (*energeo*) means active, effective, purposeful working. And its scope is total: everything. Not some things. Not the important things. Everything -- the entire sweep of history, every event, every life, every apparent accident or catastrophe -- is being worked in conformity with the purpose of God's will. This is not a statement that removes human responsibility or moral agency. But it is a statement that places the entire frame of reality within the sovereign, purposeful working of a God whose will is never finally frustrated, always moving toward the goal He determined before the world began.

Key Observations

- **Redemption is the purchase of freedom at the cost of Christ's blood** -- the forgiveness it produces is the cancellation of real guilt through real atonement.

- **God lavishes grace according to the measure of His own riches, not the measure of our need** -- the overflow is deliberate and characteristic.
- **The mystery of God's will is the cosmic unification of all things under Christ** -- a redemption that encompasses not just individual souls but the entire created order.
- **God works everything -- all of history, all of creation** -- in conformity with the purpose of His will. This is the foundation of the believer's unshakeable hope.
- **The purpose of Christ's people is to be 'for the praise of his glory'** -- to live as living demonstrations of what divine grace accomplishes.

Ephesians 1:13-14 -- The Spirit's Work: Sealed and Guaranteed

And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession -- to the praise of his glory.

IN SIMPLE AMERICAN ENGLISH

You were brought into this -- included in Christ -- when you heard the true message, the gospel that saves. And when you believed it, you were sealed. God put His mark on you: the Holy Spirit, the Spirit that was promised all along. And that Spirit is not just a mark of belonging -- He is a down payment, a deposit, a first installment guaranteeing the full inheritance that is coming. God is legally and irrevocably committed to completing this. Everything that is coming -- the resurrection, the new creation, the face-to-face life with God -- the Spirit in you right now is the guarantee that all of it will arrive. And this too -- the sealing, the guarantee, the inheritance -- is to the praise of God's glory.

"When You Heard and Believed"

The third movement of the doxology turns to the Spirit's work -- and it begins with the Ephesians' own experience of coming to faith. 'You also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation.' The sequence is significant: hearing, then believing, then sealing. The Spirit's sealing is not an experience separate from or subsequent to conversion -- it accompanies and follows immediately upon genuine faith. The moment a person hears the gospel and believes, they are included in Christ and sealed with the Spirit. This is important pastorally: the sealing of the Spirit is not a second blessing reserved for those who achieve a higher level of spiritual experience. It is the birthright of every genuine believer.

"Marked with a Seal -- The Promised Holy Spirit"

The seal in the ancient world served multiple functions simultaneously. A seal on a document authenticated it -- it proved the author's identity and confirmed the document's legitimacy. A seal on a piece of cargo marked ownership -- this belongs to a specific person. A seal on a prisoner or slave marked them as claimed -- they were under someone's authority and protection. All of these functions converge in the sealing of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit's presence in the believer authenticates the believer's status before God (Romans 8:16), marks the believer as God's possession, and claims the believer under God's authority and protection. The Spirit is 'the promised Holy Spirit' -- the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies of the Spirit poured out in the new covenant era (Joel 2:28-29, Ezekiel 36:26-27), now given to all who believe.

"A Deposit Guaranteeing Our Inheritance"

The word translated 'deposit' (arrabon) is a commercial term from the ancient world -- it means a down payment, a first installment that guarantees the full payment to follow. When someone paid an arrabon, they were legally committing to complete the transaction. The Holy Spirit is God's arrabon -- His down payment on the final inheritance that awaits His people. The Spirit's presence in the believer now is a guarantee of everything that is coming: the resurrection of the body, the final redemption of creation, the face-to-face enjoyment of God forever, the full realization of the adoption, the complete inheritance of the new creation. Every experience of the Spirit in the present -- every moment of genuine worship, every fruit of the Spirit breaking through -- is a foretaste, a first installment, a preview of an inheritance so vast that the foretaste itself is more than we can fully contain.

"To the Praise of His Glory" -- The Third Refrain

The doxology closes with its third repetition of 'to the praise of his glory.' The Father's election -- to the praise of his glorious grace. The Son's redemption -- that we might be for the praise of his glory. The Spirit's sealing -- to the praise of his glory. The entire Trinitarian movement of salvation -- every person's work, every aspect of the plan, every blessing bestowed on the redeemed -- aims at a single destination: the eternal, ceaseless, ever-deepening praise of the God who did all of this freely, sovereignly, and lovingly. This is the answer to the deepest question about the purpose of human existence. We were made for the praise of God's glory. We were redeemed for the praise of God's glory. We were sealed for the praise of God's glory.

Key Observations

- **The sequence of salvation -- hearing, believing, sealing** -- is the normal experience of every genuine believer, not a rare second blessing.
 - **The seal of the Spirit authenticates, marks ownership, and claims the believer as God's possession** -- combining legal, commercial, and personal imagery into a single declaration of security.
 - **The Spirit as arrabon (deposit/down payment) means that every present experience of the Spirit** is a foretaste and guarantee of the full inheritance to come.
 - **The triple 'to the praise of his glory' reveals the Trinitarian structure of salvation** and its single ultimate goal: the eternal glorification of God.
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Ephesians 1:15-19 -- Paul's Prayer: Knowledge, Hope, Inheritance, and Power

For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe.

IN SIMPLE AMERICAN ENGLISH

Because of all that, and because I have heard how real your faith in Jesus is and how genuinely you love all of God's people, I have not stopped thanking God for you. I keep bringing you before Him in prayer. Here is what I am asking for on your behalf: that God -- the glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ -- would give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation so that you can keep growing in your knowledge of Him personally. And I am praying specifically that God would open the eyes of your heart so you can really see three things: the hope of the future He has called you into, the staggering wealth of what God considers His inheritance -- which is His people -- and the incomparably great power that He is already directing toward those of us who believe.

The Foundation of Paul's Thanksgiving

Before Paul prays, he gives thanks. The Ephesians' faith and love -- faith in the Lord Jesus and love for all God's people -- are the evidence that the great doxology of verses 3-14 has become a lived reality in their community. The blessings Paul described in the doxology are not merely theological abstractions held in storage somewhere in the heavenly realms. They are producing visible fruit: faith toward Christ and love toward the saints. Where the gospel is truly received and the Spirit is truly present, these two fruits are always produced. Paul's unceasing thanksgiving and prayer is itself a model of pastoral love -- not a single petition offered once and then forgotten, but continuous, repeated, persevering intercession.

"The Spirit of Wisdom and Revelation"

The first thing Paul asks for is not behavior change, not moral improvement, not greater obedience. It is knowledge: 'that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.' The Spirit of wisdom and revelation is the Spirit who opens the mind and the heart to genuine, deepening knowledge of God -- not merely intellectual information about God, but the relational, experiential, transformative knowing of God Himself. Paul asks for this as a gift from God, not as something the Ephesians can produce by study or effort. The goal of the knowing is 'him' -- not doctrine about God, but God Himself, more deeply known, more fully experienced, more completely trusted. The great crisis of the contemporary church is not primarily moral but cognitive -- a failure to know God as He actually is.

"The Eyes of Your Heart Enlightened"

The phrase 'the eyes of your heart may be enlightened' is one of the most vivid images in all of Paul's prayers. The heart, in biblical anthropology, is not merely the emotional center of the person but the integrative core -- the place where thinking, willing, feeling, and responding all converge. The eyes of the heart are the faculties by which the whole person perceives spiritual reality. And Paul's prayer is that these eyes would be enlightened -- flooded with light, opened to see what they cannot see by natural capacity.

He then names three specific things he wants them to see. The hope to which He has called you -- not a vague optimism, but a specific, certain, divinely guaranteed hope. The riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people -- the staggering thought that God's people are His inheritance, His treasure, His delight. And his incomparably great power for us who believe -- the power already at work in and for those who believe, defined in the next verses by its supreme demonstration: the resurrection of Christ from the dead.

Key Observations

- **Paul's thanksgiving is grounded in the visible fruit of faith and love** -- evidence that the blessings of the doxology are producing real results.
- **The primary need Paul prays for is not moral improvement but deeper knowledge of God** -- a corrective to the practical-adjustment focus of much contemporary Christian concern.
- **The eyes of the heart require divine enlightenment** -- spiritual perception is a gift, not a human achievement.
- **The three objects of Paul's prayer -- hope, inheritance, and power** -- are not additions to the Christian life but the depths of the Christian life seen clearly.

Ephesians 1:19-23 -- The Power Defined: The Resurrection, the Exaltation, and the Cosmic Christ

That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

IN SIMPLE AMERICAN ENGLISH

Want to know what that incomparably great power actually looks like? Here it is: it is the same power God used when He raised Jesus Christ from the dead and sat Him down at His right hand in the heavenly realm -- the position of supreme authority. And when God seated Jesus there, He placed Him far above every ruler, every authority, every power, every dominion -- every spiritual and earthly force that exists, in this age and the age to come. Every single thing has been put under His feet. And God made Him head over everything -- for the sake of the church. The church is His body, the

fullness of the One who fills absolutely everything, everywhere. Think about that: the One who fills the universe has made the church the place where His fullness is especially present in the world.

The Power Defined by the Resurrection

Paul has just asked that the Ephesians would know the incomparably great power that God exerts toward those who believe. Now he defines it. And his definition is not abstract. He points to the single most dramatic demonstration of divine power in all of history: the raising of Jesus Christ from the dead. The Greek Paul uses here is extravagant even by his own standards -- he stacks four different words for power and strength in verses 19-20 (*dynamis*, *energeia*, *kratos*, *ischys*) as if no single word is adequate to describe what he is pointing to. This is not rhetorical excess -- it is the honest response of a mind that has tried to measure the power involved in the resurrection and found that every word falls short.

The power that raised Christ from the dead is the power at work in those who believe. The same power. Not a similar power. Not a diminished version of it. The identical, incomparably great, world-overturning power that conquered death is operative in the life of every person who is in Christ. This means that the Christian life is not primarily a life of moral effort. It is a life lived in the field of the same power that raised the dead. The implications of this for how we understand sanctification, prayer, ministry, suffering, and spiritual warfare are staggering.

"Seated at His Right Hand in the Heavenly Realms"

The resurrection is inseparable from the exaltation. God not only raised Christ from the dead -- He seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly realms. The right hand in ancient understanding is the position of supreme authority -- the place of honor and executive power at the king's side. Christ's resurrection was not a return to the life He had before His death. It was an ascension to a glory surpassing everything that preceded it (Philippians 2:9-11) -- the enthronement of the risen, glorified, humanity-bearing Son of God at the pinnacle of all authority.

"Far Above All Rule and Authority, Power and Dominion"

The scope of Christ's exaltation is total and explicit: He is seated 'far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.' Every category of power and authority that exists -- angelic and demonic, human and spiritual, present and future -- is subordinate to the enthroned Christ. No power is His equal. No authority exceeds His. No name stands above the name of Jesus Christ. This declaration is not merely comforting theology for personal devotion. It is a direct counter to the context in which the Ephesians lived -- a city saturated with occult practice, spirit-worship, and the veneration of powerful supernatural beings. Paul is telling believers in that world: every power you encounter is already under the feet of Christ. He is Lord over all of it. You live in His domain.

"Head over Everything for the Church"

Verse 22 introduces one of the most significant relational statements in the letter: God appointed Christ 'to be head over everything for the church.' Christ's cosmic headship over all things is not an abstract sovereignty. It is exercised specifically for the benefit of the church. Everything Christ rules -- every power He exercises, every authority He wields -- is directed

toward the church's welfare, protection, growth, and ultimate glorification. The universe is, in a real sense, being administered in the interests of the community that is Christ's body. This does not mean the church will never suffer or face opposition. It means that the One who is in charge of everything is the One who gave Himself for the church and has promised that the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

"The Fullness of Him Who Fills Everything in Every Way"

The chapter closes with one of the most theologically dense statements in Ephesians: the church is 'his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.' The word 'fullness' (pleroma) refers to that which completes something, that which fills up what would otherwise be empty or incomplete. Paul is saying something breathtaking: the church is the fullness of Christ. Not that the church is equal to Christ or that Christ is incomplete without the church in some ontological sense. But that Christ has chosen to make the church the expression, the manifestation, the embodied presence of Himself in the world -- in the same way that a body is the visible, tangible expression of the person who inhabits it. Christ, who fills the universe, has chosen to be present in a particular and special way in His people. They are not just an institution He administers from a distance. They are His fullness -- the people through whom He chooses to be visibly present in the world until He returns.

Key Observations

- **The power available to believers is defined and measured by the power that raised Christ from the dead** -- the most dramatic demonstration of divine omnipotence in history.
- **Christ's exaltation places Him above every spiritual, political, and cosmic authority that exists** -- present or future, named or unnamed.
- **Christ's headship over all things is exercised specifically for the church** -- the universe is being administered in the interests of Christ's people.
- **The church as the fullness of Christ is one of the highest designations given to the community of believers** -- they are His visible, bodily presence in the world.

What This Chapter Means for Us Today

1. Your Salvation Is Grounded in Eternity, Not in Your Performance

Ephesians 1 begins before the beginning -- before the creation of the world, before any human being existed, before any choice was made. The election, the predestination, the love -- all of it preceded you. Your salvation did not begin when you believed. It began in the eternal purpose of God before the foundation of the world. This means that the security of your salvation is as deep as the eternity in which it was planned. It does not rest on the consistency of your faith. It rests on the constancy of God's purpose. You are sealed by the Spirit. You are held by the same power that raised Christ from the dead. You will not be lost -- not because you are strong enough to hold on, but because God held you before you existed.

2. Live in Light of the Cosmic Scope of Redemption

Paul's vision of redemption in Ephesians 1 is not merely personal. It is cosmic -- the unification of all things in heaven and earth under Christ. Your salvation is not an isolated transaction between you and God that has no broader significance. It is a participation in the grand renewal of all things. You are a citizen of the new creation that is coming. You are a member of the community through which God is displaying His manifold wisdom to the powers and authorities (3:10). What you do, how you love, how you bear one another's burdens -- these things have a cosmic significance that goes far beyond what is visible. You are living in the overlap of the ages, and the choices you make are seeds of the new creation already breaking into the present.

3. Pray for the Enlightenment of the Heart's Eyes -- In Yourself and Others

Paul's prayer in verses 17-19 is a model for how to pray for the people we love. We tend to pray for circumstances -- for health, for provision, for resolution of difficulties. Paul prays for perception -- for the eyes of the heart to be opened to what is real, to see the hope, the inheritance, and the power that are already theirs in Christ. The greatest need of every believer is not better circumstances. It is deeper knowledge of God -- a more complete perception of the hope, the riches, and the power that are already theirs. Pray this for yourself. Pray it for the people in your church. Pray it for your children. It is one of the highest prayers you can offer.

4. Understand the Power That Is Available to You

One of the most tragic realities of contemporary Christianity is the gap between the power Paul describes in verses 19-20 and the power most believers actually experience and expect. The same power that raised Christ from the dead is available to those who believe -- not as a theoretical claim but as a practical reality. This does not mean that Christians should expect to perform miracles on demand. It means that the transformation of character, the overcoming of sin's dominion, the ability to love the unlovable, to forgive the unforgivable, to persevere through suffering, to hold onto hope when everything visible says there is no hope -- all of this is within the range of the power that is already at work in you. You are not limited to your natural capacity. You are operating in the field of resurrection power.

5. Take the Church Seriously -- It Is Christ's Body and Fullness

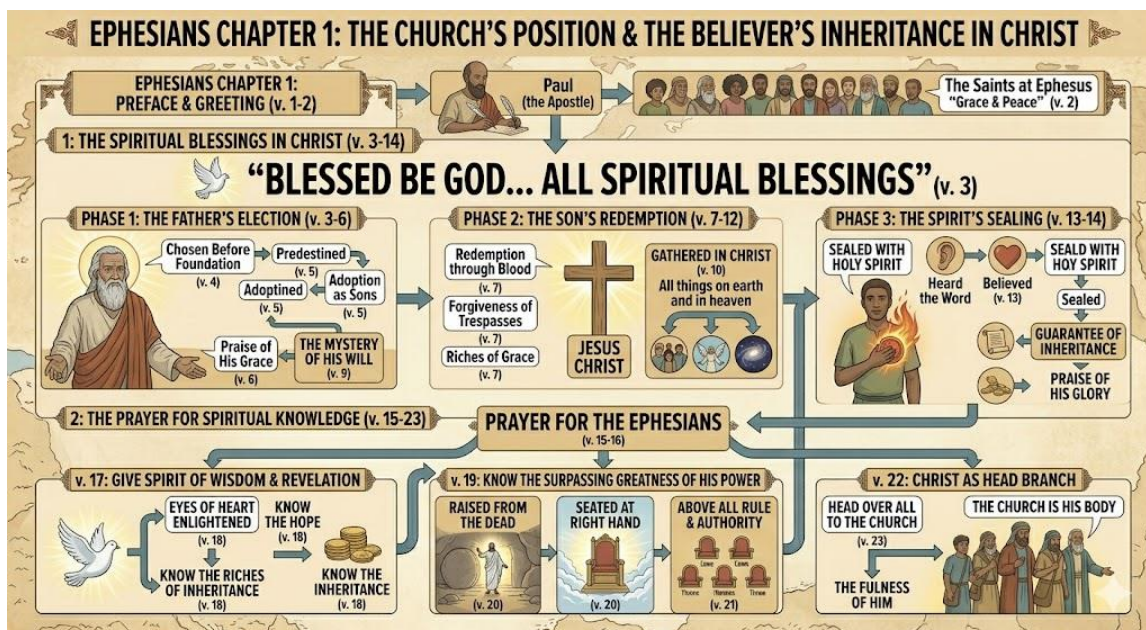
The closing declaration of the chapter is one of the most demanding truths in Ephesians. The church is not a voluntary association of like-minded individuals who find worship helpful. It is the body of Christ -- the visible, concrete, tangible presence of the risen Lord in the world. This means that belonging to the church is not optional for the believer who takes Christ's lordship seriously. It means that how you treat other members of the church is how you treat the body of Christ. It means that the community of faith is not a means to your spiritual development -- it is the very form in which Christ chooses to be present in the world. Take it seriously. Give yourself to it. Let it form you. Contribute to it. It is the fullness of Him who fills everything in every way.

How This Chapter Relates to Today

Ephesians 1 speaks into a contemporary culture -- and a contemporary church -- that is deeply characterized by fragmentation, anxiety, and the desperate search for identity and belonging. The culture outside the church offers identity through performance, through affiliation, through political allegiance, through consumption, through the approval of social networks that are constantly shifting their standards. The anxiety produced by these shifting foundations is pervasive and growing.

Ephesians 1 offers a completely different foundation. Your identity is not constructed by you -- it was chosen by God before the foundation of the world. Your belonging is not earned by you -- it was purchased by the blood of Christ and sealed by the Spirit. Your future is not uncertain -- it has been guaranteed by the same power that raised Christ from the dead. You are not a person scrambling to construct meaning in a meaningless universe. You are a chosen, redeemed, adopted, sealed, Spirit-indwelt child of the God who is bringing all things to their appointed fulfillment under the headship of Christ.

The church inside that culture needs to know who it is. It needs to know that it is not a shrinking religious institution trying to maintain relevance in a secular world. It is the body and fullness of the One who fills everything in every way -- the community chosen before time began, redeemed by blood, sealed by the Spirit, and destined to inherit a new creation that cannot be shaken. When the church knows this -- really knows it, in the deep way Paul prays for in verses 17-19 -- it lives differently. It gives differently. It loves differently. It endures differently. It hopes differently. It worships with a freedom and a fullness that nothing in the surrounding culture can produce or imitate.



Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father, glorious Father, God of our Lord Jesus Christ, we have attempted to see what Ephesians chapter 1 holds, and we are undone by the attempt. The love that preceded creation. The plan that was perfect before any human being drew breath. The redemption lavished on us in accordance with the riches of Your grace. The mystery now revealed -- that all things will be brought under the headship of Your Son. The Spirit given as a deposit,

guaranteeing everything that is coming. The power that raised Christ from the dead, alive and active in those who believe.

Lord, we confess that we have not lived as people who know these things. We have lived anxiously when we were secured eternally. We have lived for human approval when we were chosen by divine love. We have lived as though the present circumstances were the final word when we have been promised that all things will be summed up in Christ. Forgive us. And then -- do what we cannot do for ourselves.

Give us the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of You. Open the eyes of our hearts. Let us see the hope to which You have called us -- really see it, not as a doctrine but as a living certainty. Let us see the riches of Your inheritance in Your people -- let us value the church the way You value it. Let us see the incomparably great power at work in us -- resurrection power, the power that has already conquered death and will not stop short of completing what it began.

And let all of it -- the election, the redemption, the revelation, the sealing, the hope, the power, the church -- let all of it be to the praise of Your glory. That is what we were made for. That is what we were redeemed for. That is what we are sealed for. Let it be so in us, through us, and among us, until the day when we see You face to face and the praise is finally, perfectly, eternally complete. In the name of the One who is head over all things, who fills everything in every way. Amen.

Ephesians Chapter 2

A Deep Expository Study: Dead, Raised, and Built Together -- The Miracle of Grace, the Abolition of the Dividing Wall, and the Church as God's Dwelling Place

Introduction to Ephesians Chapter 2

From the Pit to the Palace -- and Then to the Temple

If Ephesians chapter 1 is the view from the summit -- the eternal, cosmic, Trinitarian sweep of God's saving purpose seen from the highest possible vantage point -- then Ephesians chapter 2 is the view from the ground. It begins in the lowest place imaginable: dead in trespasses and sins, walking according to the prince of the power of the air, children of wrath by nature. And it ends in the highest place imaginable: fellow citizens with the saints, members of the household of God, a holy temple in the Lord, a dwelling place of God by the Spirit. The distance between these two points -- between spiritual death and becoming God's own dwelling -- is the distance that grace travels. And chapter 2 is Paul's most concentrated, most awe-inducing map of that journey.

The chapter divides with remarkable clarity into two equal and complementary halves. The first half (verses 1-10) is the story of the individual's salvation -- the movement from death to life, from wrath to grace, from being a child of the devil to being God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works. The second half (verses 11-22) is the story of corporate salvation -- the reconciliation of Jew and Gentile into one new humanity, the demolition of

every dividing wall of hostility, the creation of one body through the cross, and the construction of a single holy temple in which God Himself dwells by His Spirit.

Together these two halves constitute one of the most complete statements of what the gospel achieves in the New Testament. The gospel does not merely save individuals and leave them isolated. It creates a community -- a new humanity -- that is itself the evidence of what God can do when His grace is fully unleashed on human division, hatred, and pride. The church is not merely the gathering place of the saved. The church is the evidence of the gospel. It is God's exhibit A to the watching universe of what redemption looks like when it reaches its full corporate expression.

Why This Chapter Follows Chapter 1

Chapter 1 described the blessings that belong to believers 'in Christ' -- election, redemption, adoption, sealing, the hope of inheritance. A natural question follows: but who are these people who have received such extraordinary blessings? What were they before? What was the condition from which they were rescued? Chapter 2 answers those questions with a directness and a darkness that is essential for understanding the magnitude of the grace described. You cannot fully appreciate what grace has done unless you understand what grace found. And what grace found was not people who were spiritually sick or morally impaired or simply lacking in religious education. What grace found was the dead.

The Structure of Chapter 2

The chapter moves through four major sections. First, the diagnosis of humanity's condition apart from Christ -- dead, dominated, and under divine wrath (vv. 1-3). Second, the intervention of God described in one of the most beautiful 'but God' statements in all of Scripture -- raised, seated, and saved by grace through faith (vv. 4-10). Third, the condition of the Gentiles specifically before the gospel -- excluded, alienated, without God and without hope (vv. 11-12). Fourth, the reconciling work of Christ -- the abolition of the dividing wall, the creation of one new humanity, the peace proclaimed to both those far and near, and the building of one holy temple in which God dwells (vv. 13-22).

Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father, we come to Ephesians chapter 2 knowing that we are about to see ourselves in a mirror -- the mirror of what we were before Your grace reached us, and the mirror of what Your grace has made us. Lord, do not let us rush past the darkness of the first three verses. Let us sit in them long enough to understand what we were rescued from, so that the 'but God' of verse 4 lands with its full, staggering weight. Let gratitude grow in us as we see the distance grace has traveled on our behalf.

And as we come to the second half of the chapter, Lord, give us eyes to see the church as You see it -- not as a flawed human institution to be criticized or managed, but as the new humanity created by the cross, the holy temple in which You have chosen to dwell, the dwelling place of God by the Spirit. Let that vision raise our love for the church, our commitment to one another, and our wonder that You would make Your home in us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Ephesians 2:1-3 -- The Diagnosis: Dead, Dominated, and Under Wrath

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.

IN SIMPLE AMERICAN ENGLISH

Before Christ reached you, you were dead. Not just sick, not just confused, not just in need of some moral improvement -- dead. Spiritually dead, cut off from the life of God. And in that death you were still active -- moving, living, doing things -- but your movement was governed by two things: the spirit of this present age, and the ruler of the air, which is Satan himself, who is actively working in people who are living in disobedience to God. And before any of us start feeling superior, Paul includes himself and all his Jewish companions in this: all of us lived that way. Gratifying what the flesh wanted. Following its desires and its thinking. We were all, by our very nature, people who deserved God's wrath. That was the starting point.

"You Were Dead in Your Transgressions and Sins"

Paul opens the chapter not with a description of moral failure or spiritual weakness but with a declaration of death. The condition of every human being apart from Christ is not merely sick, not merely incomplete, not merely misinformed -- it is dead. The word (nekros) is not ambiguous or metaphorical in a weak sense. It means what it says. Dead. This is spiritual death -- the death of the relationship with God, the death of genuine responsiveness to divine reality, the death of the capacity to perceive and embrace spiritual truth by natural ability alone. The dead person is alive physically and socially and intellectually. They are capable of great beauty, moral achievement, intellectual brilliance, and relational warmth. But they are dead in their relationship to God.

This matters enormously for how we understand both evangelism and sanctification. If the condition of unregenerate humanity is death, then the solution is not persuasion -- as though the right argument will convince the dead to live. The solution is resurrection. And resurrection is something only God can do. This is why Paul will use the language of creation and resurrection in verse 10 to describe what happens in the new birth. It is not self-improvement. It is an act of God analogous to the original creation and to the raising of Christ from the dead.

"Following the Ways of This World"

The dead person is not static. They are active -- walking, following, living. And their movement is governed by two authorities. The first is 'the ways of this world' -- literally, 'the age of this world,' the entire spirit and orientation of the present evil age (Galatians 1:4) that operates according to values, assumptions, and priorities that are fundamentally opposed to God. The world-system -- with its definitions of success, its hierarchies of value, its

assumptions about what matters and what does not -- is itself an authority that shapes and governs those who have no alternative authority to orient them.

"The Ruler of the Kingdom of the Air"

The second governing authority is more personal and more alarming: 'the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.' This is a reference to Satan -- who exercises a real, active, spiritual influence in the lives of those who are apart from Christ. Paul does not present the unregenerate world as merely morally confused or socially misguided. He presents it as operating under active satanic influence. The point is not a geography lesson but a spiritual reality: there is a personal, malevolent spiritual authority who is actively working in the disobedient -- shaping their desires, distorting their perceptions, feeding their rebellion, and keeping them from the light of the gospel (2 Corinthians 4:4).

"By Nature Deserving of Wrath"

The chapter's diagnosis closes with one of the most confronting phrases in all of Paul's writing: 'Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.' The phrase 'by nature' (physei) is critical -- it indicates that the condition being described is not merely the result of bad choices accumulated over time. It is the natural condition of humanity as a whole, inherited from Adam, resident in every human being from birth. The wrath Paul refers to is not an emotional divine anger that flares and subsides. It is the settled, holy, just opposition of God to everything that contradicts His character -- the divine judgment that rests on a humanity that has, in Adam and in its own choices, turned from the living God. This phrase is the darkness against which the light of the next verse blazes with its full brilliance.

Key Observations

- **Spiritual death is the accurate diagnosis of humanity apart from Christ** -- not weakness or sickness but death, requiring resurrection, not improvement.
- **The dead person is active -- walking, following, living** -- but their movement is governed by the world-system and satanic influence, not by God.
- **The diagnosis is universal** -- Jew and Gentile alike are 'by nature deserving of wrath,' making every human being equally dependent on grace.
- **Transgressions and sins together describe both deliberate rebellion and pervasive falling short** -- the full scope of human moral failure.
- **'By nature' establishes that the human condition is not merely behavioral but constitutional** -- inherited from Adam, requiring divine intervention at the level of nature itself.

Ephesians 2:4-10 -- "But God": Raised, Seated, and Saved by Grace

But God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love for us, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions -- it is by grace you have been saved. And God

raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith -- and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God -- not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

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But God. Two words that change everything. We were dead -- but God, who is overflowing with mercy and moved by His great love for us, made us alive together with Christ. Even while we were dead. This is grace. And God did not stop there -- He raised us up with Christ and sat us down with Him in the heavenly realms. Right now, our identity and standing are defined by where Christ is -- at the pinnacle of all authority. And here is why God did all of this: so that in the ages to come He could put on display the incomparable riches of His grace, through the way He has treated us in Christ Jesus. Now here is the bottom line: you were saved by grace, through faith. None of it came from you. It is the gift of God. Not by works, so that absolutely no one can boast. Because here is what you actually are: you are God's masterpiece -- His work of art -- created in Christ Jesus to walk in good works that He laid out for you before you were even born.

"But God"

Two words. The hinge of history. The pivot of the entire human story. 'But God.' After three verses of the most concentrated darkness in Paul's letters -- dead, dominated by the world, under satanic influence, by nature deserving of wrath -- two words change everything. Not 'but we' -- we could not change our own condition. Not 'but the law' -- the law can diagnose but not cure. Not 'but religion' -- religion cannot raise the dead. But God. These two words are the structural heart of all Christian theology. They appear in this same decisive function throughout Scripture. Joseph's brothers meant evil against him -- but God meant it for good (Genesis 50:20). We were dead in transgressions -- but God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive. The pattern is always the same: human inability reaches its absolute limit, and then God acts.

"Rich in Mercy" and "Great Love"

Before Paul describes what God did, he describes who God is. God acted because of who He is -- not because of what we deserved or what we could offer. He is 'rich in mercy' -- not merely merciful, but wealthy in mercy, overflowing with it, possessing an inexhaustible supply that no amount of human sin can exhaust. And the motivation behind the action is even more personal: 'because of his great love for us.' The word (agape) is not affection based on the attractiveness of its object. The Ephesians were dead in trespasses and sins -- there was nothing attractive about them from a moral or spiritual standpoint. But God's love does not originate in the loveliness of its object. It originates in God Himself. He loved because He is love (1 John 4:8). And that love -- great, sovereign, purposeful -- is the reason for everything that follows.

"Made Us Alive with Christ Even When We Were Dead"

The miracle is stated with maximum compression: God 'made us alive with Christ even when we were dead.' The Greek word (syzoopoieo -- to make alive together with) is one of a series of compound 'with Christ' verbs Paul uses in these verses: made alive together, raised together, seated together. The prefix 'together' (syn) indicates that what happened to Christ has happened to the believer -- not as a parallel experience but as a shared one. We are made alive with the One who was raised. We are raised with the One who ascended. We are seated with the One who is enthroned. When Christ rose from the dead, He rose as the firstfruits of a new humanity (1 Corinthians 15:20-23), and those who are in Him share the resurrection He inaugurated. Paul interrupts himself with a parenthetical: 'it is by grace you have been saved.' He is so arrested by the sheer gratuity of what he is describing that he cannot continue the sentence without naming the principle behind it.

"Seated with Him in the Heavenly Realms"

Verse 6 makes a declaration that should stop every believer in their tracks: God has already 'seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.' This is a present-tense, already-accomplished reality. Not a future promise -- an accomplished fact. The same position of supreme authority that Paul described Christ occupying in 1:20 -- seated at the right hand of God in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority -- is the position in which believers have already been placed, in Christ. Our identity, our status, and our spiritual location are defined by where Christ is -- at the pinnacle of all authority -- because we are in Him. The Christian life, properly understood, is not an ascent from the bottom to the top. It is a life lived from the security of an already-established heavenly standing.

The Purpose: Display in the Coming Ages

Verse 7 gives the purpose behind the entire movement of grace: 'in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.' The salvation of human beings is not ultimately about the humans. It is ultimately about the display -- the eternal, ever-deepening, ever-more-fully-perceived display -- of the incomparable riches of God's grace. In the coming ages -- in the eternal future that stretches beyond history's end -- God will be showing what He did in Christ to an audience that will be continually discovering new depths of wonder in the grace that saved those who were dead, dominated, and deserving of wrath. The redeemed are not merely the recipients of grace. They are the exhibit -- the living, eternal demonstration of what grace can do and what grace is.

"By Grace Through Faith -- the Gift of God"

Verses 8-9 contain the most concentrated statement of the doctrine of grace in all of Paul's letters: 'For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith -- and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God -- not by works, so that no one can boast.' Every word carries weight. Saved -- the comprehensive rescue from sin, death, wrath, and alienation from God. By grace -- as the ground, the source, the originating cause. Through faith -- as the channel, the instrument, the receiving posture. Not from yourselves -- even the faith is not a contribution from the human side that sets salvation in motion. It is the gift of God. The entire complex -- the grace, the salvation, the faith by which it is received -- is God's gift. The elimination of boasting is not incidental -- it is the point. A salvation that left room for human boasting would be a salvation that served human pride rather than God's glory. Grace eliminates boasting by constructing a salvation in which there is literally nothing for the human being to boast about.

"We Are God's Handiwork"

Verse 10 completes the section with one of the most profound and beautiful statements in the letter: 'For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.' The word for handiwork (poiema -- from which we get the English word 'poem') means a work of art, a masterpiece, something crafted with skill and intention and care. We are God's masterpiece -- crafted in Christ Jesus with as much deliberate intention and creative investment as the original creation of the world. But the masterpiece has a purpose. We were created in Christ Jesus to do good works. Works are not the ground of salvation; they are the goal of salvation. The grace that saved us was always grace that intended to produce something -- a life transformed, a community restored, a world served, a God glorified in concrete acts of love and justice and sacrifice. And those works were 'prepared in advance' -- before you existed, before you were saved, God had already prepared the good works that your life in Christ was designed to accomplish.

Key Observations

- **'But God' is the pivot of the entire human story** -- God's intervention at the point of absolute human inability.
- **God acts out of who He is -- rich in mercy, characterized by great love** -- not out of anything in the recipient.
- **The compound 'with Christ' verbs (made alive, raised, seated) express the believer's participation in Christ's own resurrection and exaltation** through union with Him.
- **The purpose of salvation is the eternal display of God's incomparable grace** -- the redeemed are God's exhibit to the watching universe and coming ages.
- **Salvation is by grace through faith, both of which are God's gift** -- eliminating every possible ground for human boasting.
- **We are God's poiema -- His masterpiece, His work of art** -- created in Christ Jesus for good works He prepared in advance.

Ephesians 2:11-12 -- Remember What You Were: Excluded, Alienated, Without Hope

Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called 'uncircumcised' by those who call themselves 'the circumcision' (which is done in the body by human hands) -- remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.

IN SIMPLE AMERICAN ENGLISH

So here is what you need to keep remembering -- do not forget this: before Christ reached you, you were Gentile outsiders. The circumcised Jewish people had a label for you, and it was not a kind one. And here is what that outsider status actually meant in

real terms: you had no connection to Christ whatsoever. You were not citizens of God's covenant people. You were foreigners to every promise God had ever made. You had no hope -- not a vague lack of optimism, but genuinely no future to look forward to beyond death. And you were without God -- not without religion, because the pagan world was full of gods -- but without the real, living, covenant-keeping God. That was where the gospel found you. Keep remembering it.

The Command to Remember

The second half of the chapter opens with an imperative that is as important as it is easily overlooked: 'remember.' Paul is not merely providing historical information about what Gentiles used to be. He is commanding an ongoing, deliberate, formative act of memory. The Ephesian Gentiles are to remember what they were -- to hold that memory with intentionality and allow it to function as the permanent background against which the grace of their present condition is understood and appreciated. Memory is a spiritual discipline in Paul's understanding. The person who forgets what they were is in danger of taking for granted what they have become. The community that forgets its former exclusion is in danger of becoming exclusive toward others. The command to remember is a guard against spiritual amnesia -- and spiritual amnesia is one of the most common and most destructive diseases in the Christian life.

The Former Condition of the Gentiles

Paul describes the Gentile condition before the gospel in five overlapping phrases, each adding a dimension of the exclusion that characterized their pre-Christ existence. 'Separate from Christ' -- before the gospel, the Gentiles had no connection to the Messiah. 'Excluded from citizenship in Israel' -- to be excluded from citizenship in Israel was to be outside the covenant community, with no legal standing in the household of God. 'Foreigners to the covenants of the promise' -- God's covenantal dealings with Abraham, with Moses, with David were not addressed to the Gentiles. They were strangers to this covenant history. 'Without hope' -- the pagan world of the first century was characterized by a profound hopelessness about death and the future. The grave was final. History was cyclical and going nowhere. 'Without God in the world' -- the Greek word is *atheos* -- from which we get 'atheist.' The Gentiles had gods but not the God. To have gods but not the living God is, in the most fundamental sense, to be without God.

Key Observations

- **Memory is a spiritual discipline** -- the command to remember is a guard against the spiritual amnesia that produces ingratitude and exclusivity.
- **The five descriptions of Gentile exclusion are cumulative and comprehensive** -- each one adds a dimension of the total spiritual destitution of life without the covenant.
- **'Without hope and without God in the world' is not rhetoric** -- it is the accurate theological description of a humanity without covenant, Messiah, or resurrection.
- **The distance between 'without God' and 'dwelling place of God by the Spirit' (verse 22)** is the distance grace travels in this chapter.

Ephesians 2:13-18 -- The Reconciling Work of Christ: Near, One New Humanity, and Peace

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their mutual hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

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But now -- in Christ Jesus -- everything is different. You who were far away from God, far outside the covenant, far from any hope -- you have been brought near. And what brought you near was not your religious effort or cultural achievement. It was the blood of Christ. He Himself is our peace -- not just the one who made peace possible, but the One in whom peace actually exists. He took the two groups -- Jew and Gentile -- who had been kept apart by a wall of hostility, and He made them one. He tore down that dividing wall. He did it by setting aside in His own body the law's commands and regulations that kept the two groups separated. His purpose was to create something brand new: one new humanity out of the two -- not Jew absorbing Gentile or Gentile replacing Jew, but something entirely new, united in Him. And through the cross He reconciled both groups to God in one body, putting to death the hostility between them. Then He came and announced this peace -- to those who were far away and to those who were near. And now, through Him, both groups have equal access to the Father, by one Spirit.

"But Now in Christ Jesus"

Once again, as in verse 4, the second half of the chapter is introduced by a decisive contrast. 'But now' -- at this present moment, in the new era inaugurated by the death and resurrection of Christ. What was true before Christ -- exclusion, separation, alienation, hopelessness -- is no longer true for those who are in Christ Jesus. And the reason for the change is named immediately and without ambiguity: 'the blood of Christ.' The ground of the Gentiles being 'brought near' is the death of Jesus Christ. The language of 'far' and 'near' echoes Isaiah 57:19 -- 'Peace, peace, to those far and near.' In Jewish understanding, 'far' referred to the Gentiles, 'near' to Israel. The fundamental distinction that organized the ancient world's understanding of who was inside and who was outside God's covenant has been abolished.

"He Himself Is Our Peace"

Verse 14 makes one of the most precise and important Christological statements in the letter: 'For he himself is our peace.' Not merely the source of peace, not merely the procurer of peace,

not merely the one who announced peace -- He Himself, in His own person, is the peace between the formerly divided parties. The reconciliation between Jew and Gentile, and more fundamentally the reconciliation between humanity and God, is not a state that Christ created and then stepped back from. It is a reality that subsists in Christ -- because both the formerly separated parties are now in Him, the separation between them has been overcome in His person. Peace is not a condition the cross achieved that can be maintained independently of Christ. Peace is Christ. Division in the church is not merely a failure of community management. It is a contradiction of the gospel.

The Dividing Wall of Hostility Destroyed

Paul describes Christ's reconciling work in terms of demolition: He has 'destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.' The image is vivid and historically specific. The Jerusalem Temple had a literal dividing wall -- the *soreg* -- that separated the outer court (to which Gentiles had access) from the inner courts (reserved for Jewish worshipers). Inscriptions found by archaeologists warned that any Gentile who crossed this barrier did so on pain of death. The physical wall in the Temple was the architectural expression of a theological reality: Gentiles were excluded from the inner life of God's covenant people. Christ has demolished this wall -- not merely the physical structure, but the theological principle it represented. The law that created the distinction between Jew and Gentile has been 'set aside in his flesh.' In His death, Christ fulfilled the law's demands and ended its function as a dividing line between peoples.

"One New Humanity"

The goal of Christ's reconciling work is stated with extraordinary precision in verse 15: 'His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace.' This phrase -- 'one new humanity' -- is one of the most revolutionary statements in all of Paul's writings. The solution to the division between Jew and Gentile is not the absorption of one into the other. It is the creation of something entirely new. Neither Jew nor Gentile, as those identities were previously constituted by the law, is the template for the new community. Something new has been created -- a new humanity, a new anthropological category, in which all the old dividing markers have been overcome and the defining identity is Christ. The church, when it is truly being the church, is this one new humanity -- people from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation (Revelation 7:9) brought into a single community by the blood of Christ, defined not by ethnic or cultural or social categories but by their common membership in the new humanity inaugurated by Christ's death and resurrection.

Reconciliation to God Through the Cross

Verse 16 adds the vertical dimension to the horizontal: 'and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their mutual hostility.' The reconciliation between Jew and Gentile is not merely sociological -- it is grounded in and enabled by a deeper reconciliation with God. The cross does not merely bring two human groups together. It brings them both -- together, in one body -- into right relationship with God. The cross put to death the mutual hostility -- absorbing in His own body the hostility, the sin, the curse, and the divine judgment that stood between humanity and God and between human groups who had learned to define themselves by their differences. The death of Christ is not merely a transaction between God and individual sinners. It is the event that creates a new humanity.

"Access to the Father by One Spirit"

Verse 18 is one of the most compact Trinitarian statements in the New Testament: 'through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.' Through the Son, to the Father, by the Spirit. All three persons are present in this single act of access -- the believer's ability to come before God the Father in prayer and worship. The word for access (prosagoge) was used in the ancient world for the formal introduction of a person into the presence of a king. Christ is that mediator. Through Him -- through His blood, His righteousness, His mediation -- both Jew and Gentile have the same access to the Father. Not separate access. Not access of different grades. The same access, equally, by one Spirit. The equality of access is the ground of the equality of standing.

Key Observations

- **The blood of Christ is the exclusive ground of the Gentiles being 'brought near'** -- no human religious achievement, cultural progress, or moral effort could accomplish what the cross accomplished.
- **Christ Himself is our peace** -- reconciliation is not a state He created and stepped back from but a reality that subsists in His person.
- **The dividing wall was demolished not just as a social achievement but as a theological necessity** -- the law's function as a boundary marker ended at the cross.
- **The one new humanity is neither Jew nor Gentile** -- it is an entirely new creation, a new anthropological category defined by Christ.
- **The cross addresses both the vertical enmity (humanity vs. God) and the horizontal hostility (group vs. group) simultaneously and in one act.**
- **Equal access to the Father through the Son by the Spirit** is the ground of the equality of all believers before God.

Ephesians 2:19-22 -- The Building: Fellow Citizens, God's Household, and the Holy Temple

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is being joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling place of God by his Spirit.

IN SIMPLE AMERICAN ENGLISH

So here is where you stand now: you are not outsiders anymore. Not foreigners, not strangers, not visitors on a temporary pass. You are full citizens of God's people -- same rights, same standing, same inheritance as everyone else. And even more than that, you are members of God's own household -- family. You belong here. And you are part of a building that is going up -- built on the foundation laid by the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the cornerstone that everything else is aligned to. In Him,

the whole building is being carefully fitted together, rising up to become a holy temple in the Lord. And you are part of it -- you are being built together into a place where God Himself lives, by His Spirit. You are the dwelling place of God.

"No Longer Foreigners and Strangers"

The chapter closes with a series of three overlapping images -- each one describing the new status of those who were once excluded, each one building on and surpassing the previous. The first image is civic: 'you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people.' The Gentiles who were once excluded from citizenship in Israel (verse 12) have been granted full citizenship in the new covenant community. Not resident aliens. Not guest workers. Not second-class members who have limited access and fewer rights. Full citizens -- with the same standing, the same rights, the same inheritance, the same access as those who have been in the covenant from the beginning. The second image moves from civic to domestic -- from the city to the family: 'members of his household.' This intensifies the citizenship image significantly. You can be a citizen of a nation without being part of a family. But membership in God's household is membership in His family -- those who share the common life of the household, those who have a place at the table and a share in the inheritance. The Gentile believers who were once 'without God in the world' are now members of God's own family.

"Built on the Foundation of the Apostles and Prophets"

The third and final image is architectural: the church is a building under construction. The foundation of this structure is 'the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.' The apostles and prophets here refer to the New Testament apostles (and likely the Old Testament prophets as well) whose proclamation of the gospel and whose inspired writings form the doctrinal foundation on which the church is built. The church is not free to build on any foundation it chooses -- it is defined by and accountable to the apostolic message. The 'chief cornerstone' (akrogoniaios) in ancient construction was the stone placed at the corner where two walls meet -- the stone that determined the alignment of the entire building. Every other stone was laid in relation to the cornerstone. Christ is this stone. Every other element of the church's life -- its teaching, its community, its worship, its mission -- is aligned in relation to Him. Where He is properly centered, the building rises true.

"The Whole Building Being Joined Together"

Verse 21 describes the construction process with a continuous-tense verb: the building 'is being joined together' -- a present, ongoing, active process. The church is not a finished structure. It is a building under construction -- rising, growing, being fitted together as new living stones are added through the gospel and as existing stones are shaped and fitted more precisely to one another by the Spirit. The word for 'joined together' (synarmologeō -- to fit together precisely, to join as in a mortised joint) implies a precision and an intentionality in the fitting. The stones are not thrown together randomly. They are fitted -- each one shaped to its place, each one joined to the others in a way that creates structural integrity and allows the building to bear weight and rise higher. This is the work of the Spirit in the church -- the careful, patient, often painful work of fitting diverse, differently shaped people together into a community of genuine unity.

"A Holy Temple in the Lord"

The building rises 'to become a holy temple in the Lord.' This is the most astonishing description of the church in the entire letter. The Jerusalem Temple was the place where God's presence uniquely dwelt -- the holy of holies, the place where the shekinah glory resided. Paul says: the church is the new temple. The community of believers -- made up of Jews and Gentiles who were once far apart, now fitted together by the blood of Christ -- is the place where God has chosen to dwell in this age. Not in a building of stone. In a community of people. The divine presence that once filled the holy of holies now fills the assembled community of those who are in Christ. This is not a demotion from the Jerusalem Temple -- it is an elevation beyond it. The stones of the Jerusalem Temple were cut and fitted by human hands. The stones of this new temple are human beings -- shaped by the Spirit, fitted to one another by the cross, indwelt by the living God.

"A Dwelling Place of God by His Spirit"

The chapter closes with its most intimate and most stunning declaration: 'And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling place of God by his Spirit.' The word for dwelling place (katoiketerion) means a permanent residence -- not a temporary camp or a passing visitation but a settled home. God is not a guest in the church. He is not visiting from time to time when the worship is particularly good or the sermon particularly true. He has taken up permanent residence. He dwells there. The church is His home. And this dwelling is corporate -- 'you too are being built together.' When the church gathers, God is home. When the new humanity comes together across every human dividing line and worships and serves and loves in the name of Christ, God is visibly, tangibly, spiritually present in a way that He is not present anywhere else in the world. The chapter that began with 'dead in trespasses and sins' ends with 'a dwelling place of God by His Spirit.' The distance between those two points is infinite. Only grace could travel it. And that grace has.

Key Observations

- **The three closing images -- citizens, household members, building stones --** each surpass the previous in intimacy, moving from public belonging to family belonging to being the very dwelling place of God.
- **The apostolic foundation means the church is accountable to the gospel as proclaimed by Christ's commissioned messengers --** there is no church without the apostolic word.
- **Christ as cornerstone determines the alignment of everything --** where He is properly centered, the community is shaped truly.
- **The church as holy temple is not a demotion from the Jerusalem Temple but an elevation --** living stones indwelt by the living God surpass cut stones visited by the divine presence.
- **'A dwelling place of God by His Spirit' is a permanent, settled residential image --** God is at home in His church.

What This Chapter Means for Us Today

1. Sit with the Darkness Before You Rush to the Light

Ephesians 2 opens in darkness deliberately. Paul does not give us two verses of diagnosis and then rush to the remedy. He gives us three full verses -- dead, dominated, deserving of wrath -- and commands us to stay with that reality long enough for it to shape how we understand everything that follows. The contemporary tendency is to skip the bad news and get to the good news as quickly as possible. But a 'but God' that is not preceded by an honest reckoning with 'dead in trespasses and sins' is a shallow, easily forgotten 'but God.' Take the time. Sit with what you were. Let the darkness be dark enough that when the light comes it is genuinely blinding.

2. Know That Your Salvation Is Entirely God's Work -- and Let That Produce Gratitude, Not Passivity

Salvation is by grace through faith -- not from yourselves, not by works. Every component of salvation is God's gift. This does not produce passivity -- it produces exactly the opposite. The person who fully understands that their salvation was entirely God's work, that they contributed nothing, that every spiritual blessing they possess came to them from outside themselves -- that person is not made passive. They are made grateful. And gratitude is the most powerful motivating force in the Christian life. We are God's handiwork, created for good works He prepared in advance. The grace that saved us was always grace that intended to be productive. The gratitude it generates is the fuel for the good works it designed.

3. Take the Unity of the Church as Seriously as the Gospel Takes It

The one new humanity Paul describes in Ephesians 2 is not an aspiration -- it is a declaration of what the cross has accomplished. When the church is divided along racial lines, class lines, cultural lines, political lines -- when the walls that Christ demolished are quietly rebuilt inside the community of faith -- the church is contradicting the gospel. The cross that brought Jew and Gentile into one body did so at the cost of everything. To maintain or tolerate or make peace with division in the church is to treat the blood of Christ as though it did not accomplish what it accomplished. The unity of the church is not a secondary value to be pursued when more pressing matters are settled. It is a primary gospel reality to be protected and embodied.

4. Understand That You Are Being Built -- and Submit to the Process

The church as a building under construction is one of the most practically illuminating images in the chapter. Construction is slow. It involves being cut, shaped, fitted, and sometimes placed in positions you would not have chosen for yourself. Other stones are fitted next to you that you may find uncomfortable, challenging, or unlike yourself in ways that require you to be shaped differently to accommodate them. This is not a failure of the building process -- it is the building process. The Spirit is doing something in the communal, sometimes uncomfortable work of fitting different people together. The question is not whether you find it easy. The question is whether you are submitting to the Master Builder's design.

5. Live as What You Are -- The Dwelling Place of God

The most practically transforming truth of this chapter is its closing declaration. You -- plural, corporate, together -- are a dwelling place of God by His Spirit. When you gather as the church, God is home. This should change how you think about the gathered community. The Sunday gathering is not primarily a service designed to meet your needs or inspire your emotions or give you a spiritual boost for the week. It is the assembly of the people in whom God has chosen to dwell -- the holy temple in the Lord, the dwelling place of God by the Spirit. Come to the gathering with that awareness. Serve in the community with that awareness. Love the other living stones with that awareness. You are the temple. God is dwelling here. Let everything about your life in the community reflect the dignity and the holiness and the joy of that extraordinary reality.

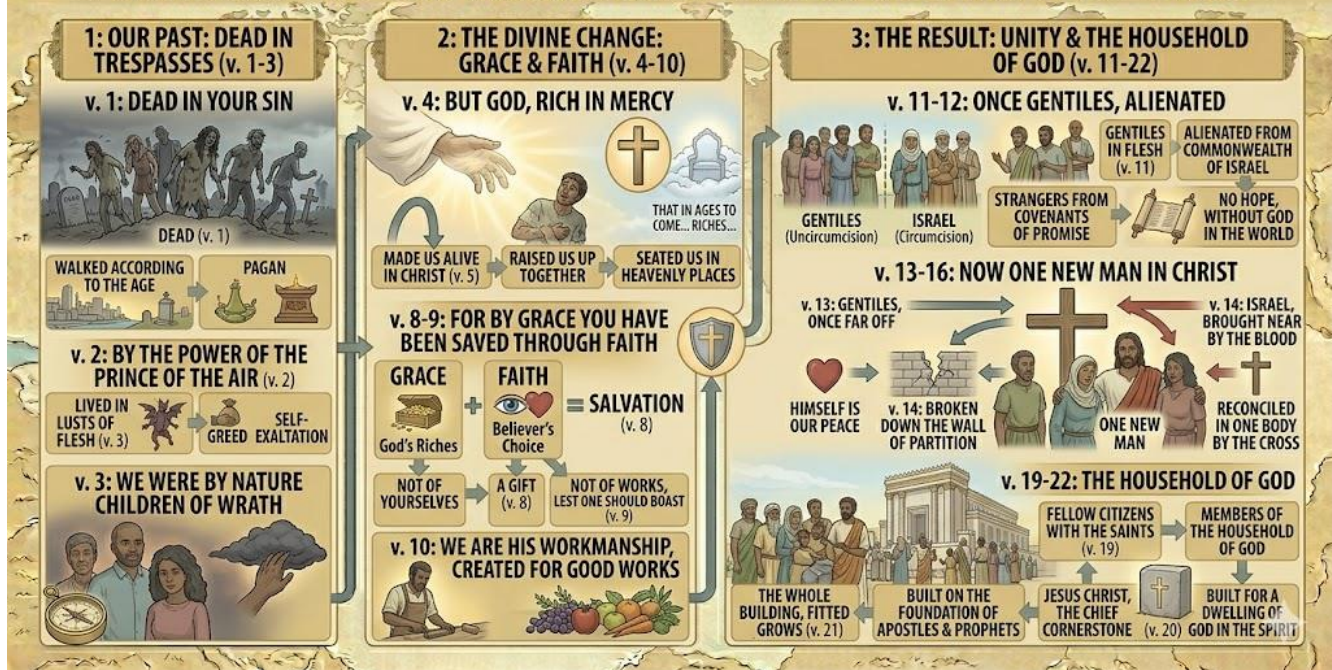
How This Chapter Relates to Today

Ephesians 2 speaks with direct and urgent relevance into a contemporary culture -- and a contemporary church -- that is deeply fractured along every conceivable line of human difference. The political, racial, economic, generational, and cultural divisions of the present moment are as sharp and as deeply felt as anything the ancient world experienced between Jew and Gentile. And the contemporary church, rather than being the demonstration of the one new humanity that the cross created, has in many contexts been shaped by those divisions rather than shaping them.

Ephesians 2 does not offer a social strategy for achieving unity. It offers a theological reality from which unity must flow. The church is one -- not because its members have worked out their differences, not because they have found enough common ground to coexist, not because they have committed to tolerance and diversity -- but because they have been brought near by the blood of Christ, made alive together by the grace of God, built together on the foundation of the apostles with Christ as the cornerstone, and indwelt by the same Spirit. The unity is already given. The work is to live it -- to refuse the re-erection of dividing walls that the cross demolished, to embody the one new humanity in concrete, costly, daily acts of cross-cultural, cross-class, cross-everything love.

The watching world is asking whether the gospel is real. One of the most powerful answers to that question is a church that is genuinely, visibly, beautifully diverse and genuinely, visibly, beautifully united -- a community that could not possibly have been assembled by any human social force, because the distances between its members are too great for anything but the blood of Christ to have bridged them. Ephesians 2 says: that community is possible. More than possible -- it is already theologically real. The question is whether the church will believe it enough to live it.

EPHESIANS CHAPTER 2: SALVATION BY GRACE & THE UNITY OF BELIEVERS



Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank You for Ephesians chapter 2 -- for its unflinching diagnosis of what we were and its breathtaking declaration of what You have made us. Dead -- but made alive. Under wrath -- but recipients of mercy. Far from You -- but brought near by the blood of Your Son. Strangers and foreigners -- but now citizens, family members, living stones in Your holy temple.

Lord, do not let us rush past what we were. Let the memory of death in trespasses and sins, of following the ways of this world, of being by nature deserving of wrath -- let that memory stay vivid enough to keep our gratitude alive and our boasting silenced. We have nothing to boast in. Everything we are and everything we have is the gift of Your grace. We are Your handiwork -- the poem You wrote in Christ Jesus. Let us live like it.

And Lord, produce in us the unity that the cross has already purchased. Where we have rebuilt the dividing walls that Christ demolished -- between races, between classes, between cultures, between generations -- forgive us, and then give us the courage and the love to tear them down again. Let the one new humanity that You created in Christ be visible in our communities -- not as an aspiration we are moving toward, but as a reality we are living out.

Finally, Lord -- let us live with the awareness of what we are. We are Your dwelling place. You are at home in Your church. Let everything about how we gather, how we serve, how we love one another, how we welcome the stranger, reflect the dignity and the holiness of being the place where You have chosen to live.

Dwell in us. Make Your home among us. Fill Your temple with Your glory -- not the glory of human achievement or institutional success, but the glory of grace upon grace upon grace, displayed in a community that could only have been assembled by You, held together by nothing less than the blood of Your Son, and inhabited by nothing less than Your own Spirit. To You be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Ephesians Chapter 3

A Deep Expository Study: The Mystery Revealed, the Mission Declared, and the Prayer That Reaches Beyond Knowledge -- Paul's Stewardship, the Church's Cosmic Witness, and the Love That Surpasses Understanding

Introduction to Ephesians Chapter 3

The Chapter Where Paul Stops to Marvel at What He Has Been Given to Say

Ephesians chapter 3 is unlike any other chapter in Paul's letters. It is not primarily an argument, a correction, or an exhortation. It is a sustained meditation on wonder -- the wonder of a prisoner who has been entrusted with the most magnificent secret in the universe, the wonder of a community that has been appointed to display that secret to the watching cosmos, and the wonder of a love so vast that Paul can only describe it as surpassing knowledge. The chapter is Paul at the edge of language -- pressing words into service they were not designed to bear, reaching for dimensions of divine reality that keep breaking through the vocabulary available to him.

The chapter begins with Paul starting a prayer -- 'For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles' -- and then immediately interrupting himself for nine verses to explain what he means by 'for this reason,' what the mystery is that he has been given to proclaim, and why the church's existence is cosmically significant. When he finally returns to the prayer in verse 14, he offers what is arguably the most magnificent intercessory prayer in the New Testament -- asking that believers would be strengthened in their inner being, that Christ would dwell in their hearts through faith, that they would know the unknowable love of Christ, and that they would be filled with all the fullness of God. The chapter closes with a doxology that reaches for infinity: to the God who is able to do far more abundantly than all we ask or imagine.

This chapter is not meant to be read efficiently. It is meant to be inhabited -- slowly, with growing amazement at what God has done, is doing, and will do in and through the community of those who are in Christ.

The Structure of Chapter 3

The chapter moves through four major sections. First, Paul identifies himself as the prisoner of Christ Jesus and the steward of the mystery -- the grace given to him to make known to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ (vv. 1-7). Second, he articulates the church's cosmic mission -- to make known the manifold wisdom of God to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose of God in Christ (vv. 8-13). Third, he returns to his interrupted prayer, asking for strengthening, indwelling, comprehension of love's dimensions, and the fullness of God (vv. 14-19). Fourth, he closes with the great doxology -- to the One who is able to do infinitely more than anything we ask or imagine (vv. 20-21).

Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father, we come to Ephesians chapter 3 asking for the very thing Paul prays for at its center -- that You would give us, through Your Spirit, the capacity to comprehend what is beyond comprehension. We want to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge. We want to be strengthened in our inner being with power through Your Spirit. We want to be filled with all the fullness of God. Lord, these are not modest requests. They are the requests of people who have been told that You are able to do far more abundantly than all we ask or imagine. So we ask -- boldly, humbly, with full expectation that the God who declared His inexhaustible power in the first two chapters of this letter is the same God who receives our prayer in this chapter.

And as we move through Paul's meditation on the mystery and the church's cosmic mission, give us eyes to see the dignity of what we have been called into. Let us not live as though the church is a minor human institution with limited relevance. Let us see what Paul sees -- a community appointed by God to display His manifold wisdom to the watching cosmos, a community through whom the eternal purpose of God in Christ is being revealed. Let that vision elevate our love for the church, our investment in it, and our wonder at being counted among its members. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Ephesians 3:1-7 --The Prisoner and the Mystery: Paul's Stewardship of Grace

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles -- Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been disclosed to the apostles and prophets by the Spirit: that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus. I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power.

IN SIMPLE AMERICAN ENGLISH

I am Paul -- and right now I am writing to you from prison. But notice how I describe myself: not as a prisoner of Rome, but as a prisoner of Christ Jesus. Because that is who actually holds my life. I am in chains because of what I have been preaching to you Gentiles -- and I would not change a thing. You have heard about the role God gave me: the stewardship of His grace, specifically on your behalf. The content of that stewardship is a mystery -- something hidden for ages that God revealed to me directly. Here is what the mystery is: through the gospel, you Gentiles are co-heirs with Israel, incorporated into the same body, and equal participants in the same promise, all in Christ Jesus. You are not second-class members of something primarily Jewish. You are fully in -- equally. I became a servant of this gospel purely as a gift of God's grace, energized by His own power working in me.

"The Prisoner of Christ Jesus"

Paul opens his interrupted digression by naming his circumstance with a phrase that requires careful attention: he is 'the prisoner of Christ Jesus.' He is writing this letter from prison -- almost certainly Roman custody, during the imprisonment described at the end of Acts. He is in chains. He is under guard. His freedom has been taken from him by the Roman Empire. But notice how he names his imprisonment. He does not say: 'I, Paul, the prisoner of Rome' or 'the prisoner of Caesar.' He says: 'the prisoner of Christ Jesus.' This is not denial of his circumstances. This is a theological interpretation of those circumstances. The chains he wears are not the ultimate authority governing his life. Christ Jesus is. His imprisonment did not happen outside God's sovereign purpose -- it happened within it, for the sake of the Gentiles, as part of the same mysterious plan he is about to describe.

The Administration of God's Grace

Paul describes his apostolic calling as 'the administration of God's grace' given to him for the sake of the Gentiles. The word for administration (oikonomia) is the household-management word -- from oikos (house) and nomos (law/management). It refers to the role of a steward: someone who manages someone else's household, resources, and affairs on behalf of the owner. Paul is not the owner of the mystery he is about to describe. He is the steward -- the one entrusted with its management and distribution on behalf of the One who owns it. A steward does not invent what he distributes. He does not modify it to suit his own preferences. His job is faithful distribution of what has been entrusted to him. Paul's apostleship is precisely this: he has been given stewardship of the grace of God, and his entire ministry is the faithful administration of that gift.

The Mystery Disclosed: Three 'Together' Words

Verse 6 is the content of the mystery -- the previously hidden secret now revealed: 'that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.' Three compound words, each beginning with the Greek prefix syn (together with), each describing a different dimension of the inclusion. Heirs together (synkleronomia) -- the Gentiles share equally in the inheritance. Not a partial inheritance, not a secondary share, but the same inheritance, in full, as co-heirs. Members together of one body (syssoma) -- this word appears nowhere else in Greek literature before Paul. He appears to have coined it to describe something genuinely new: the reality of Jew and Gentile incorporated into a single body. Sharers together in the promise (symmetocha) -- the Gentiles participate equally in the promise made to Abraham, fulfilled in Christ. The threefold 'together' structure is emphatic and deliberate. Paul does not want the Gentile believers to think of themselves as junior partners in a primarily Jewish enterprise. The 'together' is total.

"Not Made Known in Other Generations"

Verse 5 contains a statement crucial for understanding Paul's entire theology of revelation: the mystery 'was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been disclosed to the apostles and prophets by the Spirit.' This does not mean the Old Testament is silent about Gentile inclusion. What it means is that the full, explicit, clear disclosure of the mystery -- the precise way in which Gentiles would be co-heirs, co-body members, and co-sharers in Christ -- was not available in the Old Testament era with the clarity it now has through the gospel. The disclosure came 'by the Spirit' to 'the apostles and prophets' -- those who were

commissioned and inspired to receive and transmit the apostolic message. The mystery Paul describes is the culmination of that progressive disclosure -- the final, complete revelation of what God had been doing all along.

Key Observations

- **Paul's self-identification as 'prisoner of Christ Jesus' rather than 'prisoner of Rome'** is a theological claim about who truly holds authority over his life and circumstances.
- **The stewardship image positions Paul as a faithful distributor of what belongs to Another** -- he did not invent the mystery, he received and proclaims it.
- **The three 'together' words (co-heirs, co-body, co-sharers) establish the total equality of Gentile and Jewish believers** in every dimension of their standing before God.
- **The mystery was genuinely hidden in earlier generations** -- its full disclosure belongs to the new covenant era of the apostolic gospel.
- **Paul's apostleship originated in pure divine grace and power** -- grounding his authority in something Rome's chains cannot touch.

Ephesians 3:8-13 -- The Church's Cosmic Mission: Displaying God's Wisdom to the Universe

Although I am less than the least of all the Lord's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places, according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.

IN SIMPLE AMERICAN ENGLISH

Even though I am less than the least of all of God's people -- and I mean that seriously, given what I used to be -- God gave me this grace: to go to the Gentiles and preach the inexhaustible riches of Christ, and to bring into the light for everyone the plan that had been hidden in God from the beginning of time. And here is the purpose behind the whole thing: God's intent is that now, through the church -- through this community of redeemed people -- His many-faceted, multidimensional wisdom would be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. The entire spiritual universe is watching the church and learning from it something about God's wisdom. This is happening according to the eternal purpose that God accomplished in Christ Jesus. And because of all this, through faith in Him, we can come to God directly -- with complete freedom and boldness. So I am asking you: do not lose heart because of what I am suffering on your behalf. My suffering is actually your glory.

"Less Than the Least of All the Lord's People"

Before Paul describes the staggering commission he has been given, he pauses to express the depth of his unworthiness to carry it. 'Although I am less than the least of all the Lord's people' -- the Greek word he uses (elachistoteros) is a grammatical impossibility in ordinary usage -- a comparative form of a superlative, meaning something like 'lesser than the least.' Paul is not merely being modest. He is being theologically precise. He knows what he was. He was not merely a sinner -- he was the chief of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15), a persecutor, a blasphemer, a man who hunted the church of God and tried to destroy it. That history is always present in his self-understanding. He never forgets what grace found. The person who is least -- who has genuinely reckoned with what they were apart from grace -- is the person most suited to preach a gospel of grace. You cannot proclaim the riches of Christ with conviction if you have forgotten your own poverty.

"The Boundless Riches of Christ"

The commission Paul has been given is to 'preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ.' The Greek word for 'boundless' (anexichniastos) means literally 'that which cannot be tracked by footprints' -- untraceable, beyond the capacity of any investigation to fully map. The riches of Christ are riches that no exploration fully charts, no experience fully exhausts, no theology fully captures. Every generation of the church is still discovering new dimensions of what is available in Christ. Every believer who has spent decades growing in grace can testify that the depths are still not reached -- that Christ is always more, always further, always richer than the furthest reach of our understanding. This is what Paul has been commissioned to preach. Not a self-help program. Not a religious improvement system. The boundless, inexhaustible, untrackable riches of the person of Jesus Christ. To preach the gospel is to open a door onto infinity and invite people to walk through it.

"Through the Church, the Manifold Wisdom of God"

Verse 10 contains what is arguably the single most exalted description of the church's mission in all of Scripture: 'His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.' The church -- this community of redeemed sinners, of former pagans and former Pharisees, of people who once were dead in trespasses and sins -- has been appointed as the primary instrument through which God displays His wisdom to the entire spiritual universe. The audience is not merely human. It is the 'rulers and authorities in the heavenly places' -- the entire realm of spiritual powers, both the angelic beings who serve God and the demonic powers who oppose Him, all of them watching the church and learning from it something about the wisdom of God that they could not learn by any other means.

The word for manifold (polypoikilos) is extraordinary -- it means many-colored, multifaceted, variegated, like an intricate tapestry or a gem that reflects different colors at different angles. A wisdom that cannot be captured in a single image or a single expression, but that keeps revealing new facets as it is turned in the light. What the rulers and authorities are learning is how God's wisdom resolves the problem that sin created. How does a holy God remain just while justifying the ungodly? How does the Creator reconcile to Himself a creation that has rebelled against Him? The answer -- the many-colored, inexhaustible, endlessly faceted answer -- is the church. The community of the redeemed is the demonstration, to every

spiritual power in the universe, of what the wisdom of God looks like when it is given free expression.

"According to His Eternal Purpose"

Verse 11 grounds the church's cosmic mission in the most secure foundation possible: 'according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.' The church's mission is not an improvised response to a situation God did not anticipate. It is the execution of an eternal purpose -- a purpose that preceded creation, that was hidden in God through the ages, and that was accomplished (the verb is past tense -- finished, completed) in Christ Jesus. The 'eternal purpose' language carries the same weight as the 'before the foundation of the world' language of chapter 1. The church's existence and mission were decided before the universe existed. What Paul is describing in this chapter is not a plan B. It is the eternal, primary, always-intended purpose of God, brought to completion in the cross and resurrection of His Son.

"Freedom and Confidence" -- Access to God

Verse 12 transitions from the cosmic to the personal: 'In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.' The word for 'freedom' (parresia) means boldness, frankness, the confidence of one who has nothing to hide and no reason to fear rejection. The word for 'confidence' (prosagoge -- the same word used in 2:18 for access) carries the image of being formally introduced into the presence of a great person by a trusted mediator. Together, these words describe the posture of the believer in prayer. You do not approach God tentatively, as though your welcome is uncertain. You come with freedom and confidence -- not because you are worthy in yourself, but because you are in Christ. The freedom and confidence are His, shared with you through union with Him.

Key Observations

- **Paul's self-description as 'less than the least' is not false modesty but theological precision** -- the measure of his wonder at being entrusted with so much.
 - **The riches of Christ are described as 'boundless'** -- untraceable, inexhaustible, always deeper than the furthest reach of our understanding.
 - **The church's primary mission is cosmic** -- displaying God's manifold wisdom to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.
 - **Polypoikilos (manifold/many-colored) describes a wisdom so rich and multifaceted** that no single image or expression can capture it -- the church itself is the living demonstration.
 - **The church's mission is grounded in the eternal purpose of God accomplished in Christ** -- not a plan B but the always-intended, eternally purposed display of divine wisdom.
 - **Freedom and confidence in prayer flow from union with Christ** -- we approach the Father with His Son's own welcome.
 - **Paul's sufferings are reframed as the Gentiles' glory** -- part of the same divine economy as the mystery itself.
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Ephesians 3:14-19 -- The Prayer: Strength, Indwelling, Love Beyond Knowledge, and the Fullness of God

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge -- that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

IN SIMPLE AMERICAN ENGLISH

Because of all of this -- everything described in the first two and a half chapters -- I am getting on my knees before the Father, the One from whom every family everywhere, in heaven and on earth, gets its name and its meaning. And here is what I am asking Him for on your behalf: out of the staggering wealth of His glory, I am asking Him to give you power -- Spirit-powered strength -- deep down in your inner life, your core, the place where you actually live before God. And I am asking that out of that strengthening, Christ would make His home in your hearts through faith -- not just a quick visit, but a full, settled, domestic presence in every part of you. And then -- from that foundation, rooted and grounded in love -- I am asking that you, together with all of God's people, would have the spiritual capacity to grasp just how immense the love of Christ is: how wide, how long, how high, how deep. I want you to know this love that is actually beyond knowing. And ultimately, I want you to be filled to the brim -- completely full -- with the very fullness of God.

"For This Reason I Kneel Before the Father"

Paul finally returns to the prayer he interrupted at verse 1. 'For this reason' -- because of the mystery revealed, because of the church's cosmic mission, because of the eternal purpose accomplished in Christ, because of the freedom and confidence of access to God -- Paul kneels. The posture is significant. Jewish prayer was typically offered standing. Kneeling before God was an expression of special urgency, deep reverence, or intense supplication. Paul is not merely reciting a prayer. He is prostrating himself before the Father on behalf of the churches -- bringing the weight of everything he has described in the preceding two and a half chapters into the presence of the God who accomplished it all. He prays 'before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name.' God is not merely one father among many. He is the Father from whom every other form of fatherhood derives its significance. The intimacy of the address -- Father -- is set against the universality of His fatherhood over everything that exists.

"Strengthen You with Power Through His Spirit in Your Inner Being"

The first petition is for strength -- but not for any visible, external, circumstantial form of strength. The strength Paul asks for is located 'in your inner being' -- in the hidden, interior life of the person, the place where faith is exercised, where decisions are made, where the war

between flesh and Spirit is fought, where love either grows or withers, where hope is either held or lost. The strength comes 'with power through his Spirit' -- the same power that raised Christ from the dead (1:19-20), now applied to the inner life of the believer. Paul is not asking for behavioral improvement, increased religious discipline, or enhanced moral effort. He is asking for the Spirit to work in the deepest place within the believer with the full force of divine power. Everything visible in the Christian life flows from that hidden strengthening. The love, the endurance, the faithfulness, the courage, the generosity -- all of it is the outward expression of an inner life where the Spirit is working with power.

"That Christ May Dwell in Your Hearts Through Faith"

The second petition is remarkable in its apparent redundancy -- the Ephesians are already Christians, already indwelt by the Spirit. Why does Paul ask that Christ would dwell in their hearts as though this has not already happened? The answer lies in the word he uses for dwell. The Greek word (*katoikeo*) is the same word used in 2:22 for God's permanent, settled dwelling in the church as His temple. It means not to visit but to take up residence -- to settle in, to make a home, to inhabit fully and permanently. What Paul is asking is not that Christ would move in -- He has already moved in through the Spirit at conversion. He is asking that Christ would be at home -- fully, deeply, pervasively, in every room of the inner life. This is the difference between a convert and a disciple. The convert has received Christ. The disciple has given Christ every room -- has invited Him into the places of pride and the places of fear and the places of hidden sin and the places of deepest longing, and has allowed His presence to transform each room from the inside out.

"Rooted and Established in Love"

Before Paul can articulate the petition about comprehending love's dimensions, he describes the condition that makes such comprehension possible: being 'rooted and established in love.' The two metaphors work together. 'Rooted' is agricultural -- the image of a tree whose roots have gone deep into the soil, drawing nourishment from it, anchored against storms by the depth of the root system. 'Established' is architectural -- the image of a building set on a solid foundation, unable to be shifted by the forces that press against it. Love is the soil. Love is the foundation. Before the believer can comprehend the dimensions of Christ's love, they must be living in it -- rooted in the love of God that has been poured into their hearts by the Spirit (Romans 5:5), established in the love that elected them before the foundation of the world.

"To Grasp How Wide and Long and High and Deep"

The petition to comprehend the love of Christ is addressed not to the individual in isolation but to the community: 'together with all the Lord's holy people.' The comprehension Paul prays for is not a private mystical achievement. It is a corporate discovery -- something that happens as the community of faith together explores the dimensions of a love that no individual life can fully map. The four dimensions Paul names -- wide, long, high, deep -- express unmappable totality. Paul is not providing a theological map of love's dimensions. He is expressing the inexpressibility of a love that cannot be dimensioned. Wide -- you cannot find its edge going in either direction. Long -- you cannot find its beginning or its end in time. High -- you cannot find its ceiling. Deep -- you cannot find its floor. In every direction, in every dimension, the love of Christ exceeds the capacity of measurement. The prayer is that the Ephesians would have the spiritual capacity -- given by God through the Spirit, together with all the saints -- to grasp a love whose dimensions are beyond all grasping.

"To Know This Love That Surpasses Knowledge"

Verse 19 contains one of the most deliberately self-contradicting phrases in the New Testament: Paul asks that the Ephesians would 'know this love that surpasses knowledge.' To know the unknowable. To comprehend the incomprehensible. To grasp what cannot be fully grasped. This is not sloppy thinking -- it is precise theology. The love of Christ is not irrational or incoherent. But it exceeds the capacity of any human cognitive framework to fully contain it. It can be genuinely known -- entered into, experienced, trusted, relied upon -- but it cannot be exhaustively known in the sense that the knower has now fully mapped and possessed the object of their knowledge. This is the nature of knowing a Person rather than knowing a proposition. Every deepening of the knowledge reveals more of what is still unknown. Every experience of the love opens new vistas of what is still to be explored. The proper response to the knowledge of Christ's love is not the confidence of one who has now understood everything, but the growing wonder of one who keeps discovering that there is always more.

"Filled to the Measure of All the Fullness of God"

The petition reaches its culmination -- and its greatest apparent impossibility -- in the closing phrase: 'that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.' The fullness of God (pleroma theou) refers to the entire totality of what God is -- His love, His holiness, His power, His wisdom, His grace, His beauty, His truth. Paul is asking that human beings would be filled with that. This is not a prayer for believers to become God -- the distinction between Creator and creature is permanent and uncrossable. It is a prayer for believers to be as fully indwelt, as completely characterized by, as thoroughly permeated with the presence and character of God as the limitations of creaturely existence allow. The phrase echoes and answers the closing declaration of chapter 1 -- that the church is the fullness of Christ who fills everything in every way (1:23). The gap between what we are and what God intends is bridged not by our effort but by His filling.

Key Observations

- **Paul kneels** -- an unusual posture indicating the special urgency and weight of what he is about to ask.
- **The inner being is the primary location of spiritual strengthening** -- all visible Christian virtue flows from the hidden interior life where the Spirit works.
- **'Dwell' (katoikeo) indicates full, settled, domestic inhabitation** -- not visitation but making a home in every room of the believer's inner life.
- **Comprehension of love's dimensions is a corporate, communal discovery** -- not a private mystical achievement but something grasped together with all the saints.
- **The four dimensions express unmappable totality** -- wherever you reach for the boundary of Christ's love, there is no boundary.
- **'To know this love that surpasses knowledge' is intentionally self-contradicting** -- describing an experience that exceeds cognitive frameworks while genuinely engaging them.
- **'Filled to the measure of all the fullness of God' is the most ambitious petition in the New Testament** -- the maximum possible participation of finite creatures in the infinite divine life.

Ephesians 3:20-21 --The Doxology: Beyond All We Ask or Imagine

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

IN SIMPLE AMERICAN ENGLISH

Now -- to the One who is able to do immeasurably, infinitely more than anything we could ever ask for or even dream up -- to the One whose power is already at work inside us right now -- to Him be all the glory. Let it show in the church. Let it show in Christ Jesus. In every generation. Forever and ever. Amen.

"Immeasurably More Than All We Ask or Imagine"

The prayer reaches its conclusion and immediately turns upward in an act of praise that gathers everything Paul has said in the chapter into a single, soaring declaration. The doxology opens with a description of God that is itself staggering: He is the One who is able to do 'immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine.' The Greek phrase (*hyperekperissou*) is another of Paul's grammatical superlatives -- he stacks intensifying prefixes to reach for an expression that means something like 'beyond all measure and beyond all abundance.' It is not merely more than we ask -- it is beyond more than we ask. It is not merely more than we imagine -- it is beyond more than we imagine. Every extravagant request in the prayer Paul has just offered -- strengthening with divine power in the inner being, Christ fully at home in the heart, the comprehension of unmeasurable love, the fullness of God -- all of it, and infinitely more, is within the capacity of the God to whom the prayer is addressed.

This is the function of the doxology in its context. Paul has just offered what may be the most ambitious intercessory prayer in the New Testament. The natural human response to such a prayer is doubt -- surely this is too much to ask for. The doxology answers that doubt before it can take hold: the God you are praying to is able to do immeasurably more than all this. The problem is not the size of the request. The problem is always the smallness of our asking and our imagining.

"According to His Power That Is at Work Within Us"

The capacity Paul ascribes to God is not merely theoretical. It is not the capacity of a God who could do all this in principle but has chosen not to in practice. It is the power that is already at work within us -- the same resurrection power described in 1:19-20, already operative in the community of faith, already producing what no human effort could produce. The doxology is not a hope that God might someday begin to exercise His power on our behalf. It is a declaration that the power is already working -- in us, through us, among us -- and that its capacity exceeds everything we have asked or imagined it to be.

"Glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus"

The direction of the doxology is equally important: 'to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever.' Glory goes to God. But it goes to Him specifically through two instruments placed side by side: the church and Christ Jesus. Not Christ alone -- though Christ is always primary. Christ and the church together. The same pairing that appeared in 1:22-23, where Christ is head and the church is His body and fullness. The glory that belongs to God is displayed through His Son and through His Son's community. The church is not merely a recipient of God's glory -- it is an instrument of it. Its life of grace, its corporate unity, its love across every human dividing line, its worship, its service, its endurance in suffering -- all of it returns glory to the God who accomplished it all. 'Throughout all generations, for ever and ever' places the doxology in its eternal frame. This is not a momentary praise -- it is the declaration of an eternal reality.

Key Observations

- **Hyperekperissou (immeasurably more) expresses a capacity that places even Paul's most ambitious petitions within the easy range of God's ability.**
- **The capacity is not theoretical** -- it is the power already at work within us, already producing what no human effort could generate.
- **Glory goes to God through both Christ and the church** -- the church is not merely a recipient of glory but an instrument of it.
- **'Throughout all generations, for ever and ever' places the church's glorification of God in its eternal frame** -- a praise that will never end and never be exhausted.

What This Chapter Means for Us Today

1. Your Circumstances Do Not Define Your Identity -- Christ Does

Paul writes this chapter as a prisoner. His freedom has been taken. His future in human terms is uncertain. His ministry has been interrupted by circumstances outside his control. And yet from prison he writes one of the most magnificent theological meditations in history, identifies himself as 'the prisoner of Christ Jesus' rather than of Rome, and declares without self-pity that his sufferings are the Gentiles' glory. The reframing is not psychological denial -- it is theological clarity. When you know who you belong to and what you have been given to do, no external circumstance can define you. Not illness. Not financial loss. Not broken relationships. Not professional failure. Not the hostility of those who oppose what you believe. You are held by a purpose that preceded creation and will outlast every earthly opposition.

2. You Have Been Given More Than You Know

The three 'together' words of verse 6 -- co-heirs, co-body members, co-sharers -- describe a fullness of belonging that most believers have barely begun to inhabit. You have equal standing with every believer who has ever lived. You have the same access to the Father, through the same Son, by the same Spirit. You share in the same inheritance, the same promise, the same body. The gospel has given you more than you know how to receive. One of the most important practices of the Christian life is the slow, Spirit-aided discovery of what

has already been given -- not striving for something you do not yet have, but learning to inhabit the fullness of what the gospel has already placed in your hands.

3. The Church's Mission Is Bigger Than You Can See

The church you belong to -- however small, however imperfect, however invisible in the surrounding culture -- is participating in a mission that has a cosmic audience. Every time your church crosses a racial line in genuine love, every time it forgives what the world would retaliate against, every time it gathers in worship from genuinely diverse backgrounds and holds together around the cross, it is displaying the manifold wisdom of God to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. The angels are watching. The spiritual powers are learning. The eternal purpose of God is being advanced. You are not part of a minor institution struggling for cultural relevance. You are part of the primary instrument through which God is displaying His wisdom to the universe. Take the church seriously. Give yourself to it completely. The stakes are cosmic.

4. Pray Paul's Prayer -- For Yourself and For Others

Ephesians 3:14-19 is one of the most powerful models for intercessory prayer in the New Testament -- and one of the most neglected. We tend to pray for circumstances. Paul prays for the inner life. We ask God to change what is happening around the person. Paul asks God to change what is happening inside the person. We pray for health and provision and protection. Paul prays for Spirit-empowered strengthening in the inner being, for Christ to be thoroughly at home in the heart, for the comprehension of a love that surpasses knowledge, for the fullness of God. Make this prayer yours. Pray it for your children, your friends, your church community, yourself. It is one of the highest prayers available to us.

5. Pray Bigger -- Because God Can Do More Than You Ask or Imagine

The closing doxology is both a declaration and an invitation. It is a declaration about who God is -- the One who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine. And it is an implicit invitation to ask bigger, imagine more, and then trust that even the most ambitious request falls within the easy range of God's already-working power. The problem in most Christian prayer is not that we ask too much -- it is that we ask too little. We have been conditioned by repeated disappointment and by a practical theology that has shrunk God to the size of what we have so far experienced. The doxology of Ephesians 3 calls us to expand our asking to the full scope of God's ability -- which is, by definition, beyond our asking and our imagining.

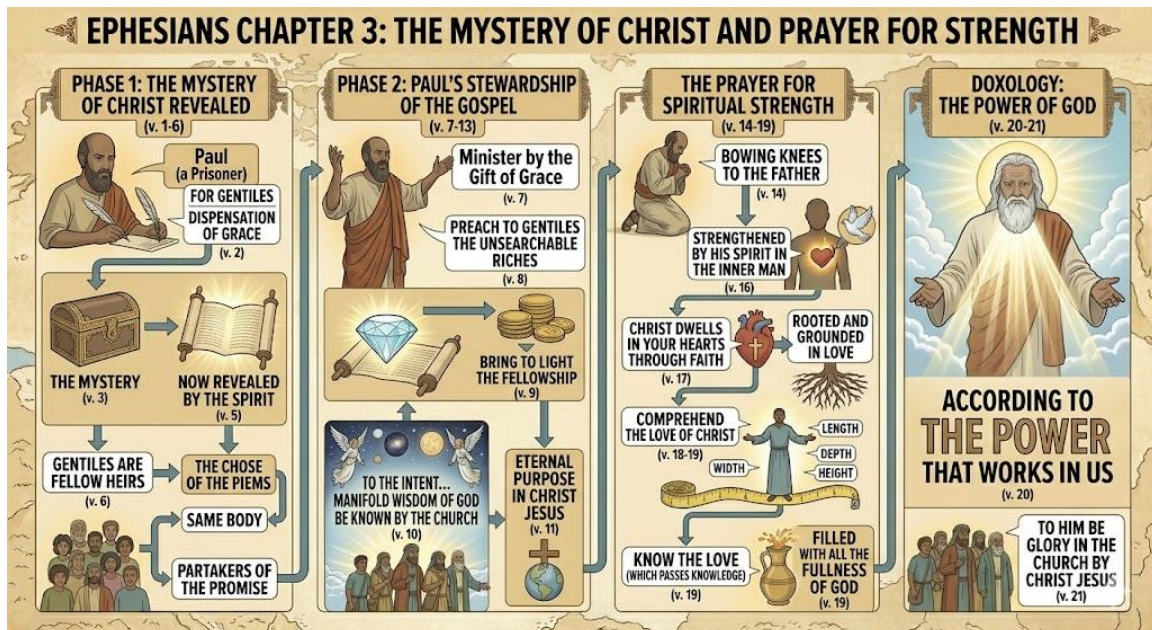
How This Chapter Relates to Today

Ephesians chapter 3 speaks with sharp relevance into a contemporary church that is simultaneously over-impressed with its own programs and strategies and under-impressed with the cosmic significance of its existence. We measure the church's significance by attendance numbers, by cultural influence, by media presence, by the impressiveness of our buildings and events. Paul measures it by the watching audience of the entire spiritual

universe and the display of the manifold wisdom of God to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

The church that knows it exists to display the wisdom of God to the cosmos does not measure itself by worldly metrics. It measures itself by the quality of its community -- by the depth of its love across human dividing lines, by the genuineness of its forgiveness, by the reality of its care for the poor and the broken, by the freedom and confidence of its access to God in prayer, by the degree to which Christ is genuinely at home in the inner lives of its members.

And the church that prays Paul's prayer -- that takes the time to kneel before the Father and ask for Spirit-empowered inner strengthening, for the fullness of Christ's indwelling, for the corporate comprehension of a love that surpasses knowledge -- is the church that is most likely to experience the doxology's promise. The power is already at work within us. The question is how large our asking is, how expansive our imagining is, and whether we are willing to trust the One who is able to do immeasurably more than all of it.



Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father, we come to the end of Ephesians chapter 3 on our knees -- in posture if not always in body, at least in spirit. We have seen the mystery revealed: Jew and Gentile, co-heirs, co-body members, co-sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus. We have seen the cosmic dignity of the church: the instrument through which Your manifold wisdom is being made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. We have encountered the prayer that reaches beyond knowledge: for strength in the inner being, for Christ at home in our hearts, for the comprehension of a love with no edges, for the fullness of God.

Lord, we confess that we have prayed too small. We have asked for circumstances when You wanted to transform inner beings. We have asked for comfort when You wanted to pour in power. We have been content with Christ visiting when You intend for Him to be at home. Forgive us. And then do what You are able to do -- immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine.

Strengthen us in our inner beings with power through Your Spirit. Not the strength of gritted teeth and willful determination -- the strength of resurrection power applied to the hidden life of the person. Let Christ be fully at home in us -- in every room, not just the presentable ones.

Tear down the interior walls we have built to keep Him out of the places we are ashamed of, and let His presence fill and transform and redeem every corner.

Root us deep and establish us firmly in love -- Your love that elected us before the world began, Your love that gave Your Son for our sins, Your love that sealed us with the Spirit and will not let us go. And from that foundation, give us -- together, as Your community of saints -- the power to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ. Let us know the unknowable. Let us comprehend the incomprehensible. Not because we are sufficient for it, but because You are sufficient to give it.

And fill us -- fill Your church -- to the measure of all Your fullness. Let the world see a community so characterized by Your presence, so marked by Your love, so shaped by Your wisdom, that the only explanation is You. To You be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus, throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Ephesians Chapter 4

A Deep Expository Study: Walk Worthy -- Unity, Gifted Ministry, Maturity, and the Putting Off of the Old Self in the Renewal of the New

Introduction to Ephesians Chapter 4

The Hinge of the Letter -- Where Theology Becomes a Way of Walking

Ephesians chapter 4 is the great turning point of the letter. Everything in chapters 1 through 3 -- the eternal election, the redemption through blood, the adoption to sonship, the sealing of the Spirit, the resurrection from death in trespasses, the creation of one new humanity, the cosmic mystery revealed, the prayer for the fullness of God -- all of it has been the foundation. Chapter 4 is the structure that rises from that foundation. The architecture of grace now becomes the architecture of life.

The opening word of chapter 4 in the original Greek is 'therefore' -- and it is one of the most weight-bearing 'therefores' in all of Scripture. Paul uses it to make the connection explicit: because of everything God has done in Christ, described across three chapters of sustained theological wonder, there is a corresponding way of living. Not an optional way. Not a supplementary way. The only way that is coherent with what God has done. The theological indicatives of chapters 1 through 3 demand the ethical imperatives of chapters 4 through 6. You cannot say you believe what chapters 1 through 3 declare and then live as though chapter 4 does not follow from it.

The chapter unfolds in three broad movements. First, the call to walk worthy of the calling -- specifically, to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, grounded in seven foundational 'ones' that describe the church's irreducible common identity (vv. 1-6). Second, the doctrine of the gifted church -- the risen and ascended Christ has given gifts to His body for the specific purpose of equipping the saints for ministry, building up the body, and bringing the community to maturity in Christ (vv. 7-16). Third, the call to put off the old self

and put on the new -- the specific behavioral and attitudinal transformation that follows from the renewal of the mind (vv. 17-32).

Why the Transition From Chapter 3 to Chapter 4 Matters

Chapter 3 ended with a doxology: 'to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever.' Chapter 4 begins with a prisoner asking the church to walk in a manner worthy of its calling. The connection is not accidental. The glory that is to be displayed in the church is not a passive glory -- it is displayed through a community that is genuinely walking worthily, genuinely maintaining unity, genuinely growing to maturity, genuinely putting off what belongs to the old self and putting on what belongs to the new. The doxology of chapter 3 is only credible if the walk of chapter 4 is real.

Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father, we come to Ephesians chapter 4 knowing that the theology of the first three chapters is now asking something of us. The grace that found us dead and made us alive, that broke down the dividing wall and created one new humanity, that promised to do immeasurably more than we ask or imagine -- that grace is now calling us to walk in a manner worthy of it. Lord, we know how wide the gap is between the calling described in this chapter and the way we actually live. We know what our speech is like when we are under pressure. We know where bitterness lives in us. We know how quickly we revert to the old self that was supposed to have been put off.

So we ask for what this chapter ultimately calls for: the renewal of the spirit of our minds. Not a surface adjustment of behavior, but the deep transformation of the inner orientation from which behavior flows. Let Christ form us from the inside out. Let the new self You have created after Your own likeness become the increasingly dominant reality of who we are. And as we study this chapter, let it be more than information -- let it be formation. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Ephesians 4:1-3 -- The Call to Walk Worthy

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

IN SIMPLE AMERICAN ENGLISH

I am writing to you as a prisoner -- but not Rome's prisoner. I am the Lord's prisoner. And because of that, I am urging you, from the bottom of my heart: live in a way that actually matches the calling you have received. That means being genuinely humble -- not performing humility, but actually thinking rightly about yourself. It means being gentle -- having the strength to stay calm and controlled. It means being patient -- long-tempered, not easily set off. It means bearing with one another in love -- holding up the weight of other people's humanity even when it is hard. And make it a priority -- press hard at this -- to maintain the unity that the Spirit has already created, keeping it held together by peace.

"As a Prisoner for the Lord, I Urge You"

Paul opens the ethical section of the letter by reidentifying himself as a prisoner -- not of Rome, but 'for the Lord.' He established this framing in 3:1, and he returns to it here because it is crucial for the authority and the weight of what follows. Paul is not speaking from a position of comfort and security, offering theoretical advice about how to live. He is speaking from chains, from custody, from the cost of faithful gospel proclamation. The man urging the Ephesians to walk in humility and gentleness and patience is a man who has practiced those qualities in conditions far more demanding than anything most of his readers have faced. The word for urge (parakaleo) is one of Paul's most characteristic words for pastoral appeal -- it means to call alongside, to encourage, to exhort with warmth and urgency.

"A Life Worthy of the Calling You Have Received"

The phrase 'worthy of the calling' requires careful theological handling. Paul is not saying that the Ephesians need to earn or repay their calling through worthy living. The calling is already received -- it is a past-tense gift, already given, already secured. What he is saying is that there is a correspondence -- a coherence -- between the calling and the life. The Greek word for worthy (axios) was used of the two pans of a balance scale being in equilibrium with each other. To live worthily is to bring your daily life into equilibrium with your calling -- to let the weight of what God has done press down on the side of daily behavior until the two pans balance. The question is: does the way I am living correspond to the person God has declared me to be in Christ?

Four Qualities of Worthy Walking

Paul immediately specifies the qualities that characterize the worthy walk. Humility (tapeinophrosyne) -- the settled, genuine assessment of oneself as dependent on God and as a servant of others, without the need to assert one's own importance or protect one's own status. In the Greco-Roman world, humility was not a virtue -- it was associated with weakness and servility. Paul makes it the first quality of the worthy walk, because without it none of the others are possible. Gentleness (prautes) -- the same word translated as meekness, this quality describes strength under control. Not weakness -- power that has been submitted and directed. Patience (makrothumia) -- literally 'long-tempered,' the opposite of short-tempered or easily provoked. This is particularly the quality needed in community -- with other believers who are different, who fail, who frustrate, who sometimes act in ways that are genuinely difficult to tolerate. Bearing with one another in love -- the word for bearing (anechomenoi) means to hold up, to carry, to endure what is burdensome. Community life requires this.

"Make Every Effort to Keep the Unity of the Spirit"

Verse 3 adds the imperative of effort to the call for unity. The phrase 'make every effort' (spoudazontes) means to exert yourself, to press hard, to be diligent and urgent about something. Unity is not automatic. It is a gift of the Spirit -- 'the unity of the Spirit' -- that must be actively and strenuously maintained. It already exists as a spiritual reality, created by the one Spirit indwelling every genuine believer. But it must be actively preserved against the forces that constantly threaten to fracture it -- pride, offense, doctrinal disagreement, personality conflicts, cultural differences, and the persistent activity of the enemy who knows

that a divided church cannot display the manifold wisdom of God to the watching cosmos. Peace is the binding agent, the ligament that holds the body of unity together.

Key Observations

- **'Worthy' describes correspondence and coherence between calling and conduct** -- not earning but embodying what has been given.
- **The four qualities of the worthy walk (humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with one another) are all relational** -- they describe how the gospel shapes us toward other people.
- **Unity is the Spirit's gift, but its preservation requires strenuous human effort** -- the two are not in tension.
- **Peace is the bond that holds unity together** -- not the absence of difficulty but the active pursuit of reconciliation.

Ephesians 4:4-6 -- The Seven Foundations of Unity

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

IN SIMPLE AMERICAN ENGLISH

Here is the foundation of everything: there is one body -- one community of all who are genuinely in Christ, no matter what the dividing lines look like from the outside. One Spirit dwelling in every genuine believer. One hope you were all called into -- the same resurrection, the same new creation, the same eternal future. One Lord -- Jesus Christ, the One to whom every knee will bow. One faith -- the same gospel, the same apostolic truth. One baptism -- one entry into the community. And over all of it: one God and Father of all -- over everything, working through everything, personally present in everyone who belongs to Him. Seven ones. One community. One source. One destination.

The Architecture of Christian Unity

These three verses constitute one of the most compressed and architecturally precise statements of Christian identity in the entire New Testament. Paul lists seven foundational 'ones' -- the irreducible, non-negotiable, theologically grounded unities that constitute the church's common identity. These are not aspirations. They are declarations of what is already true about every genuine believer -- the bedrock on which the call to maintain unity rests. The seven are arranged in a Trinitarian structure. Three center on the Spirit's work. Three center on the Son's work. One names the Father's comprehensive sovereignty over all.

"One Body and One Spirit"

The one body is the church -- the single, universal community of all those who are in Christ, whether Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female, ancient or modern. There are not two bodies -- one Jewish Christian and one Gentile Christian. There are not multiple bodies divided by tradition, denomination, or culture. There is one body. Every genuine believer, regardless of their ecclesial address, belongs to this one body. The practical implication is that the divisions between Christians are always, from this perspective, contradictions of a unity that has already been established. The one Spirit is the Holy Spirit -- the same Spirit indwelling every genuine believer, producing the same fruit, distributing diverse gifts for the common good, crying the same 'Abba, Father' in every heart. We are one body because we share one Spirit.

"One Hope, One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism"

The one hope is the shared eschatological destination of all believers -- the resurrection, the new creation, the final inheritance, the face-to-face vision of God. Every genuine believer is moving toward the same destination. Sharing a destination creates a traveling community. The one Lord is Jesus Christ -- the Lord before whom every knee will bow and every tongue confess (Philippians 2:10-11), the Lord whose name is above every name. Every genuine believer confesses the same Lord. The one faith is the body of belief -- the apostolic gospel, the content of what is believed -- that was entrusted to the saints (Jude 3). The one baptism is the rite of initiation into the body of Christ -- the outward, visible sign of the inward, invisible work of the Spirit in regeneration and union with Christ.

"One God and Father of All, Who Is Over All and Through All and In All"

The seven 'ones' culminate in the most comprehensive declaration: one God and Father of all. The three prepositions that follow -- over all, through all, in all -- describe the Father's relationship to creation and to His people in three dimensions. He is over all -- transcendent, sovereign, above everything that exists. He is through all -- immanent, actively working through every person, every event, every circumstance. He is in all -- intimately present within the community of His people, dwelling in the temple He has made of their lives. The three prepositions together describe a God who is simultaneously above the universe, at work through the universe, and personally present within His people -- a God of unqualified sovereignty and unqualified intimacy. This is the final ground of unity. There is one God. He is the Father of all who are in Christ. The family has one Father, and that one Father holds the one family together.

Key Observations

- **The seven 'ones' are not aspirations but declarations** -- they describe what is already true about every genuine believer.
 - **The Trinitarian structure (Spirit, Son, Father) grounds the church's unity** in the eternal community of the Godhead.
 - **The 'one Father' who is over all, through all, and in all** combines divine transcendence and divine immanence in a single comprehensive declaration.
 - **The practical implication is that every division among genuine believers** is a contradiction of a unity that the Trinity has already established.
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Ephesians 4:7-16 -- The Gifted Church: Christ's Descent, Ascent, and the Equipping of the Saints

But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says: 'When he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people.' (What does 'he ascended' mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

IN SIMPLE AMERICAN ENGLISH

Now here is something important: every single one of us has been given a grace-gift -- personally calibrated and given by Christ Himself. The Scripture says that when He ascended on high, He gave gifts to His people. And for Him to have ascended, He first had to descend -- all the way down into human existence, into death -- and then ascend higher than all the heavens so that He could fill everything. From that position He gave specific gifted people to the church: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. But here is the key: He gave them not to do all the ministry while everyone else watches. He gave them to equip God's people for their works of service, so that the body gets built up -- until we all reach real unity, real knowledge of Christ, real maturity measured by the fullness of Christ Himself. That way we stop being spiritual infants knocked around by every new teaching that comes along. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we grow up in every way into Christ, who is the head. From Him the whole body is held together, and each part doing its work builds the body up in love.

"To Each One of Us Grace Has Been Given"

Having described the unity of the body in verses 4-6, Paul now introduces the diversity within that unity: 'to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.' The 'each one' is emphatic and inclusive -- no member of the body is ungifted. Grace -- the specific, personal, divinely calibrated enabling that equips each believer for their particular contribution to the body -- has been given to every member. The distribution is 'as Christ apportioned it.' The gifts are not randomly distributed. They are not self-selected. They are personally and purposefully given by Christ Himself, the head of the body, in exactly the measure and kind that He has determined serves the body's needs. This removes both pride (your gift is a gift, not an achievement) and envy (the gift given to another was given by the same Lord who gave yours to you).

The Gifted Leaders: Not for Their Own Ministry but for Equipping

Verse 11 lists the specific gifted people Christ gave to the church: 'the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers.' These are specifically the gifts that relate to the ministry of the Word -- the gifts of proclamation, teaching, and pastoral care that shape the community's understanding of the gospel. The crucial verse is 12: these gifted people were given 'to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.' The grammar of verse 12 is decisive for understanding the nature of church ministry. The gifted leaders are not given to do all the ministry while the congregation watches and receives. They are given to equip the saints -- to prepare, train, and enable every member of the body for their own ministry. The professional clergy model -- in which the minister does ministry and the congregation receives it -- is a distortion of this text.

The Goal: Maturity -- the Fullness of Christ

Verses 13-16 describe the destination toward which the gifted, equipping, member-ministering church is moving: 'until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.' The telos -- the goal, the end -- of all the gifting, all the equipping, all the ministry is a community that has grown to the measure of Christ's own fullness. The destination of the church's growth process is not a polished organization, not an impressive program, not a culturally influential institution. The destination is Christlikeness -- collective, communal, measured not by human standards but by the stature of Christ Himself.

"Speaking the Truth in Love"

Verse 15 contains one of the most important and most misused phrases in the pastoral vocabulary of the church: 'speaking the truth in love.' It is misused in two directions simultaneously. Some use it to justify harsh truth-telling -- 'I'm just speaking the truth' -- with the 'in love' part functioning as permission rather than as a genuine modifier. Others use the 'in love' part to avoid speaking difficult truths at all -- love becomes a reason for silence rather than a motive for courageous speech. Paul's meaning is held together by both components equally. The truth must be spoken -- genuinely, clearly, without dilution or evasion. But the speaking must be in love -- genuinely motivated by the welfare of the person being spoken to, shaped by the relationship and the context. The mature community is one that can hold truth and love together.

The Body Building Itself Up in Love

Verse 16 closes this section with one of the most beautiful and most demanding descriptions of church life in the New Testament: 'From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.' Three things are said simultaneously. The source of the body's life and growth is Christ -- 'from him.' Every gift, every grace, every spiritual vitality flows from the Head into the body. The mechanism of the body's growth is the contribution of every part -- 'as each part does its work.' There is no spectator Christianity in this vision. Every member has a role. And the atmosphere of the building is love -- 'builds itself up in love.' Love is not merely the attitude in which ministry is done. It is the substance of which the building is made.

Key Observations

- **Every member of the body has been given grace apportioned by Christ --** there are no ungifted spectators in the community of faith.

- **The descent and ascent of Christ grounds His authority to give gifts** -- He fills all things from the position of universal lordship.
- **The gifted leaders exist to equip saints for ministry, not to do all ministry themselves** -- the building happens when every part does its work.
- **The goal of all ministry is corporate maturity** -- the community grown to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.
- **Spiritual infancy is instability; spiritual maturity is the rootedness** that can assess new teachings against the apostolic foundation.
- **'Speaking the truth in love' holds two equally necessary commitments together** -- neither the cowardice of silence nor the cruelty of harshness.
- **The body builds itself up in love** -- love is both the atmosphere and the substance of the church's growth.

Ephesians 4:17-24 -- Put Off the Old, Put On the New: The Renewal of the Mind

So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed. That, however, is not the way of life you learned when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

IN SIMPLE AMERICAN ENGLISH

I am telling you straight, and I mean it seriously in the Lord: stop living the way people who do not know God live. Their thinking is empty and going nowhere. Their understanding is dark. They are cut off from the life of God because of the ignorance that comes from a heart that has become hard toward Him. They have lost the ability to feel the moral weight of things, and they have handed themselves over to whatever feels good -- impurity and greed in every form. But that is not what you learned when you came to know Christ. What you were taught was this: strip off your old self -- the person you used to be, the one being eaten away by desires that lie to you -- and be completely transformed in the deep orientation of your mind. Then put on the new self -- the self that has been created to actually look like God, in real righteousness and real holiness.

"No Longer Live as the Gentiles Do"

The second major movement of the chapter opens with Paul insisting that the worthy walk involves a fundamental break with the way of life that characterizes those who are outside Christ. It is important to notice that Paul does not condemn the surrounding Gentile culture with contempt. He describes it with sober accuracy and traces its condition back to its root. The Gentile way of life is characterized by 'the futility of their thinking' -- not primarily by sexual immorality or greed (though these follow), but by a fundamental disorder in the way reality is perceived and processed. Futility of thinking means that their mental life is disconnected from truth -- it is going through the motions of reasoning without arriving at what is real.

The Anatomy of Spiritual Darkness

Paul traces the progression of spiritual darkness with a clinical precision that is one of the most searching passages in the New Testament for understanding how human beings move from God into moral destruction. Hardening of the heart -- The root condition is not intellectual but volitional: 'the hardening of their hearts.' The hardening is the result of repeated choices to suppress the truth (Romans 1:18), to prefer the creature over the Creator, to refuse the knowledge of God. Over time, these choices produce a calloused, rigid interior that can no longer be penetrated by normal means. Ignorance -- The hardened heart produces ignorance: 'separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them.' This is not ignorance of information but ignorance of God -- the inability to genuinely know God as He is. Loss of sensitivity -- 'Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality.' When the conscience has been repeatedly silenced, when its warnings have been consistently overridden, it eventually loses its ability to function. And when the internal corrective has been silenced, the person gives themselves over to sensuality and every kind of impurity and greed.

"Put Off the Old Self -- Be Renewed -- Put On the New Self"

Verses 22-24 present a three-part structure for Christian transformation. Put off the old self -- The old self is to be put off like a garment. The image is intentional -- a garment can be taken off and set aside. The old self is not the permanent, irreducible identity of the believer. It is something that can be removed, that has been rendered obsolete by the cross, that does not belong to the person you now are in Christ. The old self is 'being corrupted by its deceitful desires' -- not merely bad, it is deteriorating, moving toward greater and greater corruption. Be made new in the attitude of your minds -- Between the putting off and the putting on is the renewal of the mind -- the deep interior transformation that makes the behavioral change sustainable. This renewal is described in the passive voice, something that is done to us, by the Spirit, through the Word, through community, through suffering, through prayer. But it is also something we must cooperate with. Put on the new self -- The new self is 'created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.' This echoes the creation of humanity in Genesis 1:26-27 -- made in the image and likeness of God. The new self is not a patched-up version of the old. It is a new creation -- the image of God restored and renewed in Christ.

Key Observations

- **The Gentile way of life traces back to the hardening of the heart** -- a volitional problem before it is an intellectual one.
- **The anatomy of spiritual darkness (hardening, ignorance, loss of sensitivity, self-surrender) is a progression**, not a sudden fall.

- **Christian ethics is grounded in a Person** -- 'you learned Christ' -- not primarily in a rule system or a code of behavior.
- **The three-part structure (put off, be renewed, put on) describes transformation as both decisive action and ongoing process**, with the renewal of the mind as the hinge.
- **The new self is not a better version of the old** -- it is a new creation, the image of God restored in Christ.

Ephesians 4:25-32 -- Specific Transformations: Speech, Anger, Work, Words, Bitterness, and Forgiveness

Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. 'In your anger do not sin': Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. Anyone who has been stealing must steal no more, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need. Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

IN SIMPLE AMERICAN ENGLISH

Here is what putting off the old self and putting on the new actually looks like in practice. Stop lying. Tell the truth to one another -- we are all part of the same body, and a body that lies to itself cannot function. When you get angry, do not let it turn into sin. Do not carry that anger overnight -- deal with it before the day ends. Unresolved anger is the devil's open door into your life. If you used to steal, stop. Work. Do something productive with your hands -- and work specifically so you will have something to give to people who are in need. Be very careful about what comes out of your mouth. No rotten, tear-down talk. Only what is genuinely helpful to build the person up, calibrated to what they actually need. And here is what is at stake: do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, who sealed you for the day of redemption. Now, sweep out all the bitterness -- every kind of it. All the rage. All the simmering anger. The quarreling. The slander. Every form of malice. Get rid of all of it. Instead: be kind. Be tenderhearted. Forgive each other -- the same way God in Christ has forgiven you.

"Put Off Falsehood and Speak Truthfully"

The first specific application of the old-self/new-self framework is speech -- specifically, the speech of truthfulness versus falsehood. The command is grounded in community: 'we are all members of one body.' Falsehood in the community of faith is not merely a personal moral

failure -- it is a form of self-destruction. A body whose members cannot trust what each other says is a body that cannot function. The nerve signals are corrupted. The communication that should coordinate the body's movement is distorted. Truthful speech is the prerequisite for functional community. This does not mean the brutal, weaponized 'honesty' that uses truth as a vehicle for cruelty. Paul has already specified the framework: speaking the truth in love (verse 15). Truthfulness in community means that your speech accurately represents reality so that those with whom you live and serve can trust and rely on what you say.

"In Your Anger Do Not Sin"

The handling of anger is one of the most pastorally practical instructions in the chapter. Paul quotes Psalm 4:4 -- 'in your anger do not sin' -- and follows it with a specific application: 'Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry.' Two things are notable here. First, Paul does not tell the Ephesians not to be angry. He tells them not to sin in their anger. Anger is an emotion, and emotions are morally neutral in themselves -- what matters is what they are directed toward and how they are handled. Second, the command not to let the sun go down on anger is a time limit. Anger that is not resolved becomes something else -- resentment, bitterness, an open wound that the enemy can infect. The phrase 'give the devil a foothold' is literally 'give the devil a place' (topos) -- unresolved anger creates a space in the community and in the believer's inner life that the devil occupies and exploits. The resolution of conflict before the day ends is not merely good relational hygiene. It is spiritual warfare.

"Only What Is Helpful for Building Others Up"

The speech instructions continue and intensify in verse 29: 'Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.' The word for unwholesome (sapro) means rotten, decayed. Unwholesome speech is not merely crude or offensive speech. It is speech that does not serve the building up of the listener -- speech that tears down, discourages, corrupts, or simply fills the air with emptiness. The positive standard is extraordinary: 'only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs.' The standard for speech is not merely the avoidance of harm but the positive contribution to the growth and welfare of the person being addressed. 'According to their needs' -- calibrated to what this specific person, in this specific moment, most needs to hear in order to be built up.

"Do Not Grieve the Holy Spirit"

Verse 30 introduces one of the most sobering statements in the letter: 'do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.' The word for grieve (lypeo) is an emotion word -- the Holy Spirit experiences grief when believers sin. This is not a metaphor for a mechanical process of spiritual failure. It is a description of a personal relationship in which one party is genuinely, emotionally affected by the behavior of the other. The Holy Spirit is a Person. He has been given to the believer as a seal of adoption, a guarantee of inheritance, a bond of relationship with the Father and the Son. When the believer engages in the unwholesome speech, the unresolved anger, the falsehood, the bitterness described in this section -- they are not merely violating a code. They are hurting a Person who loves them, who has committed to them, who is the very guarantee of their eternal future.

"Forgiving Each Other as God Forgave You"

Verse 32 is the positive replacement for the negative list of verse 31: 'Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.' Forgiveness is described in its most demanding and most liberating terms: the standard is theological -- the measure of how God in Christ has forgiven you. And the measure of God's forgiveness is total, unconditional, irreversible, and costly. It cost the death of the Son. It was given to people who deserved judgment. It was not withheld until the recipients had sufficiently demonstrated their remorse. It was given freely, completely, at enormous cost, to the undeserving. This is the standard Paul sets for human forgiveness in the community of faith. Not because human beings have the natural capacity to forgive this way -- they do not. But because the One who forgave this way lives in them, and His Spirit is producing in them the same quality of love that characterized His own self-giving for them.

Key Observations

- **Truthful speech is essential to the functioning of the body** -- a community of false speech cannot coordinate its members.
- **Anger is not forbidden but must be resolved quickly** -- unresolved anger gives the devil the space he needs to corrupt the community.
- **The transformation of the thief is total -- from taking to working to giving** -- a complete reversal of relationship to material goods.
- **The standard for speech is not the avoidance of harm** but the positive building up of the listener according to their specific needs.
- **Grieving the Holy Spirit is a personal, relational offense** -- sin against the Spirit is not a mechanical failure but a wounding of a Person.
- **Bitterness is a comprehensive category requiring total removal** -- selective retention of grievances is not permitted in the new self.
- **The standard of forgiveness is God's forgiveness in Christ** -- total, costly, freely given to the undeserving.

What This Chapter Means for Us Today

1. Walk Worthily -- Let Theology Change the Way You Actually Live

The central demand of Ephesians 4 is one that every believer must reckon with personally: does your daily life correspond to your calling? The three chapters of theology that precede this one were not written to be believed academically and then set aside as the practical section begins. They were written to produce a people whose ordinary, daily, relational, communal life is shaped by the realities they describe. The test of whether you genuinely believe what chapters 1 through 3 declare is whether you are walking in the way chapter 4 describes. Humility. Gentleness. Patience. Truth-telling in love. Forgiveness calibrated to God's forgiveness in Christ. These are not supplementary virtues for the spiritually advanced. They are the basic, daily expression of a life that has genuinely received the grace of the gospel.

2. Invest Yourself in the Local Community -- Every Part Must Do Its Work

The body-building vision of verses 7-16 is one of the most countercultural calls in the New Testament for contemporary Christians who are accustomed to choosing a church the way they choose a service provider -- based on what is offered, how the experience is, and whether their needs are being met. The vision of Ephesians 4 is a community where every member is equipping others, contributing their grace-given gift, and building up the body through their faithful service. You were given a gift. That gift was given for the body. The body needs what you carry. To withhold it -- through passivity, through the consumer mentality of church attendance, through the false humility that says 'I don't have anything to contribute' -- is to impoverish the community Christ purchased with His blood.

3. Guard Your Mind -- The Renewal Is Real and Requires Effort

The renewal of the mind described in verses 22-24 is both a divine work (something done to us by the Spirit) and a human responsibility (something we cooperate with through deliberate choices). In a media-saturated, stimulus-saturated culture that is constantly feeding the patterns of the old self, the renewal of the mind requires active, sustained effort. What you feed grows. What you starve weakens. The old self is being corrupted by deceitful desires -- and those desires are fed by what you give your attention to. The new self is being renewed by the Spirit through the Word, through prayer, through community -- and those means of grace require active, consistent pursuit.

4. Take Your Speech Seriously

Of all the specific applications in verses 25-32, the speech instructions are perhaps the most immediately and universally relevant. Falsehood, unwholesome talk, bitterness expressed in speech, slander -- these are not exotic sins confined to particularly corrupt people. They are the daily temptations of every member of every community. The standard Paul sets -- speak only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs -- is one that most believers have never seriously attempted to apply to every conversation. But this is the standard of the new self. Take your words seriously. They either build up or tear down. They either grieve the Holy Spirit or serve the community. Every conversation is an opportunity for the speech of the new self.

5. Forgive Completely -- The Debt Has Already Been Cancelled

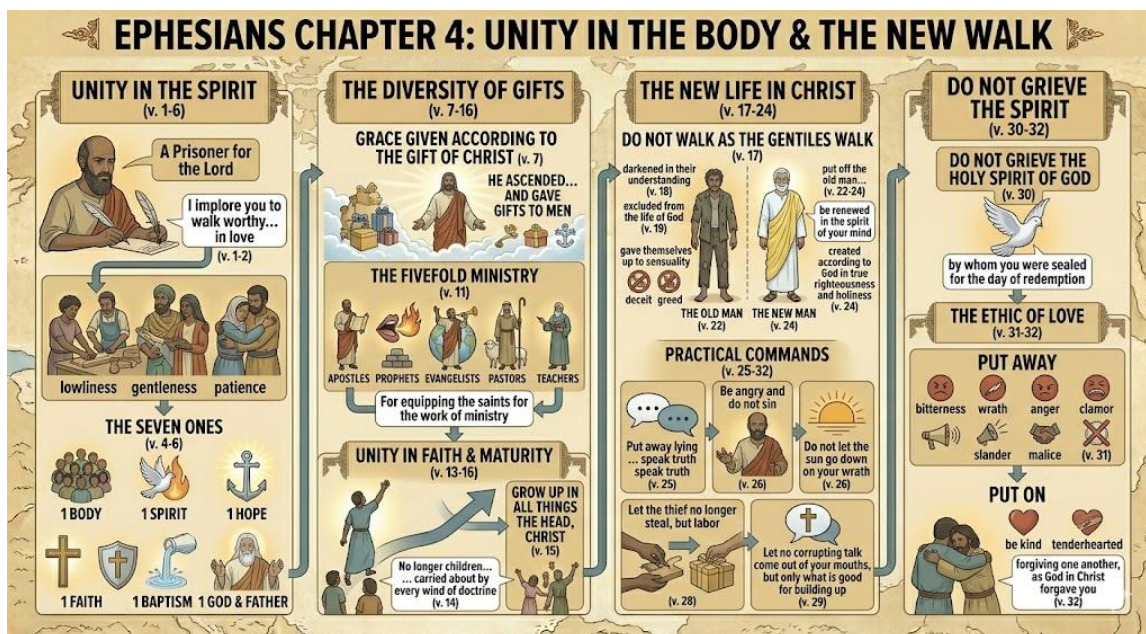
The forgiveness command at the close of the chapter is both the most demanding and the most liberating instruction in it. The most demanding because it sets a standard -- God's forgiveness in Christ -- that we cannot meet by natural capacity. The most liberating because it reminds us of what is true: we have already been forgiven that way. God in Christ has already cancelled a debt against us that was infinitely greater than any debt another human being could owe us. To refuse to forgive another person is to act as though our own debt to God was smaller than theirs to us -- which is always false. The person who genuinely understands the measure of God's forgiveness toward them finds that the refusal to forgive others becomes increasingly incoherent.

How This Chapter Relates to Today

Ephesians 4 presents a vision of Christian community that is simultaneously ancient and urgently contemporary. In a culture of radical individualism, it insists on the priority of community. In a culture of tribal division, it insists on the unity of the one body. In a culture of self-expression and self-promotion, it insists on the priority of building up others. In a culture of grievance and resentment, it insists on forgiveness calibrated to God's forgiveness in Christ. In a culture of curated digital speech designed to project a carefully managed self-image, it insists on truthful, edifying, other-centered words.

The church that takes Ephesians 4 seriously will look genuinely strange to the surrounding culture -- not strange in the sense of alien or unapproachable, but strange in the sense of being governed by a different set of values, shaped by a different identity, oriented toward a different goal. It will be a community where people are growing toward maturity in Christ rather than toward the maximization of personal experience. It will be a community where leaders invest themselves in releasing the ministry of every member rather than building their own platform. It will be a community where speech is used as a tool for building up rather than a weapon for self-assertion or self-defense.

And because it will look strange, it will be noticed. The manifold wisdom of God, displayed in a community that actually lives this way, will be as compelling in the twenty-first century as it was in the first. The world is not looking for a more competent religious institution. It is looking -- whether it knows it or not -- for the one new humanity that the cross created and that Ephesians 4 describes.



Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father, we have come to the end of Ephesians chapter 4 knowing that what we have read is not information to be filed away but a calling to be walked in. Walk worthily. Be humble and gentle and patient. Bear with one another in love. Make every effort to maintain unity. Use your gift for the building of the body. Put off the old self. Be renewed in the spirit of your mind. Put on the new self created after Your likeness. Speak truth in love. Resolve anger before the sun goes down. Refuse bitterness. Forgive as You have forgiven.

Lord, we confess the gap between this chapter and our actual daily lives. We have been harsh when You called us to be gentle. We have been proud when You called us to humility. We have carried bitterness we were commanded to release. We have spoken words that tore down when we were called to build up. We have withheld our gifts from the body when every part was needed to do its work. We have grieved Your Spirit. Forgive us -- in Christ, as this chapter instructs.

And then do what only You can do: renew the spirit of our minds. Not the surface of our behavior but the deep interior orientation from which behavior flows. Let the new self You have created after Your own likeness become the increasingly dominant reality of who we are, individually and together.

Let our communities be places where every member is equipped and every member contributes. Let our speech be only what is helpful for building others up. Let our forgiveness be as wide and free and unconditional as Yours. Let the unity of the Spirit be visibly, compellingly real in the bond of peace that holds us together across every human difference. Let us walk worthy of the calling -- not as people trying to earn what they have received, but as people whose daily lives are coming into equilibrium with the inexhaustible grace that has been given to them. To You be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus, throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Ephesians Chapter 5

A Deep Expository Study: Imitators of God -- Light, Wisdom, the Spirit-Filled Life, and the Mystery of Marriage as the Gospel Made Visible

Introduction to Ephesians Chapter 5

The Chapter Where Imitation Becomes the Standard, Light Becomes the Identity, and Marriage Becomes a Theological Statement

Ephesians chapter 5 is one of the most wide-ranging chapters in Paul's letters. It moves from the heights of the call to imitate God Himself, through the darkness of a comprehensive warning against sexual immorality and covetousness, into the luminous identity of those who are light in the Lord, through the practical wisdom of Spirit-filled community life, and finally into what many scholars consider the most theologically profound treatment of marriage in the entire Bible. The chapter covers more ground than almost any other single chapter in the New Testament -- and it holds all of it together with a single, unifying thread: the new life that belongs to those who are in Christ is not a set of rules imposed from outside but a nature expressed from within, and that nature -- characterized by love, light, wisdom, and Spirit-fullness -- finds its most comprehensive and most demanding expression in the intimate covenant of marriage.

The chapter does not permit comfortable reading. The call to imitate God is the most audacious standard ever placed before a human being. The exposure of sexual immorality and

greed as forms of idolatry cuts against some of the most deeply rooted patterns of human desire. The identity of 'light in the Lord' carries both extraordinary privilege and extraordinary responsibility. And the teaching on marriage -- however carefully it is read -- demands everything of both husband and wife in ways that cannot be softened without distorting the text. But the chapter is also one of the most glorious in Ephesians. Imitation of God is possible because God has made us His children. The darkness is not the final word. The Spirit-filled life is not a burden of religious performance but the overflow of a heart being continuously filled by God. And the mystery of marriage is grounded in the most beautiful and most costly love story ever told.

The Structure of Chapter 5

The chapter moves through five major sections. First, the foundational call to imitate God as beloved children, specifically through love that reflects Christ's self-giving sacrifice (vv. 1-2). Second, a comprehensive warning against sexual immorality, impurity, and covetousness -- with particular emphasis on the incompatibility of these with kingdom inheritance and the danger of being deceived by empty words (vv. 3-7). Third, the identity and calling of those who are 'light in the Lord' -- with the call to expose the deeds of darkness and the astonishing quotation that may be an early Christian hymn about awakening from death (vv. 8-14). Fourth, the call to walk in wisdom -- making the most of the time, understanding the Lord's will, and above all being filled with the Spirit, whose fullness expresses itself in worship, gratitude, and mutual submission (vv. 15-21). Fifth, the great teaching on marriage -- wives and husbands, the church and Christ, the mystery Paul names as the deepest ground of everything he is saying about the marriage covenant (vv. 22-33).

Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father, we come to Ephesians chapter 5 knowing that we are about to be called to a standard that exceeds anything we can reach by our own effort. Imitate God. Be light. Walk in wisdom. Be filled with the Spirit. Love your wife as Christ loved the church. Respect your husband. Lord, these are not modest instructions. They are the calling of people who have been filled with the fullness of God, sealed by His Spirit, and placed in Christ at the right hand of the Father. Give us what we need to receive this chapter not as a list of impossible demands but as the description of a life that the Spirit is genuinely producing in those who yield to Him.

And as we come to the teaching on marriage, Lord, protect us from the culture wars that have made this passage a battleground and prevented it from being a source of grace. Let us see what Paul sees -- the mystery of Christ and the church, the most beautiful love story in the universe, taking visible, tangible, daily form in the covenant of husband and wife. Let that vision elevate our marriages and our understanding of the church, and let it produce in us a deeper wonder at the love of Christ who gave Himself for us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Ephesians 5:1-2 -- Imitate God: The Audacity and the Ground of the Highest Standard

Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

IN SIMPLE AMERICAN ENGLISH

Here is the standard Paul sets: imitate God. Be a copy of your Father. And the ground he gives for this astonishing call is simple -- you are His dearly loved children. Children naturally imitate their parents. This is not a strain; it is what relationship produces. And here is the specific shape of the imitation: walk in love. But not a vague, sentimental love. Love defined by what Christ did -- He loved us and gave Himself up for us. Completely. Voluntarily. At total personal cost. That self-giving was a fragrant offering to God, a sacrifice that pleased Him fully. That is the pattern you are called to embody.

"Follow God's Example"

The opening command of chapter 5 is, by any measure, the most audacious ethical standard ever placed before a human being. 'Follow God's example' -- literally, 'be imitators of God' (Greek: mimeisthai ton theon). This is not a call to admire God from a distance, to aspire toward God's character in some vague and aspirational sense, or to approximate some divine quality in a modest, human-scaled way. It is a call to imitation -- the same word from which we get 'mimic.' Be a copy. Reproduce what you see in the original. In the ancient world, imitation of the gods was generally understood as beyond the capacity of ordinary mortals. The gods were in a different category. What Paul does here is simultaneously affirm the impossibility of the standard and ground it in a reality that makes it genuinely possible: 'as dearly loved children.'

"As Dearly Loved Children"

The ground of the call to imitate God is not moral achievement or spiritual advancement -- it is the relationship of beloved children to their Father. Children imitate their parents. This is not an obligation imposed from outside -- it is the natural expression of relationship. A child who has been deeply formed by a loving father will naturally, without straining, reproduce the father's gestures, language, and habits of heart. The Ephesians are 'dearly loved children' -- the word (*agapetos*) is the same word used of Jesus at His baptism when the Father declared 'This is my dearly loved Son' (Matthew 3:17). You do not imitate God to become His child. You imitate God because you already are His child. The imperative rests on the indicative. The ethical demand rests on the relational reality.

"Walk in the Way of Love -- as Christ Loved Us"

The specific content of the imitation is named immediately: walk in the way of love. The love that believers are called to imitate and embody is not defined abstractly or philosophically. It is defined Christologically -- by the specific, historical, self-giving love of Christ: 'just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.' The phrase 'gave himself up' is the language of the cross -- the deliberate, costly, total self-surrender of Christ in His death. He did not merely do something kind. He gave Himself -- His life, His freedom, His dignity, everything -- up for us. The description of Christ's death as 'a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God' echoes the Old Testament sacrificial system. Paul is saying that the death of Christ was a perfect, pleasing, fully acceptable sacrifice -- the ultimate fulfillment

of everything the Old Testament sacrificial system pointed toward. And it is this sacrifice that defines what love looks like for the people who bear Christ's name.

Key Observations

- **The call to imitate God is the highest ethical standard ever placed before a human being** -- and it is grounded in relationship, not achievement.
- **'Dearly loved children' establishes the indicative on which the imperative rests** -- imitation flows from relationship, not toward it.
- **The definition of love is Christological and cross-shaped** -- not sentiment or affection but costly, deliberate, total self-giving.
- **Christ's death is described as a fragrant offering** -- acceptable to God, the fulfillment of the sacrificial system, the pattern of all Christian love.

Ephesians 5:3-7 -- The Incompatibility of Immorality and Greed with the Kingdom

But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. For you can be sure of this: No immoral, impure or greedy person -- such a person is an idolater -- has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. Therefore do not be partners with them.

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Among you as God's people, sexual immorality must not even come up as something you do. No impurity. No greed. These things are just wrong for people who bear God's name -- they do not fit. And the same goes for your speech: no shameful talk, no morally empty chatter, no cleverly edged humor that winks at what ought to be refused. Instead, let your default be thanksgiving. Because here is something you need to know for certain: no sexually immoral person, no impure person, no greedy person -- and understand, greed is the same as idolatry -- has any place in the kingdom of Christ and God. Do not let anyone talk you out of this with sophisticated-sounding arguments, because God's wrath is what comes on people who live in disobedience to these things. Do not get entangled with them.

"Not Even a Hint"

The standard Paul establishes in verse 3 is deliberately extreme: 'among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity or of greed.' Not a reduced presence. Not a more moderate level. Not even a hint -- the Greek (onomatazesthō -- literally, 'not even be named') suggests that these things should be so foreign to the community of faith

that they do not even come up as named topics in the context of the community's own practice. The three categories are comprehensive: sexual immorality (porneia -- all sexual activity outside the covenant of marriage), impurity (akatharsia -- moral uncleanness generally), and greed (pleonexia -- the insatiable desire for more). These are named together because they share a common root: the self turned in on its own desires, using others and the world as instruments for its own gratification. The reason given for the prohibition is identity: 'because these are improper for God's holy people.' These things do not fit who you are.

Idolatry -- the Root of Immorality and Greed

Verse 5 contains one of Paul's most penetrating theological diagnoses: 'No immoral, impure or greedy person -- such a person is an idolater -- has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.' The identification of greed as idolatry is particularly striking and particularly important. Greed is not merely a financial vice. It is a spiritual orientation -- the worship of the self's desires as the governing value of life, the treatment of things or pleasures or status as the ultimate good that life is organized around acquiring and protecting. Sexual immorality is similarly an idolatry -- the worship of sexual experience and pleasure as the ultimate value. Paul is saying that underneath every form of sexual sin and every form of greed is the same fundamental spiritual disorder: the displacement of God from the center of life and the installation of the self's desires in His place.

"Let No One Deceive You with Empty Words"

Verse 6 introduces a warning that is as urgently relevant in the twenty-first century as it was in the first: 'let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient.' The 'empty words' are the rationalizations, the theologies of accommodation, the sophisticated arguments that minimize the seriousness of the sins just named. Every generation has its version of the empty words -- the cultural sophistication that reframes sexual immorality as healthy self-expression, the prosperity gospel that reframes greed as evidence of divine blessing, the cheap grace theology that reframes repentance as unnecessary for those who have prayed a prayer. Paul names all of these, before they are named, as empty -- hollow, without substance, incapable of bearing the weight of the reality they are trying to explain away.

Key Observations

- **'Not even a hint' sets a standard that flows from identity** -- these things do not fit who God's holy people are.
 - **Coarse joking is the most subtle of the speech sins** -- it normalizes what should be resisted under the cover of humor.
 - **Greed is idolatry** -- the displacement of God by the self's appetites as the governing value of life.
 - **'Empty words' are the rationalizations of every era that minimize the seriousness of these sins** -- Paul names them hollow before they are spoken.
 - **The wrath of God is real** -- the standard is not cultural acceptability but the kingdom of Christ.
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Ephesians 5:8-14 -- Light in the Lord: Identity, Fruit, and the Exposure of Darkness

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible -- and everything that is visible is itself light. This is why it is said: 'Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.'

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Here is your before and after: you were darkness -- not just in darkness, but darkness itself. And now you are light -- not just in the light, but light itself. In the Lord. So live like who you are: live as children of light. The fruit that light produces is goodness, righteousness, and truth. And keep actively discerning what pleases the Lord. Stay away from the empty, fruitless things that darkness does -- and instead, expose them. You do not need to repeat in detail what people do in secret in the dark; the point is that when light shines on it, it is exposed for what it is. And here is the stunning thing: everything that gets exposed by the light can itself become light. The old hymn says it: wake up, sleeper. Rise from the dead. And Christ will shine on you.

"You Were Once Darkness -- Now You Are Light"

Verse 8 makes one of the sharpest identity declarations in the chapter: 'For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.' Two things about this statement demand attention. First, the completeness of the contrast. Paul does not say the Ephesians were once in darkness. He says they were darkness -- the condition was not circumstantial but ontological, definitional. Their very nature, apart from Christ, was darkness. And correspondingly, they are not now in light -- they are light. The nature has changed. The identity has been transformed. Second, the qualifier: 'in the Lord.' The light they now are is not their own. It is not generated by their moral improvement or their spiritual discipline. It is the light they are in the Lord -- because they are in Christ, who is the light of the world (John 8:12). Their light is derived, not self-generated. This prevents both pride and despair.

"Find Out What Pleases the Lord"

The phrase 'find out what pleases the Lord' (verse 10) is a call to moral discernment -- to an active, ongoing, Spirit-assisted investigation of what honors God in every situation. This is not the mechanical application of a rulebook. Rules cannot cover every situation. Discernment -- the practiced, Spirit-informed ability to assess what, in this specific situation, with these specific people, in this specific moment, is pleasing to the Lord -- is the skill of the spiritually mature. It requires the renewal of the mind described in 4:23, the wisdom called for in verse 15, and the Spirit-filling described in verse 18.

"Have Nothing to Do with Darkness -- Expose It"

The relationship of the light-living community to the darkness around it is described in two complementary commands. 'Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness' -- the

word for fruitless (akarpos) means literally unfruitful, bearing no genuine good fruit, producing nothing of lasting value. But the community is not merely to avoid the deeds of darkness -- it is to expose them. This is perhaps the most surprising and most important word in the section. The exposure (elencho -- to reprove, to bring to light, to reveal for what it truly is) is not primarily the work of moral condemnation or cultural confrontation. It is the work of the light simply being what it is. Light does not fight darkness. It simply shines -- and darkness is exposed by the shining. The community that is genuinely living as light in the Lord is, by the quality of its life, exposing the emptiness and futility of the surrounding darkness.

Everything Exposed Can Become Light

Verse 13 contains one of the most paradoxically hopeful statements in the chapter: 'everything that is visible is itself light.' The principle is this: when the light of the gospel shines on something in darkness -- an individual, a community, a culture -- what happens is not merely exposure. What happens is the possibility of transformation. The person who is brought into the light -- whose darkness has been exposed by the gospel -- can themselves become light. The exposure is not merely judgment. It is opportunity. It is the first step toward transformation. And the hymn of verse 14 issues the call: 'Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.' The call is issued not as a threat but as an invitation -- the light is available, the awakening is possible, the transformation from darkness to light is exactly what the gospel offers to everyone who will receive it.

Key Observations

- **The identity change from darkness to light is ontological, not merely behavioral** -- the nature itself has changed, in the Lord.
- **The fruit of the light (goodness, righteousness, truth) is the comprehensive moral and relational integrity** of a life aligned with God's character.
- **'Find out what pleases the Lord' is a call to ongoing discernment** -- the skill of the mature, not a simple rule to be applied mechanically.
- **The exposure of darkness is accomplished primarily by the quality of the light-community's life**, not primarily by condemnation or cultural warfare.
- **Everything exposed by the light can become light** -- exposure is not merely judgment but the first step toward transformation and inclusion.

Ephesians 5:15-21 -- Walk in Wisdom: Time, Understanding, the Spirit's Fullness, and Mutual Submission

Be very careful, then, how you live -- not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father

for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

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Pay close attention to how you live -- not carelessly, like a person who has not thought about what matters, but wisely. Grab the opportunities that come your way, because the days are evil and you cannot afford to drift. Stop being foolish -- actually engage with what God's will is. Do not get drunk on wine; that path leads to destruction. Instead, be filled with the Spirit -- that is the real alternative to being controlled by something outside yourself. And here is what a Spirit-filled community looks like: you talk to each other through psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. You sing to God from your heart. You give thanks to God the Father for everything -- always, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. And you yield to one another, out of reverence for Christ.

"Be Very Careful How You Live"

The call to careful, watchful, deliberate living in verse 15 uses the Greek word *akribes* -- precisely, exactly, with careful attention to detail. Paul is not merely calling for generally good behavior. He is calling for a quality of attentiveness to the way of life -- a mindfulness about the implications of every choice, every word, every relationship, every use of time -- that reflects the wisdom of those who understand the era they are living in. Wisdom in the biblical sense is not primarily intellectual sophistication. It is practical, lived alignment with the way things actually are -- with who God is, what He requires, and what genuinely matters in the light of eternity.

"Making the Most of Every Opportunity"

The phrase 'making the most of every opportunity' (literally, 'redeeming the time,' *exagorazomenoi ton kairon*) is one of Paul's most distinctive exhortations. The word for time here is *kairos* -- not *chronos* (the ongoing flow of time in hours and minutes) but *kairos* (the significant moment, the opportunity, the pregnant point in time when something important is possible). Paul is calling the Ephesians to seize the significant moments -- the opportunities for gospel proclamation, for acts of love, for the exercise of wisdom -- that God places in their path. 'Because the days are evil' gives the urgency. The present era is characterized by the opposition of spiritual powers, the presence of the ruler of the air (2:2), the constant pull of the surrounding darkness. This is not a time for casual, drift-along living.

"Do Not Get Drunk -- Instead, Be Filled with the Spirit"

The contrast in verse 18 is one of the most structurally important in the chapter: 'Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.' The two contrasting states -- intoxication and Spirit-filling -- are analogous in form but opposite in content and direction. Intoxication by wine is a state in which an external substance takes over the governing of the person's behavior, lowering inhibitions, distorting judgment, and ultimately leading to debauchery (*asotia* -- unrestrained, dissipated behavior). Spirit-filling is also a state of being governed by something beyond the self. But it is governance by the Spirit of God -- the renewal and direction of the whole person by the living, holy, wise, loving Spirit of the risen Christ. The grammar of 'be filled' is important: it is a present imperative passive -- meaning be being filled, continuously, as an ongoing state, by a power outside yourself. Not a

one-time experience but a continuous orientation of the whole person toward the Spirit's governance.

The Fruit of the Spirit's Fullness: Worship, Gratitude, and Mutual Submission

Verses 19-21 describe what a Spirit-filled community looks and sounds like. The description is communal -- these are the characteristics of a body of people living under the Spirit's governance together. 'Speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit' -- The Spirit-filled community is a singing community. Corporate worship is not merely the performance of music for God. It is the mutual edification of the community -- speaking truth and praise to one another through the medium of music. 'Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord' -- The music that the Spirit produces is not performed from the surface of religious duty. It arises from the deep interior of a heart genuinely moved by the Spirit's presence and the gospel's truth. 'Always giving thanks to God the Father for everything' -- The scope of Spirit-produced thanksgiving is total: always and for everything. And 'submit to one another out of reverence for Christ' -- Mutual submission is the definitive social expression of the Spirit-filled life, and the introduction to all the specific relationship instructions that follow.

Key Observations

- **Careful, watchful living is the call of those who understand the era they are living in** -- not anxious but attentive.
- **'Redeeming the time' is the seizure of kairos moments** -- significant opportunities for the exercise of wisdom and love.
- **The drunk/Spirit-filled contrast describes two modes of being governed by something beyond the self** -- one leading to destruction, the other to worship and community.
- **'Be filled' is a continuous passive imperative** -- an ongoing orientation toward the Spirit's governance, not a one-time experience.
- **The Spirit-filled community sings, gives thanks always for everything, and submits to one another** -- these are not separate requirements but the single outflow of a community under the Spirit's governance.
- **Mutual submission is the social grammar of the Spirit-filled life** -- and the introduction to all the specific relationship instructions that follow.

Ephesians 5:22-33 -- The Mystery of Marriage: Christ and the Church Made Visible

Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and

to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church -- for we are members of his body. 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' This is a profound mystery -- but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

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Wives, place yourselves under your own husbands' leadership, the same way you yield to the Lord. Because the husband's role in the marriage is the same kind of role Christ has toward the church -- He is the head, and He proved it by becoming the Savior. So wives support and follow their husbands' leadership, as the church does with Christ. Now husbands -- and here is where the greater weight falls -- love your wives the way Christ loved the church. He gave Himself up for her. Everything. His purpose was to make her holy, to cleanse her, to present her to Himself eventually as a radiant bride -- spotless, without a blemish, holy and blameless. That is what your love is supposed to be working toward in your wife's life. Love her like your own body -- because she is, in the most real sense, one flesh with you. You nourish and care for yourself; do the same for her, just as Christ does for the church. And remember: the reason a man leaves his parents and is joined to his wife, and the two become one flesh -- that whole picture is a profound mystery. What Paul is actually talking about is Christ and the church. So husbands, love your wives as yourselves. And wives, respect your husbands.

The Context and the Stakes

This passage is one of the most discussed, debated, and frequently misread sections in the entire New Testament. It has been used to oppress women and to justify domineering husbands. It has been dismissed as culturally conditioned and no longer binding. All of these readings miss what Paul is actually doing -- which is something far more beautiful and far more demanding than any of them. What Paul is doing in this passage is using the marriage relationship as the living, visible, daily embodiment of the mystery of Christ and the church. Marriage, in Paul's understanding, is not primarily a human institution for companionship, reproduction, or social organization -- though it is all of those things. It is a sign -- a living parable, enacted in the daily life of husband and wife -- of the most fundamental relationship in the universe: the relationship between Christ and the community He has redeemed.

"Wives, Submit to Your Own Husbands as to the Lord"

The submission Paul calls for is voluntary and relational -- it is the wife's own free, Spirit-prompted yielding to the leadership of her own husband. The word (*hypotasso*) means to arrange under, to willingly place oneself in a supporting role. It is the same word used of Christ's submission to the Father in 1 Corinthians 15:28, of citizens' submission to governing authorities in Romans 13:1, and of believers' mutual submission to one another in verse 21 of this same chapter. In none of these contexts does submission imply inferiority of nature or dignity. It describes a relational posture chosen freely for the sake of right ordering and the welfare of the whole. The qualifier 'as to the Lord' sets both the motivation and the limit of the submission. A wife is not called to submit to abuse, to sin, or to the abandonment of her own

conscience before God. She is called to a voluntary, loving, Spirit-prompted relational posture toward her husband that reflects the church's posture toward Christ.

"Husbands, Love Your Wives as Christ Loved the Church"

The instruction to husbands is dramatically longer and dramatically more demanding than the instruction to wives. Where the wife is called to submit, the husband is called to love -- and the love is immediately defined by the cross. 'Just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.' This is not a gentle, romantic, feeling-based love. It is the cross-shaped, self-emptying, total self-surrender love that Paul described in verse 2 as the pattern of all Christian love. The extent and purpose of Christ's love for the church are described in breathtaking terms: to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. The goal of Christ's love is the church's perfect presentation. The husband who loves his wife as Christ loves the church is investing himself in her long-term flourishing -- not her usefulness to him, but her glory before God.

"A Profound Mystery -- I Am Talking About Christ and the Church"

Verse 31 quotes Genesis 2:24 -- the foundational statement of marriage in Scripture -- and then Paul makes a statement that recontextualizes the entire passage and the entire institution of marriage: 'This is a profound mystery -- but I am talking about Christ and the church.' The mystery Paul names is the same mystery he has been developing throughout chapters 1 through 3. The point he is making is that the Genesis text about marriage was always pointing toward something beyond itself -- toward the union of Christ and the church, the ultimate marriage between the divine Bridegroom and the redeemed community He loves. This means that marriage is not merely a human institution that happens to provide an illustration of spiritual truth. Marriage is a sign -- a divinely designed, sacramentally rich, embodied participation in the reality of Christ's relationship to the church. Every faithful Christian marriage is a living parable of the gospel. This elevates marriage to the highest possible dignity. It also places the highest possible demands on those who enter it.

Key Observations

- **Marriage in Paul's understanding is not primarily a human institution** but a divinely designed sign of Christ's relationship to the church.
 - **The wife's submission is voluntary, relational, Spirit-prompted, and 'as to the Lord'** -- its limit and motivation are Christ, not the husband's authority.
 - **The husband's headship is defined by Christ's headship** -- which is defined by sacrifice and salvation, not by command and compliance.
 - **The instruction to husbands is dramatically longer and more demanding** -- they are called to the cross-shaped love that transforms, nourishes, cherishes, and presents the beloved in holiness.
 - **The mystery of Genesis 2:24 was always pointing toward Christ and the church** -- marriage is a sacramental sign of the gospel.
 - **The two specific callings (love for husbands, respect for wives)** address the specific temptations of each role within the covenant.
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What This Chapter Means for Us Today

1. The Standard Is Christ -- and Christ Is in You

The call to imitate God and to walk in the love of Christ is not a call to achieve something beyond you. It is a call to express what is already within you -- the life of Christ formed in you by the Spirit, the new self created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. The reason Paul can set such an audacious standard is that he knows what he has already said in chapters 1 through 3. The power that raised Christ from the dead is at work in you. The Spirit of the Son cries 'Abba, Father' in your heart. You are sealed, adopted, indwelt. The standard is Christ, and Christ is in you. The call is not to ascend to a level you cannot reach -- it is to allow what is already in you to express itself outward through the quality of your daily life.

2. Sexual Purity Is a Gospel Issue, Not Just a Moral Issue

The emphasis Paul places on sexual immorality and impurity in this chapter -- 'not even a hint,' identified as idolatry, incompatible with kingdom inheritance -- refuses to let the church treat sexual ethics as a secondary or peripheral concern. In a culture saturated with sexual content and characterized by the normalizing of every form of sexual expression, the church that takes this chapter seriously will be genuinely countercultural. Not puritanical or shaming -- but clearly, confidently, lovingly committed to the vision of human sexuality that reflects the design of the Creator and the dignity of the image-bearers involved.

3. Be Filled With the Spirit -- Daily, Continuously, as the Primary Orientation of Your Life

The Spirit-filling Paul calls for is not a dramatic, occasional experience. It is a continuous, daily, moment-by-moment orientation of the whole person toward the Spirit's governance. This requires the deliberate choosing, again and again, of what feeds the Spirit's presence -- the Word, prayer, worship, honest community, the practice of gratitude -- and the deliberate refusal of what quenches or grieves the Spirit. The Spirit-filled life is not a higher tier of Christianity reserved for the especially devout. It is the baseline calling of every believer -- and the source from which all the other commands of the chapter flow.

4. Let Your Marriage Tell the True Story

For those who are married, Ephesians 5 places the highest possible calling and the highest possible dignity on the marriage covenant. Your marriage is a parable of the gospel. The daily, concrete, imperfect but genuine expression of cross-shaped love from a husband toward his wife -- and the daily, concrete, imperfect but genuine expression of respect and support from a wife toward her husband -- is a witness to the watching world about the love of Christ. Take it seriously. Invest in it. Seek help when it is broken. Fight for it when it is threatened. It is not merely a personal relationship between two people. It is a cosmic statement about the love of the One who gave Himself up for His bride.

5. Walk in Wisdom -- Redeem the Time

The brevity and the weight of the present moment are constant themes in Paul's letters, and Ephesians 5 presses this with particular urgency. The days are evil. The opportunities are

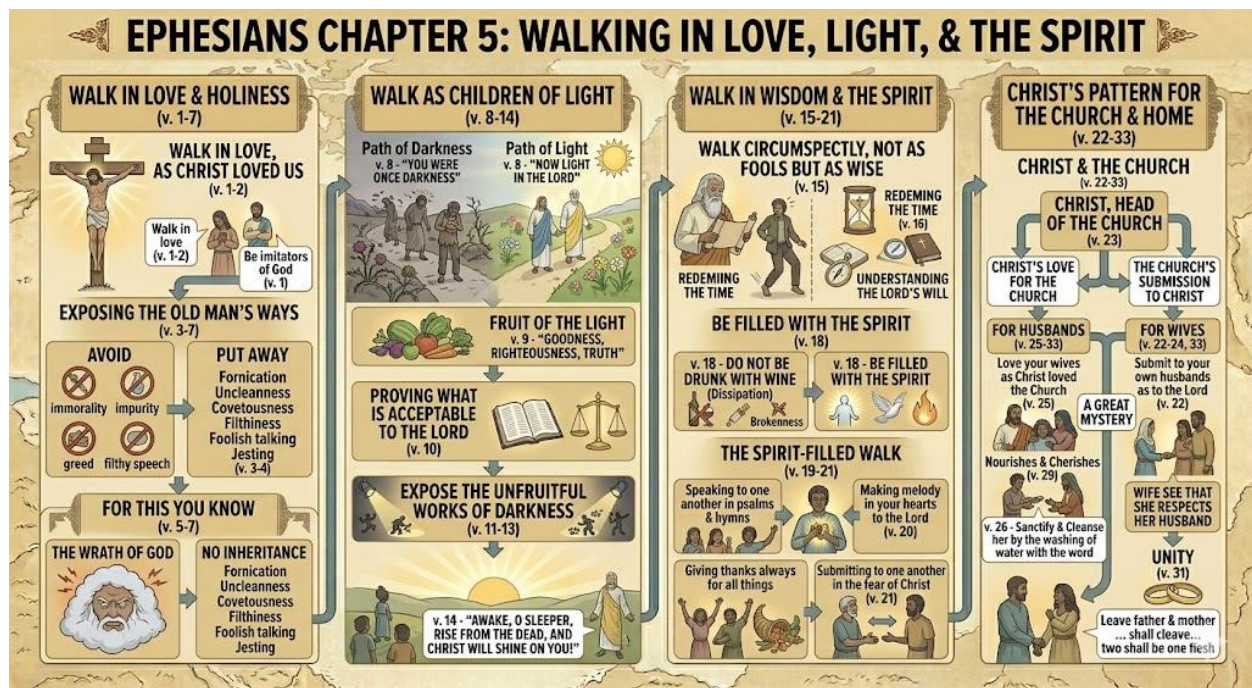
specific and time-limited. The kairos moments -- the pregnant moments of opportunity for love, for gospel proclamation, for wisdom, for acts of grace that will outlast the moment -- must be seized. The Spirit-filled life is a life characterized by this kind of intentional, attentive, opportunity-seizing engagement with the world. Not passive. Not drift. Not the sleepy accommodation to the surrounding culture. Wide awake, attentive, ready -- making the most of every opportunity because the days are evil and the time is short.

How This Chapter Relates to Today

Ephesians 5 speaks into a contemporary culture that is simultaneously desperate for genuine love and deeply confused about what love is, hungry for authentic community and deeply suspicious of authority, longing for lasting marriage and deeply uncertain about what marriage is for. Into all of these hungers and confusions, Paul's chapter offers something that neither the cultural right nor the cultural left has -- a vision of love, community, sexuality, and marriage grounded in the character of God and the work of Christ, embodied in a community filled by His Spirit, and aimed at the display of His glory to the watching world.

The call to imitate God in costly, self-giving love is the most countercultural thing imaginable in a culture of self-assertion and self-promotion. The call to be light in the Lord -- not just to avoid darkness but to expose it by the quality of the community's life -- is the church's truest form of cultural engagement. The call to be continuously filled with the Spirit and to overflow in worship, gratitude, and mutual submission is the antithesis of the consumer Christianity that mistakes comfort for the Spirit's presence. And the teaching on marriage -- husband loving as Christ, wife respecting and supporting -- is the most beautiful and most demanding vision of covenant love available to a culture that has largely reduced marriage to a mutual benefit arrangement.

Ephesians 5 does not merely offer a better version of the surrounding culture's values. It offers a completely different set of values, rooted in a completely different reality -- the reality of the gospel, the mystery of Christ and the church, the life of those who have been raised from death and filled with light and indwelt by the Spirit of the living God. The church that lives this chapter will be both the most countercultural community in its context and the most compelling demonstration of what the gospel produces when it is genuinely received and genuinely lived.



Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father, we come to the close of Ephesians chapter 5 with a deeper awareness of both the beauty and the cost of the life You have called us to. Imitate God. Walk in love as Christ loved. Be light in the Lord. Make the most of every opportunity. Be filled with Your Spirit. Love your wife as Christ loved the church. Respect your husband. These are not small instructions. They are the full, demanding, glorious shape of a life lived in the gospel.

Lord, we confess that we have loved less than Christ loved -- more cautiously, more conditionally, more self-protectively. We have tolerated hints of immorality and greed that we were told not even to name. We have been dimmer lights than we were called to be. We have drifted through days that should have been redeemed. We have grieved Your Spirit. Forgive us -- in Christ, as You always forgive, freely and completely.

And then fill us again. Fill us with Your Spirit -- continuously, daily, moment by moment. Let the overflow of that filling be worship from the heart, gratitude for everything, and the mutual submission that makes every relationship in the community an expression of the Spirit's governance.

And for those who are married -- Lord, let their marriages tell the true story. Let husbands love with the costly, transforming, self-giving love of Christ. Let wives respond with the trusting, honoring, supportive respect that reflects the church's relationship to her Lord. Let every Christian home be a parable of the gospel -- imperfect, being sanctified, moving toward the final presentation when the church is presented to Christ without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, holy and blameless.

Wake us, Lord. Shine on us. Let us be light -- genuinely, visibly, compellingly -- in the Lord. To You be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus, now and forever. Amen.

Ephesians Chapter 6

A Deep Expository Study: Children and Parents, Slaves and Masters, the Armor of God, and the Final Call to Stand -- The Gospel Applied to Every Relationship, Every Battle, and Every Prayer

Introduction to Ephesians Chapter 6

The Letter's Final Movement -- Where the Household Is Ordered, the Enemy Is Named, and the Soldier Is Armed

Ephesians chapter 6 is the letter's great conclusion -- and it concludes with a disclosure that reframes everything that has come before. After five chapters of soaring theology and increasingly specific practical instruction, chapter 6 pulls back the curtain on the ultimate reality that underlies the Christian life: you are in a war. Not a war against flesh and blood. Not a war against cultural opposition or political enemies or difficult people. A war against spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places -- the same heavenly places where Christ is enthroned far above all rule and authority (1:20-21), and where the church's life is hidden with Christ (2:6). The territory of the church's greatest blessing is also the territory of its greatest conflict.

This disclosure does not come as a surprise if the letter has been read with care. Paul has mentioned the ruler of the kingdom of the air (2:2), the spiritual forces of darkness, the principalities and authorities who are watching the church as the demonstration of God's wisdom (3:10), and the devil who exploits unresolved anger (4:27). But in chapter 6, the conflict is named directly, its nature is described precisely, its weapons are revealed, and the soldier is equipped. The armor of God is not an appendix to the theology of Ephesians. It is the necessary equipment for the life described in Ephesians -- the life that the powers of darkness are most motivated to destroy.

Why the Household Code and the Armor of God Belong Together

It would be easy to read the household instructions and the armor of God as two separate topics loosely connected by proximity in the text. But they are organically connected. The household -- the family of God, the community of the new humanity created by the cross -- is precisely what the powers of darkness are most committed to destroying. The family relationships described in the household code (husband and wife, parent and child, master and slave) are the concrete, daily arena where the cosmic battle is fought. The enemy does not show up in the form of visible armies. He shows up in the form of bitterness between a husband and wife, neglect of children, provocation of children to anger, and the grinding dehumanization of those who have no social power. The armor of God is the equipment needed to live the life of chapter 5 against the persistent, intelligent, malevolent opposition of the one who has been trying to destroy the image of God in human community since the garden.

The Structure of Chapter 6

The chapter moves through five major sections. First, the completion of the household code -- instructions to children and parents (vv. 1-4), followed by instructions to slaves and masters (vv. 5-9). Second, the call to be strong in the Lord and put on the full armor of God -- with the enemy named and the nature of the conflict described (vv. 10-13). Third, the armor itself -- belt, breastplate, shoes, shield, helmet, and sword -- each piece described with its specific function in the believer's spiritual warfare (vv. 14-17). Fourth, the instruction on prayer as the atmosphere in which the armor is worn and the battle is fought (v. 18). Fifth, Paul's personal request for prayer, the commendation of Tychicus, and the final benediction (vv. 19-24).

Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father, we come to the final chapter of Ephesians knowing that what we are about to read will require everything of us. Not merely the adjustment of behavior in household relationships -- though that is required. Not merely the intellectual understanding of spiritual warfare -- though that is given. But the actual, daily, costly, Spirit-sustained practice of living as soldiers of Christ in a war we did not choose but cannot escape, in a household ordered by the gospel against every pressure of the surrounding culture, in a prayer life that is the atmosphere of everything else.

Lord, open our eyes to the reality of the spiritual battle. Not the dramatic, spectacular battle we might imagine -- but the real battle, fought in the ordinary places of daily life, in the relationships of home and work and community, in the inner life where faith either holds or crumbles. Give us the full armor. Give us the strength that comes only from being in the Lord and in the power of His might. And give us the prayer life that connects us to the One who has already won the war. In the name of the Victor, Amen.

Ephesians 6:1-4 -- Children and Parents: Honor, Nurture, and the Promise Attached to Obedience

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honor your father and mother' -- which is the first commandment with a promise -- 'so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.' Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

IN SIMPLE AMERICAN ENGLISH

Children, obey your parents -- in the Lord, because this is simply the right thing. The fifth commandment says honor your father and mother, and it is the first commandment that comes with a specific promise: do this and things will go well for you and you will have long life on the earth. Now fathers, a specific word for you: do not push your children to the breaking point. Do not provoke them, crush them, or wear them down with unreasonable demands and harsh treatment. Instead, bring them up carefully -- with the training and instruction that comes from the Lord. Your job is to form them in the knowledge of God, not to exasperate them out of it.

"Children, Obey Your Parents in the Lord"

The instruction to children is direct and unambiguous: obey. The qualifier 'in the Lord' places the obedience in its proper framework: children obey their parents not merely because parents are bigger or because disobedience has consequences, but because obedience to parents is, in the Lord, the right ordering of their lives at this stage of their formation. The phrase 'for this is right' (touto gar estin dikaion) grounds the instruction in justice -- in the proper ordering of relationships that reflects the character of God and the design of creation. It is significant that Paul addresses children directly -- not merely parents on how to handle children. The children in the Ephesian churches are treated as genuine members of the covenant community, capable of hearing and responding to the Word, included in the congregation's life, and addressed as participants in the new humanity Paul has been describing.

"Fathers, Do Not Exasperate Your Children"

The instruction to fathers is brief but devastating in its precision: 'do not exasperate your children.' The word (parorgizo) means to provoke to anger, to rouse to exasperation, to push someone to the breaking point of their patience and emotional capacity. Paul is naming a specific and common failure mode of parental authority -- the use of parental power not to build up children but to break them down, not to form them but to frustrate them, not to bring out what God has placed in them but to crush it under the weight of unreasonable demands, harsh criticism, inconsistent standards, or the grinding of parental anger. The instruction is addressed specifically to fathers -- not because mothers cannot exasperate children, but because fathers in the first-century world held a legal authority over children that was close to absolute. Paul's instruction is not a reassertion of that authority but a limit upon it: the authority you have over your children exists not for your own expression or satisfaction but for their formation.

"Bring Them Up in the Training and Instruction of the Lord"

The positive counterpart to 'do not exasperate' is the comprehensive mandate of verse 4: 'bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.' Two Greek words describe the parental task. Paideia (training, discipline) refers to the whole process of formation -- the structured, intentional, consistent shaping of a child's character through both instruction and correction. Nouthesia (instruction, admonition) refers more specifically to the verbal, explanatory dimension of formation -- the teaching, the warning, the exhortation, the dialogue through which children come to understand not merely what to do but why. Both are qualified by 'of the Lord' -- meaning that the content and the spirit of the formation are shaped by the knowledge of God, the gospel of Christ, and the life of the Spirit. Christian parenting is the intentional, sustained, prayerful introduction of a child to the God who made them, the Christ who redeemed them, and the life of the Spirit who is available to them.

Key Observations

- **Children are addressed directly as members of the covenant community** -- genuine participants in the life of the new humanity, not merely objects of parental management.
- **The fifth commandment's promise is communal and covenantal** -- the community ordered by right intergenerational relationships is a community that can flourish.

- **'Do not exasperate' is a specific limit on parental authority** -- the power entrusted to parents exists for the child's formation, not the parent's self-expression.
- **Christian parenting is theological formation** -- the intentional, sustained introduction of a child to the God who made them and the Christ who redeemed them.

Ephesians 6:5-9 -- Slaves and Masters: Integrity, Fear of God, and the Leveling of the Gospel

Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people, because you know that the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do, whether they are slave or free. And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.

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Those of you who are enslaved, obey your earthly masters with sincere respect -- not as a performance for when they are watching, but with the same genuine heart you would bring to serving Christ. Because that is actually what you are doing -- doing the will of God, serving the Lord through your work. And know this: the Lord will reward every good thing you do, regardless of whether you are slave or free. Social status does not determine what God sees or what God rewards. Now masters, you are held to the same standard. Treat those under your authority the same way -- do not threaten them. Because the One who is their Master in heaven is also your Master. And He does not play favorites based on earthly social standing.

The Context -- Not an Endorsement but a Transformation

Before engaging with the specific instructions, the context of this passage demands careful attention. Paul is not endorsing slavery. He is not telling the Ephesian community that the institution of slavery is just or good or ordained by God. He is addressing the concrete, immediate situation of people in his churches who are enslaved -- a condition they cannot immediately exit -- and giving them a framework for living with integrity and dignity in that condition, while simultaneously placing a demand on slave owners that, followed consistently, would undermine the logic of slavery from within. The wider biblical trajectory moves consistently away from slavery -- from the Exodus as the paradigmatic act of divine liberation, through the Jubilee provisions of Leviticus 25, through Paul's own statement in 1 Corinthians 7:21 that if you can gain your freedom you should, through Philemon where Paul appeals for the slave Onesimus's freedom, to the ultimate eschatological vision in which there is 'neither slave nor free' in Christ (Galatians 3:28).

The Eye-Service Prohibition and the Theological Leveling

'Not only to win their favor when their eye is on you' -- Paul names the temptation of eye-service (ophthalmoudouleia -- literally, eye-slavery): the performance of work quality that rises and falls with whether the master is watching. Paul calls for something different: the quality of work and the sincerity of service that flows from serving Christ, not from human oversight. 'Because you know that the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do, whether they are slave or free' -- this is one of the most leveling statements in the passage. In the sight of God, the work of the slave and the work of the free person are evaluated by the same standard: sincerity of heart, integrity of service, faithfulness to Christ. And the instruction to masters -- 'treat your slaves in the same way' and 'do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him' -- is the theological earthquake beneath the passage. Both master and slave have the same Master -- Christ. Before Christ, the slave and the master stand on identical ground.

Key Observations

- **Paul addresses the institution as it is while embedding the seeds of its transformation** in the theological logic of the gospel.
- **The eye-service prohibition calls for integrity that does not depend on human oversight** -- service rendered to Christ through earthly work.
- **The reward statement levels slave and free before God** -- the quality of heart, not the status of the person, is what God rewards.
- **The common Master of both slave and free is the most radical statement in the passage** -- before Christ, all status distinctions collapse.

Ephesians 6:10-13 -- The Call to Stand: The Strength of the Lord, the Enemy Named, and the Nature of the Battle

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.

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Finally -- and this is the big picture behind everything: be strong. Not in yourself. In the Lord. In the power that belongs to Him. Put on the full armor of God -- the whole set, nothing missing -- so you can hold your ground against everything the devil schemes to throw at you. And understand what you are actually up against: this is not a battle against people. The people who oppose you are not your ultimate enemy. The real battle is against rulers, authorities, the powers of this dark world, and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms -- real, organized, intelligent opposition in the spiritual dimension. So put on the full armor of God. When the evil day comes -- and it

will come -- you need to be able to stand. And when you have done everything there is to do, just stand. Hold the ground.

"Be Strong in the Lord and in His Mighty Power"

The opening command of the spiritual warfare section establishes the source of the strength required for the battle: 'be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.' This is not a call to muster personal courage, to strengthen your resolve, to dig deep into inner resources. It is a call to draw strength from a source entirely outside yourself -- from the Lord and from the power that belongs to Him. The word for 'mighty power' (kratos tes ischyos) is the same compound of power-words Paul used in 1:19 to describe the power that raised Christ from the dead. The strength available to the believer in spiritual warfare is the same resurrection power that has already defeated death, disarmed the principalities and powers (Colossians 2:15), and seated Christ far above all rule and authority. The soldier stands in the strength of a Victor who has already won the decisive battle.

The Devil's Schemes -- Strategic, Intelligent, Targeted

The enemy against whose schemes the armor is needed is named directly: the devil. The word for schemes (methodeia -- from which we get 'method') means cunning strategies, calculated plans, intelligent, systematic deception. The devil is not a blunt force attacker. He is a strategist -- one who has been observing human beings since the garden, who knows every weakness, every vulnerability, every historical pattern of failure, every particular pressure point of the individual believer and the specific community. His attacks are not random. They are methodical, patient, and precisely targeted. This is why the armor is needed -- not primarily to repel force but to stand against cunning. The enemy's primary weapons are not brute power but deception and accusation.

"Our Struggle Is Not Against Flesh and Blood"

Verse 12 is one of the most important statements in the chapter for orienting the believer's engagement with the world. 'For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.' The practical implication is profound. When the believer is struggling against a difficult person -- a hostile colleague, an abusive authority figure, a community organized around values that oppose the gospel -- the primary battle is not with that person. The person is not the ultimate enemy. Behind the human opposition are the spiritual powers that are using, influencing, and energizing the opposition. The person is a human being created in the image of God, whom Christ died to redeem, for whom the gospel is an invitation rather than a condemnation. The battle is with the powers behind them.

"So That When the Day of Evil Comes, You May Be Able to Stand"

The goal of the armor is described repeatedly with the same word: stand (stenai, stete, stete). Not advance. Not conquer. Not destroy. Stand. The military image is of the soldier who holds the position that has been assigned to them -- who does not retreat, does not give ground, does not abandon the post under pressure. The victory has already been won by Christ. The believer's task is not to win the war -- it has been won. Their task is to hold the ground that the Victor has secured, to refuse to yield what has already been taken from the enemy, to stand in the victory that belongs to the One whose armor they are wearing. 'The day of evil' refers to

the specific seasons of intense spiritual assault that every believer will encounter -- the moments when the pressure is greatest, when the deception is most sophisticated, when the accusation is most intense.

Key Observations

- **The strength called for is entirely derived** -- from the Lord and from His mighty power, not from personal resources.
- **The full armor (panoplia) is comprehensive** -- no piece can be safely omitted because the enemy attacks at the point of least protection.
- **The devil's schemes (methodeia) are strategic and intelligent** -- the armor is designed against deception and accusation, not merely brute force.
- **'Not against flesh and blood' reorients the believer's engagement with human opposition** -- the real enemy is always behind the visible enemy.
- **The goal is to stand** -- to hold ground that Christ has already won -- not to fight a war whose outcome is still in question.

Ephesians 6:14-17 -- The Armor Described: Truth, Righteousness, Peace, Faith, Salvation, and the Word

Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

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Here is what you put on: Buckle on the belt of truth -- your whole life anchored in what is actually real, in who God actually is, in what the gospel actually says. Put on the breastplate of righteousness -- both the righteousness of Christ that covers you before God and the practical integrity of a life that does not give the enemy a foothold. Strap on the shoes of the gospel of peace -- stand on the fact that you are at peace with God, and be ready to carry that peace to others. Pick up the shield of faith -- the large, full-body shield that intercepts and extinguishes every specific, flaming attack the enemy fires at your mind and heart. Put on the helmet of salvation -- the solid, unshakeable certainty that what God has begun in you, He will complete. And take up the sword of the Spirit -- the Word of God -- the one offensive weapon, sharp and alive, the same weapon Jesus used against the devil's most sophisticated temptations.

The Belt of Truth

The Roman soldier's belt was the foundational piece of equipment -- the belt that held everything else in place, that gathered the tunic so the soldier could move freely, that provided the base to which the sword was attached and from which the breastplate hung. Without the belt properly fastened, no other piece of equipment could function correctly. Paul assigns to this foundational piece the quality of truth -- not primarily intellectual accuracy alone, but the comprehensive reality of the gospel, the knowledge of God as He actually is, the alignment of one's mind and life with what is real. The devil's primary strategy is deception -- the substitution of what is false for what is true. The belt of truth is the primary protection against this: a life deeply oriented around what is genuinely real -- who God is, what He has done in Christ, who the believer is in Him, what the enemy truly is (defeated, not triumphant), what the future truly holds.

The Breastplate of Righteousness and Feet of the Gospel of Peace

The breastplate protected the vital organs -- the heart and the lungs, the center of physical life. The spiritual breastplate is righteousness -- both the forensic righteousness of Christ imputed to the believer through faith (which protects against the accuser's primary weapon: condemnation) and the practical righteousness of a life being conformed to the character of God (which removes the enemy's ability to use the believer's own unrepented sin as a weapon against them). The feet of readiness represent the stability that comes from standing in the accomplished peace of the gospel -- the soldier who knows they are at peace with God can stand firm against every spiritual pressure that threatens to destabilize them. They are not fighting to achieve peace with God. They are standing in peace that has already been accomplished. And those feet are also ready to carry the gospel of peace -- the advance of the gospel into new territory is also spiritual warfare.

The Shield of Faith, Helmet of Salvation, and Sword of the Spirit

The shield (thureos -- the large, door-shaped Roman shield) was large enough to cover the entire body and was soaked in water before battle specifically to extinguish flaming arrows. Paul assigns this shield to faith -- the specific, grounded confidence in the character and promises of God that intercepts and extinguishes the enemy's targeted attacks on the mind and heart (sudden doubts about God's goodness, fears that the promises are not reliable, accusations that God has abandoned the believer). The helmet of salvation protects the mind against the enemy's assaults on assurance -- the firm, confident knowledge that salvation is accomplished, sealed, and guaranteed, that the God who chose us before the foundation of the world and sealed us with the Spirit will complete what He has begun (Philippians 1:6). The sword of the Spirit -- the Word of God -- is the only offensive weapon in the armor. In the hands of the Spirit-filled believer, the Word of God is not merely information. It is a weapon of divine power that exposes deception, silences accusation, demolishes strongholds of false thinking, and advances the gospel into the darkness. Jesus modeled its use in His wilderness temptation (Matthew 4:1-11).

Key Observations

- **The belt of truth is foundational** -- all other pieces depend on it, and the primary protection is against the enemy's chief weapon: deception.
- **The breastplate of righteousness protects against both accusation (through imputed righteousness) and exploitation of unrepented sin (through practical righteousness).**

- **The gospel of peace as footwear is both the stability of standing in accomplished reconciliation** and the readiness to carry the reconciling message forward.
- **The shield of faith extinguishes the flaming arrows of specific, targeted mental and spiritual attacks** -- grounded confidence in God's character and promises.
- **The helmet of salvation protects the mind against assaults on assurance** -- the certainty that what God has begun, He will complete.
- **The sword of the Spirit is the only offensive weapon** -- the Word of God wielded by the Spirit's power, the weapon Jesus Himself used against the enemy's most sophisticated temptations.

Ephesians 6:18 -- Prayer: The Atmosphere of the Armor and the Lifeline of the Battle

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.

IN SIMPLE AMERICAN ENGLISH

And pray. This is not a seventh piece of armor to add to the list -- prayer is the very atmosphere in which all the armor is worn and all the battle is fought. Pray in the Spirit -- not the performance of religious duty, but Spirit-animated, Spirit-directed prayer that connects you to the One whose battle this is. Pray on all occasions -- this is not reserved for crisis moments or formal settings, it is the ongoing, moment-by-moment orientation of the whole person toward God. Pray with all kinds of prayers and requests -- adoration, confession, thanksgiving, intercession, petition, lament -- the full range of human experience laid before God. And pray for all the Lord's people -- not just your own circle, not just the people whose situations are most pressing, but all the saints. And stay awake. Be alert. Keep at it. Never stop.

Prayer as the Atmosphere, Not a Seventh Piece of Armor

Verse 18 is sometimes treated as a seventh piece of spiritual armor -- 'and don't forget to pray.' But this misunderstands Paul's intent. Prayer is not one more piece of equipment to be added to the list. It is the atmosphere in which all the armor is worn and all the battle is fought. Without prayer, the armor can become religious performance -- an outward form of spiritual readiness that lacks the vital connection to the One whose armor it is. The belt of truth is maintained by praying the truth. The breastplate of righteousness is reinforced by confessing sin and receiving the righteousness of Christ in prayer. The shield of faith is lifted in prayer. The sword of the Spirit is wielded as the believer prays the Word. Prayer is the blood flow that animates the whole armor, the signal line that connects the soldier to the Commander, the lifeline that maintains the connection to the power that makes any of this possible.

The Four 'Alls' of Prayer

The four 'alls' of verse 18 describe the comprehensive scope of the prayer Paul calls for. 'In the Spirit' -- not prayer that is merely religious performance, but prayer animated and directed by the Holy Spirit who intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words (Romans 8:26-27). 'On all occasions' -- not reserved for crisis moments or formal religious settings, but the constant, continuous, moment-by-moment conversation with God that is the normal atmosphere of the Spirit-filled life. 'With all kinds of prayers and requests' -- the full range of what prayer can be: adoration and confession, thanksgiving and intercession, petition and lament. 'For all the Lord's people' -- the scope of intercession is as wide as the community of faith. Not merely for one's own circle, but for all the saints -- the entire body of Christ, known and unknown, near and far, of every culture and every era. The call to alertness (agryphountes -- keeping watch, staying awake) echoes Jesus's instruction in Gethsemane: 'Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation' (Matthew 26:41).

Key Observations

- **Prayer is not a seventh piece of armor but the atmosphere in which all the armor lives** -- the breath of the spiritual soldier.
- **The four 'alls' (in the Spirit, on all occasions, with all kinds of prayers, for all the saints)** describe a comprehensive, Spirit-animated, community-encompassing prayer life.
- **Alertness in prayer is the spiritual equivalent of military watchfulness** -- the refusal to drift into the inattentiveness that makes the soldier vulnerable.
- **Persevering prayer for all the saints connects the individual soldier to the entire body** -- we are not fighting alone but as members of one army.

Ephesians 6:19-24 -- Paul's Request, Tychicus, and the Final Benediction

Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should. Tychicus, the dear brother and faithful servant in the Lord, will tell you everything, so that you also may know how I am and what I am doing. I am sending him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage you. Peace to the brothers and sisters, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love.

IN SIMPLE AMERICAN ENGLISH

And pray for me too. Not for my comfort. Not for my chains to be removed. Pray that when I open my mouth, God gives me the words to fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel -- the very mystery this whole letter has been describing. Because that is what I am: an ambassador. In chains, yes -- but an ambassador of the King of kings. Pray that I will declare it boldly, the way I should. Now, Tychicus -- who is a dear

brother and a faithful servant of the Lord -- is bringing you this letter. He will fill you in on everything about how I am doing, and I am sending him specifically so you will know and so he can encourage you. And with that: peace to you all, brothers and sisters. Love and faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. And grace -- grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with a love that does not die.

"Pray Also for Me"

After calling the Ephesians to pray for all the saints, Paul immediately includes himself in that request. The apostle who has written five chapters of the most theologically magnificent content in the New Testament, who has prayed the most ambitious intercessory prayer imaginable on behalf of the churches, who has equipped the community with the full armor of God -- this apostle needs the prayers of the community. He does not stand above the battle or outside the need for intercession. He is in the battle -- chained, imprisoned, waiting trial -- and he needs the sustaining prayers of the body he has been building. The specific content of Paul's prayer request is revealing: he does not ask for comfort in his imprisonment. He does not ask for his chains to be removed. He asks for one thing: that words would be given to him so that he will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel.

"An Ambassador in Chains"

'For which I am an ambassador in chains' -- the paradox is intentional and powerful. An ambassador is the authorized representative of a sovereign power, clothed with the authority of the one who sent them. Paul is the ambassador of the King of kings, the Lord who is far above all rule and authority. And this ambassador is in chains -- imprisoned by the earthly authority of Rome. The juxtaposition of ambassador and chains captures the paradox of the Christian life that Paul has been expressing throughout the letter: the highest possible calling exercised in the most apparently humbling circumstances, the authority of heaven operating through the weakness of earth, the victory of Christ proclaimed through the imprisoned body of His servant. The calling does not diminish when the environment is hostile. The mission does not change when the circumstances are unfavorable.

The Final Benediction: Peace, Love, Faith, and Grace

The letter closes with a benediction that is itself a compressed summary of its central themes. 'Peace to the brothers and sisters' -- the peace that Christ has made, the peace that He Himself is (2:14), the peace that the gospel proclaims (2:17). 'Love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ' -- love and faith, inseparably paired, both divine gifts flowing from the same source as the grace and peace of the opening greeting. And then the final word: 'Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love.' The letter that opened with 'grace and peace' closes with 'grace.' The first word and the last word of the entire letter's theological content is grace. And the grace that closes the letter is given to those who love the Lord Jesus 'with an undying love' -- the Greek phrase (*en aphtharsia* -- in incorruptibility, in immortality) suggesting a love that does not decay, that is not contingent on circumstances, that endures through every difficulty. Such love is itself a gift of grace.

Key Observations

- **Paul's prayer request focuses entirely on gospel boldness, not personal comfort** -- the mission has not changed even in chains.

- **'Ambassador in chains' captures the paradox of the Christian life** -- the highest calling exercised in the most apparently humbling circumstances.
 - **Tychicus represents the human infrastructure of the body of Christ** -- ordinary faithfulness carrying the extraordinary word across ordinary distance.
 - **The benediction's final word is grace** -- the first and last reality of the entire letter, the ground of everything Paul has described from 1:1 to 6:24.
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What This Chapter Means for Us Today

1. Raise Children in the Training and Instruction of the Lord -- Make the Home a Site of Theological Formation

The instruction of verses 1-4 places the primary responsibility for the theological formation of children squarely in the home. Not in the church's children's program -- though that has its place. In the home, through the daily, ordinary, consistent presence of parents who are themselves walking with God, speaking the truth of the gospel, praying with their children, confessing their own failures, and deliberately introducing their children to the God who made them and the Christ who redeemed them. The home is the primary classroom. The parents are the primary teachers. And the curriculum is not merely religious information but the embodied demonstration of what it looks like to know God and to walk with Him through every season of ordinary life.

2. Know Your Real Enemy -- and Engage the Real Battle

The most practically disorienting truth of this chapter for contemporary Christians is the insistence that 'our struggle is not against flesh and blood.' In a culture of political polarization, tribal conflict, and social media warfare, the church is constantly tempted to make the human opponents of the gospel the primary enemy to be defeated. But the people on the other side of every human conflict are not the ultimate enemy. They are image-bearers of God for whom Christ died, behind whom spiritual powers are operating, toward whom the church's posture should always be the posture of an ambassador of reconciliation rather than the posture of a combatant in a tribal war. Knowing the real enemy reorients the church's engagement with the world -- from the warfare of human conflict to the warfare of prayer, proclamation, and the lived demonstration of the gospel.

3. Put On Every Piece of the Armor -- Daily, Deliberately, Completely

The armor of God is not self-applying. It requires the deliberate, daily, conscious choice to put it on -- to anchor the mind in truth, to stand in the righteousness of Christ, to walk in the assurance of the gospel of peace, to take up the shield of faith, to put on the helmet of salvation, to take the sword of the Spirit. This can and should be a practiced, intentional act of the morning -- the soldier who goes into the day's battle fully equipped because they took the time to dress for the war they are actually in. The believer who goes through the day without having deliberately put on the armor is a soldier who has walked onto a battlefield naked --

not because the enemy is not there but because they have not prepared for what is actually happening.

4. Pray Without Ceasing -- and Pray for All the Saints

The prayer call of verse 18 is one of the most practically demanding and most practically transforming instructions in the letter. The believer who prays in the Spirit on all occasions, with all kinds of prayers and requests, for all the saints -- that believer is living in the constant, Spirit-sustained awareness of the spiritual dimension of every moment. They are alert. They are connected to the Commander. They are fighting the real battle with the real weapon. And they are not fighting alone -- they are praying for and being prayed for by the entire body of Christ, which is itself the army that cannot ultimately be defeated because its Head is seated far above all rule and authority and has already won the decisive battle.

5. Be an Ambassador in Whatever Chains You Wear

Paul's self-description as 'an ambassador in chains' speaks directly to every believer who is exercising their calling in difficult, constrained, or apparently humbling circumstances. The calling does not change when the circumstances are unfavorable. The mission does not diminish when the environment is hostile. The authority of heaven does not shrink when earthly authority opposes. Like Paul in his chains, like Tychicus on his journey, like every believer who has ever carried the gospel into an environment that does not welcome it -- the calling is to be the ambassador of the King, to make known the mystery of the gospel, to do it fearlessly, and to trust that the One who said 'I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it' is still in charge of the outcome.

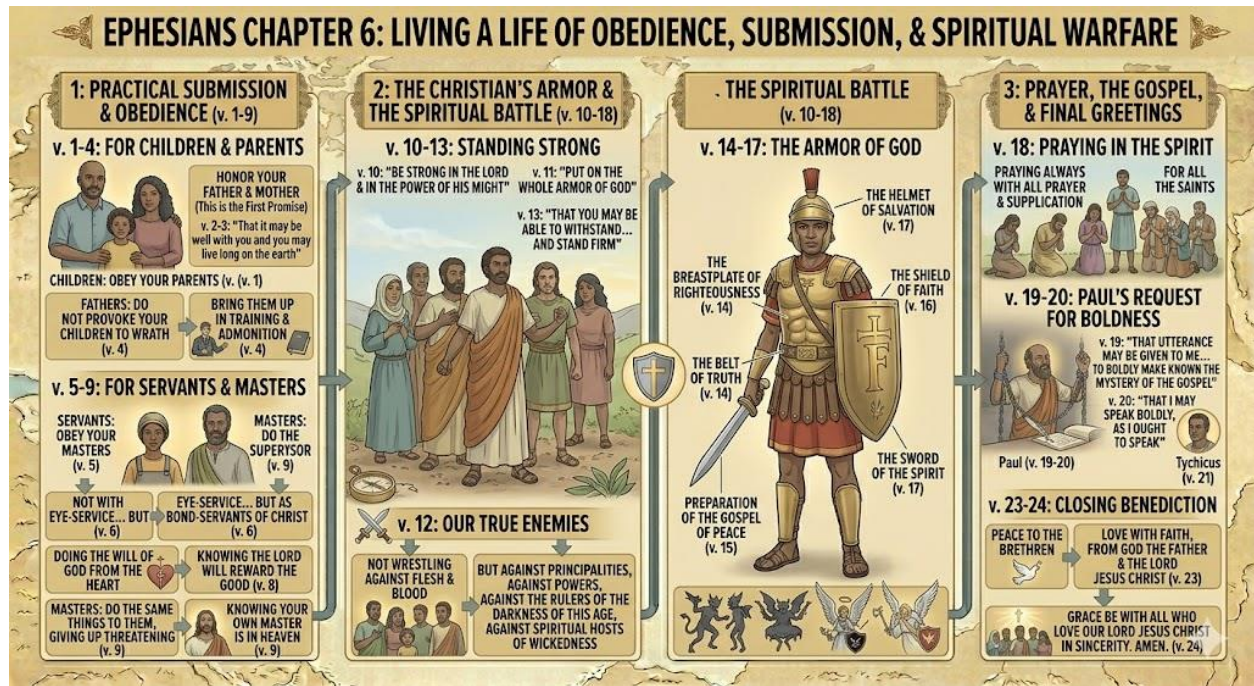
How This Chapter Relates to Today

Ephesians chapter 6 speaks with direct and urgent relevance into the contemporary church's life in three specific areas. First, the household. The church in every era is formed primarily in homes -- in the daily, ordinary, unspectacular life of family relationships where children are either shaped toward God or away from Him, where marriage either embodies the mystery of Christ and the church or contradicts it, where authority is either exercised in love or weaponized in abuse.

Second, spiritual warfare. The contemporary church is largely unprepared for the spiritual battle Paul describes because it has largely lost the ability to perceive the spiritual dimension of ordinary life. The conflict is understood in political, social, psychological, and cultural terms -- which are real but secondary. The primary battle is spiritual, and the primary weapons are the ones Paul describes: truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, the Word, and prayer. The church that recovers this awareness and arms itself accordingly will fight far more effectively -- and far less destructively toward its human opponents -- than the church that has reduced the battle to its earthly dimensions.

Third, prayer. The contemporary church prays less and less consistently than almost any previous generation of believers. The prayer call of verse 18 -- all kinds of prayers, at all times, for all the saints, in the Spirit -- describes a quality of prayer life that most contemporary Christians, if honest, know they do not possess. The recovery of this prayer life -- corporate and individual, liturgical and spontaneous, deliberate and constant -- is perhaps the single

most urgent need of the church in the present moment. Everything else Paul has described in Ephesians -- the theology, the ethics, the community life, the spiritual warfare -- depends on this sustained, Spirit-animated, alert, persevering, comprehensive prayer.



Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father, we have come to the end of Ephesians. Six chapters of the most concentrated, most comprehensive, most magnificent theological and practical vision in the New Testament. And we close it not merely having read it, but having been called by it -- called to walk worthy, to put on the full armor, to pray in the Spirit, to raise our children in Your training and instruction, to stand firm in the Lord and in the power of His mighty power.

Lord, we are not equal to this calling. The armor is available but we have been slow to put it on. The prayer is commanded but we have been negligent. The family life is designed but we have been distracted. The battle is real but we have been treating it as though it were not.

So we ask for what this letter has been offering from the first verse to the last: grace. The grace that chose us before the foundation of the world. The grace that made us alive when we were dead. The grace that created one new humanity out of the many divided peoples. The grace that revealed the mystery hidden for ages. The grace that equips us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms. The grace that is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine. Let that grace be to us -- to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love -- exactly what this letter has promised it to be.

Strengthen us in the Lord and in the power of His might. Give us the full armor and the wisdom and the will to put it on every day, in every battle, without leaving any piece behind. Make us a praying people -- alert, persevering, comprehensive, Spirit-animated -- who pray for all the saints and for all who need to become saints. Let our homes be places where children learn to know You. Let our marriages tell the true story of Christ and the church. Let our communities display the manifold wisdom of God to the watching cosmos. Let our lives be the praise of Your glory.

Peace to the brothers and sisters. Love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love. To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Ephesians

Walking in the Riches of Christ

CONCLUSION

Conclusion

As we come to the end of *Called, Sealed, and Filled: A Study of Paul's Letter to the Ephesians*, we are reminded that the book of Ephesians is far more than a theological letter written to an ancient church -- it is a living message for every believer in every generation. Its truths are timeless, its promises are powerful, and its call to spiritual maturity is as urgent today as when Paul the Apostle first penned these words under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Throughout this study, we have seen the incredible riches believers possess in Christ. We have learned that before the foundation of the world, God had a plan of redemption for His people. Through Jesus Christ we have been chosen, adopted, redeemed, forgiven, and given an eternal inheritance. We have seen that salvation is entirely by grace through faith, not by human effort, so that all glory belongs to God alone.

We have also discovered the believer's new identity. The world may define people by their failures, achievements, background, or status, but Ephesians defines believers by their position in Christ. We are no longer strangers, enemies, or spiritually dead -- we are children of God, members of His household, and part of the body of Christ. We have been sealed by the Holy Spirit as a guarantee that we belong to Him forever.

Yet Ephesians does not stop with doctrine alone. Paul continually moves from belief to behavior, from theology to practical living. Because we have been called by God, we are to walk worthy of that calling. We are to pursue unity, holiness, purity, humility, forgiveness, love, and wisdom. Our faith is not meant to remain inside church walls but to shape our homes, marriages, relationships, speech, attitudes, and daily conduct.

This study has also reminded us that the Christian life is a spiritual battle. Believers face an unseen war against darkness and deception, but God has not left His people defenseless. Through the armor of God, the power of prayer, and the strength of the Holy Spirit, we are equipped to stand firm and remain faithful.

The themes of this book -- called, sealed, and filled -- summarize the heart of the Christian life. We have been called by God for His purpose, sealed by the Spirit for His possession, and filled with the Spirit for daily living and spiritual power. These are not distant theological ideas; they are present realities meant to transform the way we think, live, worship, and serve.

As you close this study, my prayer is that Ephesians will continue to shape your heart long after the final page. May you walk in the confidence of your salvation, the security of God's promises, and the power of the Holy Spirit. May you stand firm in truth, grow in spiritual maturity, and reflect the love and holiness of Christ in a world that desperately needs Him.

Above all, may you never forget that the God who called you is faithful. He is still building His church, still transforming lives, and still accomplishing His eternal purposes through those who trust Him.

**Walk worthy of your calling.
Stand strong in His power.
And live each day filled with His Spirit.**

Ephesians

Walking in the Riches of Christ

A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

A Note from the Author

Dr. Paul Crawford

Dear Reader,

Thank you for taking the time to study *Called, Sealed, and Filled: A Study of Paul's Letter to the Ephesians*. It has been both a privilege and a blessing to walk verse by verse through one of the most powerful and spiritually rich books in the New Testament.

The letter to the Ephesians has always held a special place in my heart because it reveals so clearly who believers are in Christ and how they are called to live in a fallen world. In a time when many people struggle with identity, purpose, fear, and spiritual confusion, Ephesians points us back to the unshakable truths of God's grace, salvation, and eternal plan.

As I wrote this study, I was continually reminded that Christianity is not merely a religion of outward behavior -- it is a transformed life empowered by the Holy Spirit. Paul's message challenges us not only to understand doctrine but to live it daily. We are called to walk in unity, holiness, love, wisdom, and spiritual strength because of what Christ has already done for us.

My prayer throughout the writing of this book has been simple: that readers would grow deeper in their relationship with Jesus Christ. I pray this study has strengthened your understanding of Scripture, encouraged your faith, and helped you recognize the incredible spiritual blessings you possess as a child of God.

Never forget that you have been called by God for a purpose, sealed by the Holy Spirit for eternity, and filled with His power to live faithfully in this generation. No matter what challenges you face, God's grace is sufficient, His promises are secure, and His Spirit is at work within you.

I encourage you to continue studying God's Word with hunger and humility. The deeper we go into Scripture, the more clearly we see the beauty, wisdom, and glory of Christ.

Thank you for allowing me to share this journey with you. May the Lord bless you, strengthen you, and guide you as you walk worthy of the calling you have received.

In Christ,
Dr. Paul Crawford

Dr. Paul Crawford is more than just a Christian Author; His books are a source of inspiration and guidance on your spiritual journey. His books are created with a deep sense of faith and a desire to uplift and inspire all who read.

<https://www.crawfordbiblecommentary.com/>

