

George Philip Bible Readings

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EPHESIANS

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1:1

Some translations do not actually have the name Ephesus in this verse but they mention the name in the margin. It is thought the letter might have been a circular one, sent to several churches including the congregation in the great city of Ephesus. The whole epistle is a message of instruction, inspiration, encouragement and assurance to those called to live the life of faith in a godless society. The very fact that there *was* a congregation of Christian believers in a place such as Ephesus is a token of the wonderful power of the Gospel to bring salvation and life to men and women no matter their background or condition. Paul paid a brief visit to Ephesus around the year AD 52, promising to return later. With him went two believers, Priscilla and Aquila, husband and wife, who had met Paul in Corinth after having been expelled from Rome by Caesar's persecution. They seem to have been left in Ephesus to guide the small nucleus of believers who had, at that time, received very little in the way of instruction. When Apollos came, his preaching was beneficial, as far as it went (Acts 18:18-21, 24-28). He was biblical and earnest but he knew little about the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. When Paul returned to Ephesus he met a dozen "disciples" whom he recognised as believers and yet realised that their understanding of the Gospel was limited. Obviously they had not been in touch with Aquila and Priscilla (remember the size of the city) and perhaps had responded to the preaching of Apollos before he had been enlightened by these two good Christians (Acts 19:1-7). We must not be distracted by the unusual experience of these twelve disciples but see from the story the great need for converts to be truly and fully taught in the things of God. This is obviously one reason why Paul wrote this epistle.

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We continue to set the background to the epistle. If we compare Acts 19:8, 10; 20:17-31 we see that Paul ministered in Ephesus for about three years, and during that time he wrote some of his great epistles, including 1 Corinthians. His ministry in Ephesus was turbulent as well as significant. We are told of opposition from the religious establishment (Acts 19:8-10); miracles of healing and outbursts of demonic activity (Acts 19:11-20); a clash with the trade guilds because of the effect the gospel was having on their profits, and the resultant persecution, uproar and anti-Jew fury (Acts 19:23-41). In *that* context the Word of the Lord grew and prevailed and a church was founded. Bible Dictionaries tell us that Ephesus was a significant, cosmopolitan, business and trading city of some 300,000 inhabitants. It was quite a place with a colonnaded street some 35 feet wide leading down to the harbour. There was an open-air theatre seating some 25,000. Tourism was a big thing and the souvenir shops with silver charms representing the Temple of Diana (goddess of fertility) were a significant part of the economy. Permissive morality, indulgence, dabbling in the occult had their expression in the pornographic book trade, as the story in Acts makes plain. On the face of it, it was not a promising place for evangelism and church-planting but both Paul and Apollos preached there, emphasising repentance and faith. It was not a message of easy believism, but one that called for an abandoning of sin and the living of a new life. Paul described the whole situation as one of great opportunity (1 Cor. 16:8-9) and proved there that he had indeed no need to be ashamed of the Gospel because it was shown to be the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16-17). His ministry in Ephesus was around the years AD 52-53. His letter to the Ephesians was written about AD 60-61 and the teaching we are to study was being given to Christians of some seven years' standing, *together with* those who had come to faith as the work went on.

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Before we get to grips with the teaching of the epistle a word of warning needs to be given to Christians of long standing and to congregations who have had long spiritual ministries. Paul wrote from prison in Rome to the church at Ephesus and his heart was glad as he expounded to them the glories of the Gospel and the wonder of their calling and destiny in Christ. That was in the year AD 60-61. But by about the year AD 90, John, whose responsibility was for the churches in Asia Minor, was writing to the churches by the command and inspiration of the Holy Spirit and the message to the church at Ephesus, recorded in Revelation 2:1-5, is solemn and searching. The Christians in that congregation were still clear in matters of doctrine; capable of discerning false apostles; still active in Christian work, and standing against low standards of morality. But their love for the

Lord, the love they had had at the first, was no longer there. Because of their lack of love to Jesus, and all that means in terms of glad yielding of heart and life, they were in danger of being removed from the church scene. The time would come when no-one would even remember that there had been a living, growing church at Ephesus. It can still happen. Some lapse from living, loving commitment to Jesus to a mere formal, even if evangelical, way of worship and life. Congregations that once were scenes of God's saving power now know nothing of God's presence. The glory is departed. It can happen and people not be aware of it (Judges 16:20). Paul's ministry in this epistle will help us to get our minds and hearts centred again on the glories of the Gospel and the fulness of life and destiny that are ours in Christ.

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1:1

This epistle, the one to the Colossians and also the short letter to Philemon, were sent by the messenger Tychicus to encourage the hearts of the believers (6: 21-22). This first verse must have done just that. Paul had once been the great persecutor of the church, passionate in his hatred of and opposition to all that belonged to Christ (Acts 9:1-2; 1 Cor. 15:9; Gal. 1:13; 1 Tim. 1:13). Now all that had changed, and this man was a bondservant of Christ, called by God and sent as an apostle with the authority of God (Acts 9: 10- 16). Such was his commitment to Christ and to the gospel that he was ready to lose everything for Jesus' sake (Phil. 3:4-14). What a picture for those in Ephesus facing persecution! If someone like Paul can be converted then there is hope for all, even for those who seem set to reject Christ with all their powers. But note where Paul rested his calling and authority. It is not in his own experience but in the will of God. It was God who had opened his eyes (2 Cor. 4:6). Paul knew, as the prophets of old knew, that it was God who had called him to be an apostle, one who would speak God's Word with authority (Gal. 1:1; Jer. 1:5; Amos 7:14-15). He had not simply "taken up the ministry" nor had he "volunteered" for missionary service. It was God's doing from the start (Acts 13:1-3) and this is a theme Paul elaborates within the next few verses, grounding the whole of salvation in the sovereign grace and activity of God. Now, we who tend to be very much turned in on ourselves, need to think far more than we do about the will of God: the clear, decisive, active, planned will and purpose of God. It is quite thrilling to think of our very ordinary persons and lives being caught up into and playing an active part in the outworking of God's will here on earth. What a calling and what a dignity to be given to such as we are! (2 Cor. 6:1; Phil.1:4)

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Try to imagine the reaction, the thrill and the encouragement of the believers in the church at Ephesus when this description of them was read out. It was indeed a miracle of grace that these people had been brought to faith, some of them from dark and terrible backgrounds. But Paul did not allow them to be anchored in the past, brooding about their former sins and evil lives. Having heard the Gospel and having believed on the Lord Jesus Christ unto salvation, they were now God's "saints". No, they were not perfect morally or spiritually but, born of the Spirit of God with new life within them by the Holy Spirit, they were now the children of God. (John 1: 11-13; 1 John 3:1-2). They were God's people, set apart to be His personal possession (1 Pet. 2:9). They were not what they once had been. They were new creatures in Christ, raised to newness of life (Rom. 6:4). They were different from the other people in Ephesus, and this distinction between believers and unbelievers must never be forgotten. It is a difference in time and in eternity. This is no ground for being proud, because it is all the work of God's grace, and His grace alone. The description "faithful in Christ Jesus" is not a comment on their spiritual stability and loyalty but rather a description of what they were. They were believers: believing what God had done for them and given to them in Christ. What this fully means Paul expounds in his letter but from the start he was focusing their minds and hearts (this is something to be felt and to thrill to) on what they were, what they had, and what God had done for them in Christ. The message is not simply a personal one, nor restricted only to the congregation in Ephesus, but is to the whole church. The number of believers in any one place may be small, but we have to see ourselves together with all those in every place who call on the name of the Lord (1 Cor. 1:2). What a corrective to feelings of inferiority or insignificance!

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We tend to think of a benediction as a closing word of blessing, but Paul uses these familiar phrases not just as a greeting or salutation but as a focus for and pointer to the message he is to expound. The grace of God is His free, unmerited favour which works salvation and blessing for His people. It is sovereign grace, amazing grace and sustaining grace, the grace that seeks, finds and saves. "Grace is the fountain. Peace belongs to the stream of spiritual blessing which issues from this fountain." (Hendriksen) Grace that settles the heart on Christ also brings peace, not simply peace with God (Rom. 5:1-2) but the peace of God (Phil. 4:7), so that in all the varied circumstances of life we learn more and more to let the peace of God rule in our hearts (Col. 3:15 AV). Always remember that the God of peace is the God of power (Heb. 13:20-21). Paul is not just speaking pious words. God's blessing is real, positive and practical and he wants us to recognise this and to count on it day by day. God is not reluctant to bless. He is not grudging towards His people. If God the Father has given us His own Son to die for us, will He not freely and generously give us all other needful things (Rom. 8:32)? The grace and peace Paul speaks of have their origin in God the Father and they come to us through the Lord Jesus Christ who won them for us through His death and resurrection. Note the full title given to the Saviour. He is Lord, the great conquering one who has won for us the victory; He is Jesus, the one who came to us and identified Himself with us to do for us all we could not do for ourselves; and He is Christ, the anointed executor of all God's saving purposes. He is Prophet, Priest and King, and as such He is able to save to the uttermost (Heb. 7:25 AV) because He has secured eternal redemption for us (Heb. 9:11-14).

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Although we need to study parts of this epistle verse by verse it would be good to read right down to v.14 or at least as far as v.10 to see and to sense the sheer grandeur of the salvation that is ours in Christ. Paul calls us to bless, to eulogise, to speak well of God, whom he describes as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. There may be a reference here to both the humanity and divinity of Christ, since He spoke of both "My God" (Matt. 27:46) and "Father" (John 17:1). To bless God seems more than just to praise Him, as some modern versions translate the word. There is worship, adoration, thanksgiving and praise involved here and we do well to think of the opening section of Psalm 103 (v.1-5) and the paraphrase of 1 Pet. 1:3-5, "Blest be the everlasting God, the Father of our Lord; Be His abounding mercy praised, His majesty adored." Paul kindles both astonishment and adoration by the way he declares what God has in fact done for us in Christ here and now. The order of the words in NIV seems to suggest that the blessing is far away, remote from the grim business of daily life and perhaps postponed to Heaven. But God *has* blessed us. No doubt there is need to emphasise that we are speaking here of spiritual blessings, rather than the temporal blessings which we all take very much for granted. But Paul is directing our thoughts to the facts of spiritual blessing which are the foundation, inspiration and enabling for life here and now in a grim, disordered and demanding world. What we must always remember is that as believers we are "in Christ". That is our position and standing and identity. We live down here in the "real" world, as people call it, but in actual fact we belong to the "real world" which is "up there", a world that is permanent whereas this world is temporary. We "belong" in heaven. Our citizenship is there, not here (Phil. 3:20). That is the "secret" of our whole way of life. Little wonder people cannot understand our attitudes and confidence and hope.

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God's blessing is very practical because it is factual. We are "in Christ", Christ is at God's right hand (1:20), and we "sit" in an undisputed place with Christ (2:6). That being so all the blessings of the heavenly place are ours *now* to be made use of. We are not really creatures of earth any more, although our full heavenly identity is not yet manifest (1 John 3:2). At the same time we live on earth but not as weak, poverty-stricken creatures always up against it. God has provided. God *has* blessed us with all the spiritual riches of the heavenly places. There is not such a thing as a "poor" Christian. The whole storehouse of God's blessings has been given to us *in Christ* who is Himself everything (1 Cor. 3:21-23). This is a total fact which allows of no qualification (Col. 1:19; 2:9-10). This is something which needs to be grasped and remembered especially in a day when there is so much confused talk about knowing the "fulness" of God's blessing. If we have Christ we have everything; and

everything is ours to use by the Holy Spirit who *has been* given to us (Rom. 5:5; 8: 9-11). Granted some "blessings" come to us in a form that we fail to recognise as benefit and blessing. Trials and tribulations can be "God's gracious gifts to help us on to glory." We can be blessed without noticing it at the time (Lk. 24:32). And we may plead with God to take away things we feel are nothing but a hindrance, believing we would be more blessed and useful without them. But these painful things may well be the catalyst that makes us fully useful to God (2 Cor. 12:7-10). The truth is that, if we have Christ, then we are provided for in every possible contingency of life.

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Paul simply piles up statement after statement concerning the various aspects of God's activity in working for us such a great salvation. Having affirmed that God has blessed us with the riches of His grace, he now declares that God chose us in Christ. God did this not as an after-thought, nor as a result of our merit or our believing, but by a clear, specific, personal choice before the foundation of the world. This plain statement will always be quite beyond our human understanding but the truth of it was expressed by Jesus Himself in addressing the disciples (John 15:16, 19). Paul, of course, is making this statement to people in Ephesus who, having heard the Gospel, responded in faith and took Christ as Saviour. He is explaining to them the nature and security of their salvation. It is grounded in and guaranteed by God's personal choice, about which He has no regrets (Heb. 11:16). This is a tremendous comfort when you are really up against it and feelings of doubt and despair cloud the reality of salvation and security. In all we mean by salvation and life we are kept by the power of God (1 Pet. 1:4-5). This word "chosen" makes plain that in the free, causeless and unconditional sovereignty that belongs to Him, since He is God and there is none else, God chose to set His heart of love on us and gave Himself to us in Christ so that He might bring us to Himself to be His very own sons and daughters. Never forget that the whole issue is set in the context of the Gospel which tells of how God Himself, in His Son, paid the awful price so that sin could be judged and put away (1 Pet. 1:18-20). We may be baffled in trying to understand this thought of God's choice, His eternal election as the theologians call it, but we should be even more baffled (as no doubt the Ephesians were) that God should choose *us*. Why should God want strange, complicated, sinful people like us? The hymn writer says, "Why, O Lord, such love to me?" and if that is our reaction, perhaps we have learned something about worship.

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Read Jesus' words in John 6:44-45 and see how He brings together the Father's gracious drawing and the response of faith which constrains people to faith and discipleship. Read 1 Thess. 1:2-5 where Paul says that the response of faith when the Gospel was preached was the indication or confirmation of their election by God. Everything is set in the context of the preaching of the Gospel and the declaration that Christ is the Saviour of sinners. We must never get lost in abstract philosophising about freewill and predestination. If man is to be free, then God must be free to bestow His grace-gifts on whoever He wills to choose. We are taken back to a point before the world was made, before history began, above and beyond all the limitations of time and space. We are told that when God first made the world His objective was quite clear. He was not like some D.I.Y. amateurs who make things and then wonder what to do with them. God planned in free-will, and proceeded to carry out His perfect plan, and all His methods and objectives partake of the perfection and integrity that are part of His eternal character of love and righteousness. It is immense comfort to know that God's will cannot and will not be frustrated by men or by devils. This is also assurance to all engaged in the work of the Gospel, as Jesus made plain in John 6:37. The issue is never in doubt. At one point in our experience all seems to depend on our choice, and it is a real one, else the Bible would be dishonest in calling for repentance and faith. There is a time to urge sinners to come to Christ and to choose while the day of grace lasts. But there comes a time when, looking back and seeing things more clearly, we say with wonder and gratitude, in the words of the hymn writer, "While I passed my Saviour by, His love laid hold on me."

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1:4-6

Note in v 4b that we were chosen to be holy and blameless in God's sight. The converts in Ephesus had not been holy. We will read something of that in 5: 3-11 and Paul spoke to the Corinthians in similar terms (1 Cor. 6:9-11). The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation at every level of society, even in those areas that society has given up as hope-less. It is when, by the grace of God, we begin to see the sinfulness of sin that we begin to have a deep desire to be good, true, pure and holy, and to grieve over our continuing falling and failing whereby we grieve the heart of our loving Father. But Paul is not challenging us to be holy. He is pointing us away from the black past to the bright future and reminding us of what God is going to make us. Think of the doxology in Jude 24. This is where we are going: to God's presence, faultless and stainless. This is the clear and determined objective of God who destined (pre-destined), marked us out beforehand *in love* to be His sons and daughters in Christ, bearing the family likeness. He chose us: that is privilege. He destines us: that is objective. Holiness (which includes whole-ness and integration and maturity of personality) is the positive aspect, and blameless is the negative aspect indicating the absence of fault and wrong. And it is all spoken of in terms of love: God's love for us and the fruit of love manifest *in us* towards God and each other. A holiness that is not diffused with love is a distortion. After all, God is love and God is holy. And God commended His love to us in that while we were still sinners, showing neither inclination or capacity for holiness, Christ died for us (Rom. 5:6-11).

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1:4-6

These verses (3-10), although stretching our minds and going beyond our capacity, are nevertheless warming our hearts. They tell us of the God of love who has planned a destiny for us and who has marked out the boundaries and the route. What a relief that someone knows what is going on and is in full charge of us and all concerning us. The picture is of God's activity in grace setting about the business of our salvation with clear deliberation, bringing us to Himself through the Gospel by the work of the Holy Spirit. Keep in mind that the work of the Spirit is not tentative but effectual. He does not suggest we might come to Jesus; He brings us, and He does so by many varied routes. As Jesus said to Nicodemus, "The wind (Spirit) blows wherever it pleases " and is ever beyond explanation. Paul was brought to faith in Christ by direct confrontation; the jailer in Philippi by way of an earthquake that terrified him; the woman at the well of Samaria by way of a hungry heart and a spoiled life; the woman with the issue of blood by way of disappointment with countless doctors; and the Prodigal son was brought home to the Father by way of rebellion and a pig-sty existence. The stories are found in John 3:1-8; Acts 9:1-5; 16:25ff; John 4:7-15; Mark 5:25ff; and Luke 15:11-24. The picture of the Prodigal back home with the Father, honoured and trusted and rejoiced over, is as good an illustration as any to expound the words "in love, to be His sons" (5). But it is not just "position" that we are given, not just a formal "place". As we shall see later, the very life of Jesus is given to dwell in us by the Holy Spirit so that we are enabled to be and to live as true sons and daughters of God. This is what gives God pleasure now and in all the ages of eternity. This will also be to God's praise for it will demonstrate what His grace can do with the poor broken lives of sinners.

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1:4-6

There are still great riches of encouragement and blessing in these verses but before considering them, pause to worship and to ponder the wonder of our salvation and the story of God's grace that brought us to where we now are. Think of Addison's hymn, "When all Thy mercies, O my God, my rising soul surveys!"

"Unnumbered comforts to my soul
Thy tender care bestowed,
Before my infant heart conceived
From whom these comforts flowed.

"When in the slippery paths of youth
With heedless steps I ran,
Thine arm, unseen, conveyed me safe,

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And led me up to man.

"When worn with sickness, oft hast Thou
With health renewed my face;
And, when in sins and sorrows sunk,
Revived my soul with grace."

When did God start working His gracious work in our hearts and lives by His Holy Spirit? Was it not long before we were ever aware of it? Who took the initiative and created in us a desire for and an awareness of need for a Saviour? It was God, in His grace. We may be unable to grasp and to hold in tension (but not in contradiction) God's choice and our choice, but this we can say

"I am not skilled to understand
What God has willed, what God has planned;
I only know at His right hand
Stands one who is my Saviour.

"I take God at His word and deed;
Christ died to save me, this I read;
And in my heart I find a need
Of Him to be my Saviour."

Into that heart of need there comes the Saviour whose name is Jesus, bringing the limitless riches of God's love.

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1:4-6

We concluded yesterday speaking of the limitless riches of God's love. Now we have to see that God's love and grace are freely bestowed, given, poured out without grudging, hesitation or limitation, in Jesus, through His death and resurrection. If we want to see just how staggering this is, read John 17:23 where Jesus declares that God loves us *even as* He loved Jesus, His own eternal Son. This is indeed amazing love, beyond all thought and wonder. Of course, love is proud of and wants to be proud of the loved one and we are told here that God really wants to "show us off" as examples of His love and grace. But we are not just "trophies" of grace to be placed in some window display, we are family, sons and daughters of God whose heart and smile are towards us, all for the sake of His own beloved Son. The picture is of God the Father, God the Son, and all His adopted children walking together as a happy family delighting in each other. As Paul will make plain in chapter 2 we are not lodgers, nor are we tense children visiting some forbidding relative, scared lest we say or do anything wrong. We are family! (2:19) Think of the loving pride and pleasure the Father had in His own Son and how this was testified to publicly (Matt. 3: 17; 17:5). The human life of Jesus declared and showed forth the love and grace of the Father, and part of God's plan is to do this very same thing in and through us. The extent to which we are called and destined to show forth God's wonderful grace becomes clear if we read Eph. 2:7 and 3:10. The life of the individual believer and the life of the church combine in testimony to declare the wonder and glory of God's amazing grace. Is it not true that in our own lives, where sin abounded, grace abounded much more (Rom. 5:20)? What a God we have!

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1:4-6

The word "adopted" is used in relation to our being placed in the position of sons. The Ephesians, most of them from Gentile background, some of them slaves with no rights at all, and living under Roman law, would know full well that legal adoption conferred not only standing but all the privileges and rights of a natural-born child. This is a glorious thought. The Westminster Confessions of Faith states that all those who are effectually called through the Gospel and are justified by faith are made "partakers of the grace of adoption (Gal. 4:4-6): by which they are taken into the number, and enjoy the liberties and privileges of the children of God (Rom. 8:17; John 1:12); have His name put on them (2 Cor. 6:18); receive the Spirit of adoption (Rom. 8:15); have access to the throne of grace with boldness; are enabled to cry, 'Abba, Father'; are pitied, protected, provided for, and

chastened by Him as a Father (Heb. 12:6); yet never cast off, but sealed to the day of redemption (Eph. 4:30); and inherit the promises as heirs of everlasting salvation (1 Pet. 1:3-5)." We have taken time to study these verses in detail not least to show us that our thinking about the Gospel and about salvation tends to be far too shallow and narrow. We need to realise just what a marvellous plan of salvation we are sharing in, and in this way we begin to glory in the Gospel. In the next verses we begin to learn the wonder of forgiveness and the thrill of the outworking of God's perfect will down through the ages of history. It is time we Christian learned to "walk tall" in this bowed down, cringing, fearful generation. We have something we can be sure about for time and for eternity.

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These verses should be a wonderful message to all those who have known what it is to sin, fall, and fail, and have lived with that desolating sense of guilt and shame that tends to dominate the thinking and inhibit personality and life. Two words are used: "redemption" and "forgiveness", and both are spoken of in terms of the richness of grace which God has "lavished" on us. The language is that of unqualified generosity. There is nothing mean, stilted or unwilling about God. Everything He does is in accordance with and on the scale of the limitlessness of His love. Never forget, "God is love" (1 John 4:16). Redemption speaks of total and immediate deliverance from the state of slavery. To be a sinner is to be a slave to sin (Rom. 6:16, 17), whether or not we are aware of the fact. We are guilty before God (Rom. 3:19 AV) and we are rightly and justly held in the condemned cell. There is nothing we can do to change our situation, but One comes who pays a ransom price on our behalf, meets the judgment, and sets us free. God does not close His eyes to the facts of sin and guilt, nor does He ever move from His position of righteousness and justice. Sin must be judged. The price must be paid. Someone must stand in for the sinner and this is what Jesus did. He was made sin for us (2 Cor. 5:21); He died, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God (1 Pet. 3:18 AV); He was wounded for our transgressions ... and He secured our peace (Isa. 53:5). He paid the debt and set us free.

"Bearing shame and scoffing rude
In my place condemned He stood;
Sealed my pardon with His blood,
Hallelujah, what a Saviour!"

Redemption is release and deliverance from all the thralldom of sin, death, the Devil and Hell. It is liberty for the captive. It is all God's doing by the blood, that is by the death, of Christ. Consider such references as Col. 1:13-14; Heb. 2:14-15; 9:24-28; 2 Tim. 1:10; 1 John 3:8; Rom. 3: 21-26.

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1:7-8

In Sandyford today we gather at the Lord's Table and, so near Christmas, we shall inevitably think of Him who was given the name Jesus because He would save His people from their sins. The price of the redemption we spoke of yesterday was great indeed (1 Pet. 1:18, 19). No-one will ever know what it cost the Saviour to bear away our sins, and we need to remember that the death of the Saviour was not an emergency measure but something that was in the heart of God from all eternity before the world was ever made. At the heart of God's eternal throne there is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world (Rev. 5:6; 13:8). The Saviour born in Bethlehem was born to die, and without that perfect life given up to death on the Cross to pay the price of sin, there would have been no redemption, no deliverance, no hope, no forgiveness of sins. But now, consider that it is on the scale of God's generous, lavish love that we have forgiveness. Let our guilty consciences and unhappy hearts be assured by the Gospel of saving grace. Our God will abundantly pardon (Isa. 55:1-3, 6-9). Our sins are put behind God's back and are no longer in His sight or thoughts (Isa 38:16-17). Our God is no longer angry and our sins have been consigned to the depth of the sea (Micah 7:18-19). There is no longer any condemnation (Rom. 8:1) and the blood of Jesus keeps on washing us clean (1 John 1:7-9). The record of sin and guilt that once stood against us has been taken away and nailed to the Cross (Col. 2:13-15) and neither sin nor Satan has any right to bring the subject up. We say to the Accuser, "Yes, it is all true. I am a guilty sinner, but I am forgiven, for Jesus' sake."

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1:9-10

We are told here of God's wisdom, His will, His purpose, and His plan for the course and culmination of history. All of these are made known to us in Christ and we are made part of the whole scheme through Christ. This should make us think of the sheer privilege of being Christians and that would help us to cope with the battles and struggles of Christian experience and service. Far from resenting the difficulties we should see ourselves as participating in the sufferings of Christ, as Paul himself regarded his struggles (Phil. 3:10; 2 Cor. 4:7-12, 16-18). Peter spoke in the same way to those facing persecutions (1 Pet. 4:12-19). When Paul speaks of "mystery" he is not suggesting there is something kept hidden or revealed only to an elitist few. He is referring to what God has revealed, namely His plan for world redemption, a plan that stands over against the seeming chaos and meaninglessness of all that goes one round about us. The "mystery" is revealed in Jesus Christ, His Person and atoning work, the activity of God in working salvation, the sure progress of God's will on earth even as it is in Heaven and the absolute certainty of the final outcome. Of course, it is by faith that we understand this (Heb. 11:3). We believe these things because God has declared them in His Word. We live in this out-working process by faith not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7). Many times we will not be able to *see* God's working because He often hides Himself (Isa. 45:15). Many times we will not *feel* that God is working His purpose out as year succeeds to year, nor will we *feel* that God is working *in* our personal lives and working *through* us to accomplish His perfect plan. But the truth is, He is at work. He tells us this, and says that this is the reason for and the significance of our being brought to Christ.

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1:9-10

These truths we are being taught should counteract the feelings of insignificance and aimlessness that often blur our spiritual sight and steal our joy in God. We have been given to know what angels do not know (1 Pet. 1:10-12) and we have positive participation in God's plan. We are given wisdom in Christ and ability to act on it and insight or understanding as we think things through. We are told of God's plan which was brought into operation when the fulness of the time had come (Gal. 4:4) and Jesus was born. And this plan operates through to the fulness of the time of history when Jesus will come again. There may be an echo here of the words of the risen Christ in Acts 1:6-10, and we must grasp by faith that the times and seasons of history are in God's hands alone. By faith we rest in the fact that every knee will bow to Christ who alone is Lord (Phil. 2:9-11). By faith Paul declares in the great resurrection chapter (1 Cor. 15:20-28) that the work goes on until death itself is abolished and Christ delivers up the completed kingdom to God, and God is all in all (not "everything to everyone" as in RSV). So vast is Paul's concept of the "mystery" that he conceives of the whole physical creation being delivered from bondage and brokenness (Rom. 8:18-25) and declares that all our personal battles and struggles are part and parcel of this amazing process. The battles and bruises are not for nothing: We do not yet see all things put under Christ (Heb. 2:8,9) but we do see, by faith, Christ crowned with glory and honour, and this is our assurance. The end of the story of world history is not a negative catastrophe brought about by man's folly and rebellion (although all man's stupidity and rebellion are encompassed by God's sovereign providence). The end is a new heaven and new earth, a whole new and perfect order of existence of which God Himself is shown to be both architect and builder. (2 Pet. 3: 11-13; Heb. 11:10).

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1:11-12

What a magnificent position we have been given! We have been chosen, destined and appointed. It should make us want to be worthy, in person and activity, of the one through whom we have been called, even Jesus Christ the Son of God who loved us and gave Himself for us (Gal.6:14). In this plan of God, whereby He will bring to pass all He planned when He first created the world, we are called to live to the praise of God's glory (v.6, 11-12). This refers not only to our God glorifying service but to the fact that God's glory and grace are seen in the very fact that sinners such as we are have been saved, transformed and given a destiny of glory. As the Catechism says, "The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever" and the very fact that in a world like this there are people who manifestly enjoy God speaks of His glorious grace. There is much debate

as to the exact significance of the word "chosen" (made heirs, or appointed) but if we think in Old Testament terms of how God chose a people, made them His own, redeemed them, brought them to their land and allotted the families their appointed territory, we will have grasped the essential truth (1 Kings 8:50-53). Think of the story in Nehemiah 3:13-14 of how in the building of Jerusalem everyone had an allocated share, some having to work in the inglorious area of the "Dung Gate". Take as an illustration the scene on a building site. It usually is very dirty, seemingly disorganised and very unpromising. But there is plan, direction, supplies, and the driving force of the owner and his master-of-works. Think of your Christian life in these terms and recall the words of the hymn that says, "Content to fill a little space, if Thou be glorified." (A.L. Waring)

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1:11-12

The various translations of the word "chosen" (11) seem to link with the reference to "inheritance" in v.14. In v.11 we have reference to God's plan and will, and it helps our understanding if we think in this way. We are heirs in respect of future blessings and because God has written our names into "His will" we cannot be denied our inheritance, no-one can take it from us, and all that God has promised will come to us in this world and the next. We have no need to fear the future because it is guaranteed by God's personal guarantee, who is Christ. What is more, God is committed to see to it that by His own power all things are made to work together to bring to pass His will for His people. God works in all things, and God causes all things to work together for good for them that love Him (Rom. 8:28). God is never conditioned or limited by men (Isa. 43:13) and something of the glorious sweep of His powerful purposes through history is expressed in the great doxology in Rom. 11:33-36. But the principle applies also on a very personal level, as the Psalmist makes plain when he affirms that our times are in God's hands (Ps. 31:15), and that the unsleeping God keeps our going out and coming in (Ps. 121:8). Even though in some measure of panic we feel ourselves at the ends of the earth, even there and then God's right hand of salvation holds us (Ps. 139:1-12). If only we knew our Bibles as we should, we would be able to call to mind in every situation some of the glorious promises of God concerning what He has planned and purposed for His people. What He has promised He will bring to pass. These are indeed promises to stand on.

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1:13-14

This great passage (3-14) began with a call to bless God. Three times Paul speaks of ascribing praise to the glory of God (6, 12, 14) and we have to sense the worship of his heart, his thrill in the Gospel and his sheer admiration as he considers the wonder of God's plan of salvation. We love to sing the metrical version of Psalm 105:1-5, 7, not least the words,

"Think on the works that He has done,
Which admiration breed;
His wonders, and the judgments all
Which from His mouth proceed."

This sense of thrill and wonder is found all through Scripture in utterances such as, "Who is a God like unto Thee, who pardons iniquity?" (Mic. 7:18); or "To whom then will you compare me?" (Isa.40:25); or in the doxologies in Revelation (Rev. 4:11; 5:12-14; 7:9-12). Compare this with the tendency to think, speak and sing about God almost exclusively in terms of our own experience, enjoyment and fulfilment. We can end up thinking of God almost in terms of a servant whose task it is to make us happy. Paul's attitude is much more one of saying with real astonishment, "Why, O Lord, such love to me?" He has been speaking of a salvation that began in eternity in the loving, redeeming heart of God (4) and that finds its fulfilment in eternity (10, 14). The whole of his life is based on and encompassed by this salvation. He has spoken of it in terms of God the Father who planned and purposed; God the Son who died the once-for-all atoning death for sin; and now he speaks of salvation in terms of God the Holy Spirit, the great dynamic, seal and guarantee of salvation. The whole eternal Trinity is involved in our salvation. This should awe and thrill our hearts, and lift our thoughts to a higher plane. Compare Paul's similar exposition of salvation in Rom. 8:26, 27, 31-34. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are all *for us*. Who can be against us?

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1:13-14

In the outworking of God's plan of redemption note very carefully the significant emphasis on hearing and believing the word of truth. This requires, of course, the true, assured preaching and proclaiming of the message of the Gospel. We must never lose our confidence in the Gospel nor in the business of preaching which is God's appointed method (1 Cor. 1:21) and by which faith is kindled (Rom. 10:14-17). If the preached Word is not heard and responded to in faith there is no benefit, except perhaps some mental stimulation and emotional stirring (Rom. 1:16; Heb. 2:1-3; 4:1-2). Paul emphasises that hearing the Gospel and believing unto salvation is accompanied by the sealing by the promised Holy Spirit. The "seal" can be likened to the hallmark put on silver to guarantee its authenticity. But we must not exalt this "sealing" by the Spirit into some special, advanced, secret spiritual experience whereby we gain assurance of salvation and holiness. The confirmation that we are truly "in Christ" is that the Holy Spirit, who is given to every believer, begins to produce increasingly, new desires and hopes. The Spirit urges the believer on, keeping him fixed on Christ, refusing to let him settle down in casual discipleship, and producing in him the desire and determination to set Christ first and to go after Him with singleness of purpose (Phil. 3:12-14). If this desire to "press toward the mark" is not present in some measure, it would seem that the "seal" is missing, and, without the "hallmark" our faith and conversion are suspect. But note carefully that Paul speaks of this sealing by the Spirit in terms of a guarantee of life now, life all along the line, and life in Heaven. God sets His seal of ownership on us, and nothing can pluck us from His hand or separate us from His love (Jn. 10:29; Rom. 8:37-39).

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1:13-14

These words about being sealed with the Spirit are meant to reassure us about our salvation rather than make us question if something is missing. Paul states clearly that those who believed *were* sealed with the Spirit who had been *promised* (Acts 1:8; John 14:16,26). This confirms that our salvation is God's work and it bears His stamp of completion. There is a children's hymn that says:

"Then on each He setteth
His own secret sign:
'They that have my Spirit,
These,' saith He, 'are Mine.'"

The Lord knows them that are His (2 Tim. 2:19) and no-one can change that. Both AV and NIV speak of the Holy Spirit as an "earnest" or "deposit" guaranteeing our inheritance. We do not have a "first instalment" of the Spirit, because He is a Person and therefore indivisible. We either have Him or we do not have Him (Rom. 8:9-11).). But every believer *does* have the Holy Spirit. "Think what Spirit dwells within thee" (Lyte), and that indwelling Spirit is the pledge that all God has promised will be ours in full measure in spite of everything that would seek to hinder (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:1-5). The Spirit who indwells the believer is the Spirit of truth who teaches and leads us into the truth (John 16:13); the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead; the Spirit who enables us to be holy; who leads us; who teaches us to pray and who prays for us (Rom. 8:11, 13, 14, 26, 27). The Spirit within us means Christ is in us in all the virtue and victory of His atoning death and glorious resurrection. The Spirit within is the Spirit of Him who said He was the resurrection and the life (John 11:25-26). If this is true, the certainties are glorious and the possibilities limitless.

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1:15-16

The words "for this reason" indicate that what follows is based on and emerges from what has been stated in v.3-14, namely, the theology of salvation. We do well to read that exposition to grasp the greatness of what God has done for us and the certainty of it, so that we will be encouraged in our prayers, just as Paul says he is encouraged. One reason why our prayers tend to be limited and hindered is simply that we allow *our* problems, difficulties, battles and failures to loom so large in our thinking and feeling that they obscure the sight of our great God and rob us of the thrill, enjoyment and anticipation of the great salvation that is ours in Jesus Christ. When we pray we are speaking to the God who owns the world (Ps. 50:10); who sets the stars in their courses (Ps. 147:4; Gen. 1:16) and who so loved us He gave His Son to die for us (John 3:16,17). When we pray we are operating on a basis that is immensely and eternally secure, and are simply exercising our right to come to God,

because we are His children and part of His eternal purpose. It is God Himself who inspires us to pray by the Spirit within. All this is the practical outcome of salvation. In the outward, objective sense, Christ has qualified us for the inheritance, giving us the title deeds, so that no-one has the right to query let alone deny our claim to salvation and acceptance (Col. 1:12-14). Inwardly, subjectively, in terms of daily experience, the indwelling Spirit enables us to take possession of what is ours and in that way to live in the light and in the power of the world to come. It is unnecessary and indeed wrong to try to inculcate a "mood" for prayer, because the Devil is an expert at manipulating feelings. Our prayer life and our practical life must be based on facts: the fact of God and the fact of a great salvation that is sure and certain.

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1:15-16

Having spelled out in detail the facts of salvation, Paul now prays it all in, and this points to a very important lesson concerning the preaching of the Gospel. An older generation used to pray, "Follow with Thy blessing the preaching of Thy Word." In preaching we have often referred to Eph. 6:18-19; Col. 4:3-4; and 2 Thess. 3:1 regarding praying for the proclamation of the Gospel. But we need also to be reminded of the need to water the seed sown with our prayers. We know that God's Word will not return empty (Isa. 55:9-11) and that God watches over His Word to perform it (Jer. 1:12). But that does not eliminate prayer. And prayer is vital not only for preaching but for all we mean by fellowship. Paul had worked a long time in Ephesus and he was now in prison in Rome. He heard of the faith of the converts, how they were standing fast, and how they were manifesting the love of Christ in their own fellowship and reaching out to others. His heart rejoiced and he gave thanks for them! Just imagine what encouragement that must have been to these believers. He assured them of his prayers for them. He had them in his heart (Phil. 1:7) and they were his partners in the Gospel. This was not self-indulgent fellowship, and we must be careful never to let our pleasure in each other in the context of the church degenerate into that. Paul saw himself and them as bound together in sweet, strong, happy bonds for the sake of Jesus and the Gospel. This is how true joy and satisfaction are found. Note finally how the great theologian, missionary statesman, church leader, world-significant figure was not in any sense desirous of detaching himself from the prayer life of the fellowship. There are some who, when they begin to feel they are important and senior, leave the praying to others. If we are too spiritual, or too busy to be at the prayer meeting there is something wrong.

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1:17

We study this great prayer verse by verse, but several times in coming days we should read right through to the end of the chapter, firstly to sense the sweep of the prayer and secondly to become aware that this man Paul does indeed know God and dwells in His presence. But it is clear from the prayer that Paul wants all of us to enjoy this same close fellowship with God. This will be even clearer when we come to the second prayer in 3:14-21. In the first prayer (15-23) he prays for our hearts to be enlightened, illuminated, lit up in order to see and to grasp the glory and hope of the Gospel. In the second prayer (3:14ff) he prays that we might grasp and experience the full measure of God's love. In his other prison prayers (Phil. 1:9-12), he prays that our love will have discernment and our lives will be a witness, and in Col. 1:9-12 he prays that our behaviour will be worthy of God and our service be fruitful. In each of the prayers he asks for wisdom, understanding and knowledge, and in today's verse he makes it plain that this is something that God Himself must give to us. It is a matter of revelation, our eyes being opened. It is not something that we can discover and think out for ourselves, and this is why we need to bring ourselves again and again to Scripture, which is the record of God's revelation of Himself, in the way He chose to reveal Himself, and in the words He gave by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20, 21). There are many church issues and practices being discussed and decided about today in terms of "the current thinking of society". But that is not the basis on which God's church is to be led. Notice that it is not mere "head" knowledge that is needed. It is knowledge of *Him*. We need to know God on a personal level.

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1:17

We have not yet focused on the God to whom we pray. We have already had a description of God in v.3 but here "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ" seems to refer to the human experience of Jesus and makes us think of the God to whom the man Christ Jesus prayed. The Gospels make plain how Jesus looked to and trusted the Father and delighted to do His will. Read John 17:1-5, 11, 21, 24, 25 and sense the utter trust and glad obedience. Even in the dark agony of Gethsemane it was to His Father that He prayed. But in the dark depths of the Cross, in the mystery of atonement, when He offered Himself without spot in the power of the Spirit, it was to His God that He cried. (Heb. 5:7; 9:14; Mk. 15:33-34). A Concordance will reveal the frequency with which God is referred to as Father. Here Paul describes God as the Father of glory (glorious Father). He is the Father of an infinite majesty (Heb. 1:1-3; 8:1), Father of lights (Jas. 1:17), with whom there is no change and to whom glory belongs naturally (Ps. 29: 1-11; Habak. 3:3-4). The heavens declare the glory of God (Ps. 19:1), and the Psalmist sings again and again of the glorious majesty of God and of His works (Ps. 145:1-5). Read Psalm 93 and Psalm 95:1-7 and let the call to worship and to bow down stir mind, heart and spirit. Be still. Don't always be rushing around, even in Christian activity. Be still, and let the knowledge of God and of His presence bring peace and hope to your heart and soul. Soon we shall be singing and reading the Christmas story and the words, "The glory of the Lord shone round about them." That should remind us of how in Jesus the "presence" of the Father of glory came down to dwell with us. Remember that God's glory and His goodness cannot be separated (Ex. 33: 12-15, 17-19).

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1:18

You can imagine Paul saying, "If only these Christians could see what Christ has brought them." When he prays for God to open the eyes of their hearts he may have had in mind the story in 2 Kings 6: 15-17. It is only God who can clear away the mists of uncertainty from our eyes and hearts so that we can begin to see that our riches in Christ are far beyond all calculation and imagination. Read 1 Cor. 2:9-10, especially in the Authorised Version. We are dealing here with God's intentions and provisions and with the possibilities open to us. In a real sense we are speaking of seeing what is invisible (Heb. 11:27; 2 Cor. 4:18). It is by faith that we see, and this requires us to make deliberate effort to *think* on these things. Paul speaks of "hope" to which we are called. This refers first to the objective fact that God has called us to share His glory (Rom. 5:1-2; 8:28-30; 1 Thess. 2:12; 2 Pet. 1:3; 1 Pet. 5:10; Jude 24). Do we think enough about our marvellous destiny, about which there is not the slightest doubt for those who are in Christ? Paul wants us secondly to know and feel subjectively the thrill of this sure hope of glory, because we know where we are going. This hope is the anchor of our souls, sure and steadfast (Heb. 6:17-20). An anchor does two things; it holds you from drifting with tide, and storms, and it can pull you in spite of every contrary force. Many people say, "I hope" when they are full off doubt and not at all sure how things will work out. But for the Christian it is *sure* hope, because God has called us to it and God's purpose cannot be frustrated. Well may we sing "My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus blood and righteousness." (Mote)

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1:18

We are getting near Christmas and it is appropriate that we should be thinking of the glory of the Lord shining rounds about us. When we think of the Babe of Bethlehem we must think also of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, and how true it is, as the hymn writer declares, that "The Lamb is all the glory in Immanuel's land." Paul speaks of the riches of the glorious inheritance God gives to His people and shares with His people. Our salvation inheritance and our heavenly inheritance are one and the same thing, and it is indeed many-splendoured. Everything about God's salvation is on a grand scale, and the "promised land" is spoken of as "a land flowing with milk and honey." Little wonder the Psalmist speaks of pleasures forever and fulness of joy at God's right hand (Ps 16:11). Peter speaks of an inheritance that is without flaw having been reserved for us (1 Pet. 1:3-5). Some versions refer to God's inheritance among the saints and that speaks of something shared in the near presence of God. Think of the blessing we know even here in this world when, in church for example, we feel God's nearness. That is but a faint foretaste of what it will be one day. But the phrase "God's inheritance in the saints" suggests God's pleasure when He gathers His saints together in glory. Heb. 2:10

speaks of bringing many sons to glory and we could link that verse with Col. 1:27, “Christ in you, the hope of glory”. Think of God the Father with all His children gathered round Him. All will enjoy each other’s company and there will never be a shadow of any kind.

“There is a land of pure delight,
Where saints immortal reign;
Infinite day excludes the night,
And pleasures banish pain.”

(Watts)

We are on our way. That is our sure hope.

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1:19

We may digress just a little on Christmas Eve to remind ourselves that the immeasurable greatness of God's power came down to earth for the salvation of sinners in Jesus, born of Mary in the little town of Bethlehem. That scene in the stable seems far removed from any thought of God's mighty power. But that is to assess spiritual principles and issues on the basis of circumstances and appearances rather than on the basis of faith. Of course, all through Jesus' life, right from the time Mary and Joseph fled from the fury of Herod, appearances suggested that He was indeed despised and rejected of men. And on the Cross, which was the focus of the Saviour's coming from long before Bethlehem, Jesus seemed totally and utterly weak. And yet the stable, the Cross and the empty tomb unite in the great declaration that the Saviour, and the salvation God had promised from eternal years, had in fact come. Read Luke 1:26-38 and see how the outworking of God's great promise involved the lives of ordinary, godly people being caught up into His scheme of things in a way that baffled them and called on them for great faith and trust. We have no idea what Mary's thoughts were about how it would all work out as she as aware of the child growing in her womb. Her simple but profound faith would look to the God of promise, who does all things well. But what happened as the time drew near? Read Luke 2:1-7. There was a new wave of taxation, a long journey to be taken, and in Bethlehem a fruitless search for accommodation. Where was God in all this? It is not easy to believe when nothing seems to be working out. But God *was* there. His time had come (Gal. 4:4). The Prince of Glory, the Saviour of the world, was born for us on earth below in a way and in a place that made clear that not even the lowliest person would feel excluded.

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1:19

We do not leave Christmas behind, because the good news of the Gospel concerns the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16). But what we have to grasp is that God's power, which Paul describes as great beyond measurement, is not something that is remote and detached. Yes, God is separate from His creation and He rules over the progress of history in His absolute providence. That sovereign providence watches over us, orders our ways, and keeps our going out and coming in (Ps. 121:7, 8). But Paul, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, declares the truth that God's great power is *in us* (RSV) who believe. Never forget that there is a clear distinction between believers and unbelievers, and the predicament of unbelievers will be expounded in the opening verses of chapter 2, showing them to be victims of their own natures and of the evil powers of the world. But believers are different. We have been set free and endowed with power within us. That power of the Holy Spirit, which was instrumental in bringing us to Christ by many and varied routes, is now within us to make effective in us and through us all God's marvellous purposes. That Spirit is at work in us, generating new hopes and desires, confirming faith and making us ever more sure and confident about the unseen things of our eternal inheritance. Read Rom. 8:12-17, especially the reference to the Holy Spirit and our own spirit. His desires become our desires. He urges us on and keeps us right. Even when we feel bleak, desolate, uninspired, with little thought of God or desire for Him, that blessed Spirit, comforter and encourager indeed (John 15:26), will not let us settle down. The Spirit within insists, “You belong to Christ by right of redemption and it is my business to see to it that you will go with Him.” What a comfort! We are not alone and we do not go on in our own strength. Whatever else we are, we are not weak. That is the message of v.19.

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1:20-21

Here is a detailed description of the power that is in us by the Holy Spirit. It is the power of the resurrection, ascension and exaltation of Jesus Christ. It is the power by which the whole kingdom of sin and Satan was totally overthrown. But, lest we confuse power with commotion, remember the amazing quietness of the actual event of the Resurrection. Remember too the surprise of the disciples when they first met the risen Christ, and how some of them failed to recognise Him (John 20:14; Lk. 24:16, 32). But, as they grasped the fact of Resurrection victory, the whole world began to know the joy and power of the message of the Gospel. In like manner we have to recognise the fact that the Resurrection power of Christ's victory is ours, not simply operating on our behalf but actually dwelling within us. The possibilities are limitless, first to bring us to mature development in Christ and also to use us in the service of the Gospel. Again, remember that in the story of the Resurrection it was the group of disciples, who were all complicated characters and failures in service, who were taken up in the "power of the resurrection" so that they turned the world upside down (Acts 17:6), becoming people who counted it a great privilege to be allowed to suffer for Jesus' sake (Acts 5:41). What a word of encouragement this is, and we must not allow the Devil to take it away from us by turning our thoughts in on ourselves to brood on whether or not we have strong faith. If we look back to v.19 the phrase "us who believe" is a description of what a Christian is, not a condition of God's working. Many a believer is tormented by the thought that "if only he had had enough faith" things would have been different. Don't focus on your faith; focus on your mighty God and His glorious salvation.

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1:20-21

The emphasis in v.21 is on the risen Christ who is enthroned in glory at the right hand of the Father (Heb. 1:1-3). This is an aspect of the truth we tend to forget about because the pressures of the world confuse us. Is it not true that with Christmas past we tend to think of the *end* of the year and the *uncertainties* of the coming year with so much that we do not know and cannot be sure about? But we can be sure that Jesus is on the throne.

"Lo! within a manger lies
He who built the starry skies;
He who, throned in height sublime,
Sits amid the cherubim."

In many churches at the end of the year people will sing,

"Peace, perfect peace, our future all unknown?
Jesus we know, and He is on the throne."

This is indeed practical theology; truth we have to count on, truth to live by. When we are told that Christ "sits" at God's right hand we are to understand that His work is totally finished (Heb. 10:11-14) and the issues are no longer in doubt (Ps. 68:20 AV). Try to imagine the thrill of Paul's heart as he penned these words to be read by Christians in the thick of the battle. He affirms that our mighty Saviour is seated "far above" all powers and persons we can ever meet. His is not a narrowly won victory, although it was won at great cost. No matter where we look, no matter what evil powers and principles we may become aware of, no matter the activities of Hell and hellish people, we must take our stand on this: Christ is greater. Jesus Himself said it in John 16:33.

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1:20-21

The Saviour who is ours and whose power is within us is declared to be far above all the things mentioned in v.21, whatever these things are and whether or not they are presently manifest or will emerge in future days. This is a comfort indeed. We view world politics; the power and spread of evil philosophies and religions; manifestations of the para-normal, the occult and Satanism; and the increasing bestiality of human nature. We wonder just what will yet emerge and we could fear. There is no need. All that is evil has already been defeated (Col. 2:15). All that is meant by rule, authority, power, dominion and every title has to be seen as created beings under divine control and direction in order to carry out God's purposes (Col. 1:15-18). When we ask why it is that we see so many activities and victories of evil men and devils, we must answer that it pleases and serves God and furthers His good purposes for us and for the world to allow evil to operate. Read Psalm 2:1-4. Read also the parable of the Tares and Wheat (Matt. 13:24-30), where it is made plain that not even the full

operation of evil can prevent the Lord's full harvest. Read Ps. 73:1-3, 12-17, and see how the godly man got confused when he forgot the sovereignty of the righteous God who allows some evil and prevents other evil. We must not ever think that things are out of control or that evil has snatched the initiative from God. Christ is enthroned and is head over all persons and principalities, things rational, non-rational and supernatural; things organic or inorganic, visible or invisible. And, because this is so, there is simply nothing in the whole order of creation that can separate us from the love of God or interfere with His gracious and glorious purposes for us. Read Rom. 8:31-39. Remember also that God's sure plan is glory for us (Rom. 8:28-30). He will settle for nothing less. Aren't you glad?

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1:22-23

The last phrase of this chapter is difficult but the message of these two verses is clear and encouraging. Christ is head over all things in the interest of the church. "The entire command and government of the universe" (Calvin) is given to Christ and it is in that capacity that Christ was appointed Head of the Church. As Head of the Church, which is His body, Christ not only rules but supplies its very life, sharing that life with His church in understanding sympathy and tender love. Cf. 4: 15-16; 5:23-29. "Intimate union, dependence, and community of life, are the main ideas expressed by this figure, the head of the body." (Hodge) The great difficulty now is to determine the meaning of "the fulness of him who fills all in all", and such notes as these may not be the place for a discussion, which in the various commentaries runs to several pages. We are taught in Col. 1:19 that the fulness of the Godhead is in Christ. Eph. 4:13 speaks of Christians, in the fellowship of the church, growing up into the fulness of Christ. In John 1:16 there is reference to our receiving from His fulness grace upon grace. Col. 2:9-10 seems to refer to our being filled full with all the fulness of God in Christ, who is the head over all. This last filling may refer to the church rather than the individual believer. Some commentators say that the church is the fulness of Christ, because it is filled by Him. Others say the church is the fulness of Christ in that it fills or complements or even completes His mystical Person. These are deep realms and we give another day to their consideration.

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1:22-23

Since Paul is seeking to encourage the Ephesian believers, we consider these verses in that light. In referring to the church as Christ's body he emphasises that they are no longer merely individual believers living in the locality of Ephesus. They, together with all who call on the name of the Lord (1 Cor. 1:2), constitute one living body of which Christ is the head. This body, animated by His life, is the vehicle of Christ's thought and purpose and the expression of all that He is, that is, His fulness. In Cor. 12:12-13 there is such a close union of members, head and body, that there is a suggestion that Christ is not complete without the church. Indeed, a bridegroom without a bride does not make sense. Someone has put it that in the resurrection glory Christ without His church is like Adam without Eve in the Garden of Eden. This is the sense in which we said yesterday that the church complements Christ. "What an encouragement it is to hear that, not until He has us as one with Himself, is He complete in all His parts, or does He wish to be regarded as whole." (Calvin) This does not for a moment suggest that Christ is or ever could be incomplete separated from us. The church, which is His body, is the sphere in which and by means of which He who is the fulness of all is able to realise and display all His attributes and potential. This is why we must lift up our heads to see what we are made part of, by God's grace. This is why we must never be disheartened when, as part of the church, we are going through difficult spells. See the church as filled with all the fulness of Christ. This is its glory.

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2:1

New Year's Day is an appropriate time to look back, to review the past, to recognise the great wonder of God's goodness to us, and then to look forward to all that God plans for us and to do with us in days to come. If chapter 1 expounds the God we have, this chapter expounds the salvation we have. We have been shown in the first chapter the Person, Power and Purposes of God and we have been taught that salvation originates in God's sovereign grace. We have been shown that the individual believer and the church are from eternity to eternity

held and secured in the saving purposes of God, which purposes go forward positively and gloriously in spite of men or devils. Paul has prayed that we would be enabled to grasp the facts of salvation and so begin to live in the thrill, assurance and hope of the Gospel. Remember that the facts stand whether or not at any moment we feel the thrill of them. But we will thrill if we hold together what God has done for us (the past), what He is doing for us now (the present), and what He is going to do for us (the future). We are reminded in today's verse that in past experience we were dead *in* (not just *through*) trespasses and sins. Our condition was one of spiritual deadness. We were born sinners; we did not just become sinners as a result of wrong things we did. We did wrong because by nature we were wrong and in relation to God we were helpless and hopeless. There was nothing we could do to remedy our situation BUT GOD (v.4) acted. There is an old hymn that says, "What a wonderful change in my life has been wrought, since Jesus came into my heart." Note that it was Jesus who came. He took the initiative and, as another hymn says, "While I passed my Saviour by, His love laid hold on me." This is a good day for thanksgiving.

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2:1-3

To start the year with clear and true thoughts about salvation, so that we will understand the teaching of these verses, read 2 Cor. 5:17-19; Rom. 6:4; Gal. 2:20 which teach the total transformation which has taken place in every believer. Read also Rom. 5:1-2 and see how, in Christ, we have peace with God in relation to the past, grace from God in relation to the present, and hope in God in relation to the future. This is salvation, and here in Ephesians chapter 2 Paul speaks of it in v.1-10 in terms of being made alive, and in v. 11-22 in terms of being made one in Christ. Christian believers are men and women raised from the dead to newness of life and this new life finds its expression, growth, continuance and service in being brought together in one living body, fellowship, family which is the church. Paul's teaching emphasises the personal nature of faith and salvation but guards against individualism which causes people to "do their own thing" without ever committing themselves to any congregation of God's people. Such an attitude is neither spiritual nor biblical. In expounding the wonder of salvation Paul begins by making very plain what it means *not* to be a Christian. An unbelieving sinner is not alive, but dead. He is not free, but trapped in what he is by nature and personality; not developing into full human dignity, but far more conditioned by the spirit of the world and the Evil One himself, than he is ever aware of until he finds himself saying, as so many have said, "I never thought I would do that". Since this is the spiritual condition of the sinner then every conversion, every coming to Jesus, every acceptance of salvation is a miracle of God's grace, a resurrection from the dead and a transportation from death to life and from the power of Satan to God. (1 John 3:14; John 5:24; Acts 26:18) All this, as we have said before, takes place in the context of the preaching of the Gospel which is God's ordained method of working salvation (1 Cor. 1:21). Taken somewhat out of context, John 5:25 gives a marvellous picture of what happens when the Gospel is preached.

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2:1-3

When so much contemporary thinking is conditioned by God-excluding humanism, we need to listen carefully to what the Bible says about human nature. We are told here what we were apart from Christ. Sinner man is not just sick, weak, limited, under-privileged and needy, although he is all that. He is not just bad, fallen in nature (Jer. 17:9; Ps. 51:5). He is spiritually dead in relation to God, a condition of total helplessness and inability. His need is not just for education, opportunity and encouragement, but for resurrection, life from the dead. He needs to be born anew, born from above (John 3:3-7) and this is something God alone can do by the Holy Spirit whose instrument is God's Word (1 Pet. 1:23). It is a terrible condition to be in to have a "sinner-heart" because it means we are programmed to sin, not in a fatalistic sense but in the sense of being held responsible for our sin. The Bible is devastatingly honest about this, as we see in such Scriptures as Gen. 6:5 and Rom. 3:9-19. If by nature man is under the power of sin there is no point in just calling man to be better, to try harder, because he cannot. Nor is there hope in humanistic socialism whose philosophy is that if man is given help to express and develop himself then he will rise to true dignity. To use Wesley's words, man is "fast bound in sin and nature's night". That is the plight of man and it can be answered only by the power of God which quickens him into new life whereby he is then able to believe, respond, learn and become, in personality and practice, a new

creature in Christ. The Gospel is preached; God's Word is living and life-giving, and the sinner hears, realises this is for him and he believe on the Lord Jesus Christ unto salvation.

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2:1-3

There is stills a further element to grasp if we are to understand the human situation and predicament apart from Christ. Left to ourselves, human life is spoken of as following the course of this world, which is described vividly in 1 John 2:15-17; 5:19 in terms of Satan and his powerful influence. The sinner's life-style, inspiration and motivation, are then spoken of plainly as following the prince of the power of the air, that evil person whose influence is everywhere present. People mock at the idea of a personal Devil influencing their lives but so often when evil things are done and people are challenged as to why they acted so, they reply, "I don't know. I couldn't help it." In the present generation, of course, there is much more talk about evil powers and spirits, and the reality of Satan is more generally accepted. We may think we are clear of such dark areas of life but it may be that so far we have been strangely protected. What if the restraints were withdrawn? The third thing said about the sinner's condition is that he is motivated by the spirit of disobedience so that there is an instinctive inclination to go against law and against God. We can see such a contrary spirit in tiny children but when we see it in adults it is frightening in its un-reason. Paul speaks of this later in Eph. 6:10ff. Here he shows us how we are conditioned by what we are, by what we are becoming, by environment and association, by the basest desires of body and mind, and that we are by nature children of wrath (Rom. 1:18). If we even begin to see and feel these truths we shall have a true idea of how much we need a God-given salvation. We certainly cannot save ourselves. We do not have the power, even if we had the inclination.

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2:4-6

In contrast to our hopeless predicament on our own, Paul now expounds what we are in Christ. God was not content simply to sympathise and certainly did not wait for us to improve. Being rich in mercy and moved by His great love, God looked on those towards whom His settled indignation, wrath and judgment were directed and He acted for their salvation. Read John 3:16-18; Rom.5:6-8; 1 John 3:1. If we ask why God should do this for such undeserving sinners, the only answers answer lies in the wonder of His love. This is something which God not only displays and acts on but feels, and this is something we forget. When God sees what sin has done to men and women and through them to the whole of creation, it grieves Him in His heart (Gen. 6:6), and when all the appeals of His grace are resisted and refused there is sorrow and tears (Lk. 3:34: 19:41). But Paul speaks here of those who have in fact been brought to Christ through the Gospel and he says "you" (v.1) Gentiles, described in v.2,3, together with "us" Jews (v.4), with all our religious background and privilege which did not bring us salvation, God made alive together with Christ. Note carefully how the whole of salvation is shown to be the work of God. When we were dead, God made us alive. It was by God's grace that we were enabled to hear and believe the Gospel. It was by God's grace we were convicted of our sin and made to see and feel our need of a Saviour. It was by God's grace, not by our good works or our religious observances that we were saved. But note careful that it was "with Christ" that this great work of salvation was done. The love of the Father and the atoning death of the Son on the Cross are held together. It was God in His great love who paid the price of sin in His own Son who was made sin for us (2 Cor. 5:21) and who died the righteous for the unrighteous to bring us to Himself (1 Pet. 3:18).

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2:4-6

We do well to ponder the love that drew salvation's plan and the grace that brought it down to man in the person, life and work of the Saviour, Jesus Christ. Paul was always speaking of this theme (Titus 2:11; 3:3-7; 2 Tim. 1:10) and it thrilled his heart, especially when he considered just how great a salvation he had in Christ. He speaks of it in terms of passing from death to life (Acts 26:18). The contrast is as great as that. We were dead *in sin* and now we are alive *in Christ*. Paul spoke of himself as "a man in Christ" (2 Cor. 12:2). That is our position. We are incorporated into Christ, united to Him so that all the spiritual reality and vitality of His death and resurrection are ours (Rom. 6:5). Think of it in visual terms. Jesus Christ in His death and resurrection

comes down to us in our condition of lostness, bondage and deadness, and lifts us up in His victory over sin and death. We are not lifted back to the old level of humanity but to a new and higher level, to sit with Christ in the heavenly places. We are new people, with new life, living on a new level from which no one has the right to eject us. It means that what will be ours in God's eternal heaven is in fact ours now, so that we can live in the power of the world to come (Heb. 6:5). As believers we do not battle and struggle towards victory - we start there. We stand and live on victory ground and if we can but grasp this we will have a new attitude to life and a new resolve in facing and coping with all the inevitable battles and demands that are part and parcel of Christian life in a fallen world. This has to be believed, and as we do so we begin to lay hold on eternal life (1 Tim. 6:12). This resurrection life is not something God is going to give us one day when we get to heaven. It is ours now. We may not always feel it and people may have difficulty in believing this about us. But it is true. *We have been raised to newness of life in Christ.*

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2:4-6

This great transforming salvation which ushers in a completely new era of life for us through Christ is the work and gift of God. By grace we have been saved. We cannot emphasise it too often. It is the life of victory because we have been raised from the dead. It is the life of assurance, because we are seated with Christ in His glorious, complete triumph. It is a salvation life which cannot be qualified or reduced, let alone cancelled. We are in Him forever. Even if the world explodes or if in life everything seems to go wrong, this assured salvation cannot be changed. This salvation life is also an immense privilege because we are set in heavenly places. We are up among those who guide and control the destiny of the world. We are not any more insignificant irrelevant creatures and, for example, when we are gathered to pray we are in fact in the throne room of Almighty God and at the very hub of the universe. Why, oh why is prayer, for so many Christians, the Cinderella activity, fitted in when every other appealing thing or person has had full share of our time and energy? Since all this is true, this life we have in Christ is something to be enjoyed, not just in fellowship and friendship with one another, but with God the Father and God the Son in the communion of the Holy Spirit (1 John 1:3,7). God does not want rows and rows of mere ornaments. He wants sons and daughter to speak with and to walk with as He had planned from the beginning (Gen. 3:8-9; 5:22; Exod. 33:11). This is how it will be in eternity (Rev. 21:1-5; 22:1-5) but we certainly can taste the joys here on earth as we keep close to Jesus. This is "glory begun below" (Isaac Watts). It is the life of Heaven lived here on earth, and while we do taste the streams of it here, we will discover its ocean fulness in the glory of Immanuel's land. These last words are from the hymn, "The sands of time are sinking."

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2:7

For two days we have been thinking of all that we get in and from this great salvation which is ours by the free grace-gift of God. Little wonder there is a hymn that says, "Oh that will be glory for me!" But what about glory for *Him*? We are told in this one verse that in the coming ages, here in this life and in the world to come, our redeemed, transformed lives will be everlasting monuments testifying to and demonstrating the riches of God's grace and kindness. Earth and Heaven and Hell shall see the wonder of God's grace, and many, being astonished by the kindness that God has showered on miserable, undeserving sinners such as we are, will be made envious and desirous of having our God to be their God, and no wonder! We read something of this in our earlier studies in Zechariah (Zech. 8:20-23). There is an indication of something similar in Acts 4:13. Paul seems to have this in mind in Rom. 11:13-14. Think of how the commercial world devotes great skill to the business of dressing shop-windows in order to show their goods to best advantage so that people will want them. We are God's "shop-window". Think of the difference between jewels heaped in a dusty box and those set on velvet with light shining on them. In the latter case the priceless value is clearly seen. There is no doubt that God wants to display His grace in our transformed, enriched lives and people should be able to see the peace, confidence, hope and assurance that is ours in Christ. This is what it means to shine as lights in a wicked world (Phil. 2:15). The objective, of course, is to point to God's great goodness, not to draw attention to ourselves.

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2:8-10

In v.7-10 Paul is now speaking of what we *shall be*, although the full meaning of that will not be evident till we get to Heaven (1 John 3:2). But God has set the work in motion and He will complete it. This is the answer to those who unjustly criticise Christians for their poor quality lives. Just wait until God is finished with us! He will be satisfied (Isa. 53:11AV). Again in v.8-9 there is the emphasis that salvation is the gift of God's grace received by faith alone. This emphasis is necessary because of the tendency of the human heart to be proud, and the tendency, especially among "churchy" people, to think that by good works, trying our best and supporting "the church" we can get to Heaven. It is not easy to take the place of the empty-handed sinner and admit there is nothing we can do, but that is the way of salvation. We either abandon self and trust Christ or we abandon Christ and remain under the sentence of death. We believe what God says, and by faith we accept Christ. But even faith is the gift of God. It is not a self-generated change of mind and attitude (Acts 5:31). Boasting is excluded (1 Cor. 4:6-7). Salvation is not a "help". It is a gift when striving ends.

"And every virtue we possess,
And every victory won,
And every thought of holiness,
Are His alone." (Auber)

"To wash away the crimson stain.
Grace, grace alone availeth;
Our works, alas! are all in vain;
In much the best life faileth:

No man can glory in Thy sight
All must alike confess Thy might.
And live alone by mercy." (Luther)

Do you see how resolutely Paul points us to and leaves us with Jesus?

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2:8-10

We who have been brought to faith and salvation in Christ are described as God's workmanship, His handiwork which He is pleased and proud to put on show. His work is not just a work of power but of beauty; there is art, balance and usefulness in it; and we could almost speak of God's masterpiece. If man is spoken of as the crown of creation, how much more must redeemed man be the crown of the new creation? Such thoughts should make us consider just what value God sets on our persons and our activities. But all of this carries great responsibility. God looks for all that is meant by "good works" in rich variety in the lives of His children, not least to manifest the graces, the characteristics and the good deeds of Jesus. If we are born of God, then we should bear the family likeness and be like Jesus who went about doing good (Acts 10:38). He was the friend of sinners, to save them from their sins; the healer of broken hearts and lives; the One who went looking for the lost sheep; and the One who was so immensely patient with His slow, stumbling disciples. Faith that does not issue in good works is not faith at all, says James (Jas. 2:14-17). Hebrews 6:7-12 speaks of the things that accompany salvation and makes plain that it is the determination to go on in faith, and the emerging in life of Christian character that validate salvation (2 Pet. 1:3-11). Did not Jesus speak vividly of this in John 15:1-6? Think of it this way: what do we actually do for God? What do we do that is not primarily for ourselves and our own satisfaction, fulfilment and happiness? Is God's purpose for good works being fulfilled in our lives? We must study these verses again tomorrow with the help of other Scripture references.

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2:8-10

There is instruction and encouragement in the thought that we are God's workmanship, created for good works. God first works on us and in us, raising us from the dead and by His indwelling Spirit bringing us to new birth, new life and all the potential of new manhood. That new manhood has to be nurtured and developed (1 Pet. 2:2; Heb. 5:11-6:3; Eph. 4:13-15). Of course it has to be expressed in daily life (Phil. 1:27). Then God works

through us in our given circumstances of life and using our God-given natural talents and capacities. In many ways this means we get on with the business of living the Christian life without wasting too much time looking for guidance. Where we are is our place of service since God has put us there. Neither our personalities nor our circumstances have developed without Him or independently of Him. We are His workmanship just as creation was His workmanship. By His own word of power He brought creation into being out of nothing, He set order and system in it all, and He pronounced it good and pleasing in His sight. So it is with our salvation and, just as creation continues to be ordered and sustained by God's ever present power (Col. 1:15-17; 2 Pet. 3:7), so it is with the new creation that is our salvation life. Its beginning, continuance and final consummation are all in the gracious hand of God's sovereign power. This does not cancel out the "good works" Paul speaks of here. Indeed the willingness to work and to do it heartily is one of the signs of a true work of grace in the heart. Lazy, self-indulgent Christians are a contradiction in terms. But the works we now do are not in terms of do-it-yourself salvation, nor are they the wasteful, profitless destructive works of the flesh (Gal. 5:19-21). As new creatures in Christ we are now willing to will and to do His good pleasure and not our own (Phil. 2:12-13).

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2:11-12

Having expounded salvation in terms of having been *made alive* in Christ, Paul now in the rest of this chapter speaks of salvation in terms of having been *made one* in Christ. This begins to demonstrate the significance of the fellowship of the church and the need to be part of the church for growth in grace, for balanced and integrated service, and for a true apprehension of and expression of all we mean by salvation. Note how theological this whole epistle is proving to be. In chapter 1 we dealt with predestination, election, redemption, forgiveness, sovereign grace and the full sweep of God's plan and purpose from eternity to eternity. In the first half of the second chapter we have seen the glory of regeneration, salvation by grace and our union with Christ in His death and resurrection. Now the theme is reconciliation, the essential unity of all believers, and the glorious fellowship of the saints. It will help us to understand if we remember the deep antagonism and contempt that existed between Jews and Gentiles in Paul's day. To the Jews, the Gentiles were "dogs", outsiders, without value or significance; to the Gentiles, the Jews were proud, arrogant, claiming that they alone were of any value or significance to God. There was no love lost between the Jews "near" to God and the Gentiles "far off" (13, 17). But in the church in Ephesus there were "Gentiles and Jews in Jesus' fold" and possibly a big majority of Gentiles. Inasmuch as they had both been accepted by God in Christ Jesus they had to accept each other and had to see that they belonged to each other. This was God's doing (Gal. 3:28). They dared not contradict it.

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2:11-12

If chapter 1 expounded salvation in terms of God's sovereign, saving activity, chapter 2 expounds salvation in terms of our experience, showing the difference or transformation that salvation makes. It is important to note that the themes of "made alive" (2:1-10) and "made one" (2:11-22) are dealt with together because, although salvation is a very personal thing, life in Christ does not grow, develop, mature and express itself in merely individualistic terms. A Christian isolated from and independent of other Christians is really a contradiction. If we are "born anew" we are born into a new family and are part of it. To deny and abandon family is a wrong and evil thing. Paul has already shown what our condition and situation were apart from Christ (1-10). Now he addresses the Gentile converts especially but in doing so he exposes the false spirituality of the Jews. The Gentiles had been devalued and despised, made to feel unwanted and rejected, as if God had no place for them. The Jews, with all their past spiritual privileges (Rom. 9:1-5), had forgotten their calling to serve as a light to the Gentiles (Rom. 2:17-24). They had become spiritually proud and complacent, admiring their own spirituality and looking down on others. This is always a danger to those who are well taught and much privileged in the things of God. The person who is "born again" but is always telling people this, criticising *their* lack of spirituality, while his own life lacks the marks of humility, obedience, duty and service is not any different from the "liberal theologian" or "worldly churchman", save only that there is less excuse for the evangelical believer. If our Gospel privileges do not make us willing servants of others in the interest of their salvation there is something far wrong. To have a reputation for being alive but have no real evidences of true

Christian living is a dangerous condition (Rev. 3:1-3).

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2:11-12

In one verse full of negatives (12) Paul portrays the situation of the Gentiles before their conversion. They were Christless, stateless, friendless, hopeless and godless, that is, without God. To remember this is to be awakened to gratitude to God for what He has brought us in Christ. Look at the spiritual detail of what Paul says. We were separated from Christ in whom all the promises of God are fulfilled (2 Cor. 1:20). We were alienated from citizenship in the elect nation, with no rights or security. We were strangers to the whole idea of God's covenant promises, which are full of direction and destiny. We were without hope: no future, no expectation, nothing but what is now in a material sense, with life slipping away. And we were without God: an absent dimension in life which is testified to in our day by art, literature and music. How true a description of society and life is found in the words of the Psalmist, "God is not in all their thoughts" (Ps. 10:4 AV). This is a step worse than being antagonistic towards God and, when God is excluded from man's thinking and awareness, there is no controlling of the moral, social and spiritual landslide (Rom. 1:18ff). This is the society all of us have helped to create for the growing generation, making our children materialists, using the educational process to instil a lust for excellence so that "gains" in life will be great. Even in churches we kept silent about eternity as if this world was the only one that mattered. But life does not consist of possessions (Matt. 6:24; Lk. 12:15) and we cannot serve God and mammon. Life for so many is empty, pointless, disappointing and frustrating: nothing now and nothing to come. Nowhere to go. No sense of belonging or being cared for or mattering to anyone. How glad we are that Jesus came to seek and to save those who were lost (Lk. 19:10).

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2:13-16

Paul has been speaking of the emptiness, futility and hopelessness of life apart from Christ (11-12). When hope goes, despair leads to all kinds of vandalism. One Russian novelist spoke of "a land where there are no signposts, because there is nowhere to go." A philosopher in apostolic times said, "The best thing of all was not to be born, and the next best thing was to die." In the intellectual and cultural capital of Greece with all its glories Paul found a statue to "The Unknown God". When we look at and listen to contemporary society there is evidence of a lost, disordered, unfriendly, unhappy generation of men and women all at odds with each other. It was a wise man who said that "Man has not only lost his way, he has forgotten his address." Estrangement, competition, suspicion and friction seem to be the marks of life in a world adrift from God and if that was the end of the story all would be dark. In v.4 we had the words, "But God," and now in v.13 we have "But now." Of course we must see very clearly that the only alternative to the destructive alienation that is man's experience in the world is found "in Christ." It is in our union with Christ, on the basis of His atoning work, the shedding of His blood, by which sin's guilt, penalty and power were dealt with once for all, that we have salvation life. From whatever background we have come, religious or pagan, whatever our age, personality, gifts or lack of them, we believers are "in Christ" and are consequently "all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3: 26-28; Col. 3:11). Since we are all undeserving sinners, gloriously forgiven, there is no room for place or preference, as if there were better-class and poorer-class Christians. All divisions of class, intellect, colour, race, nationality, background and prejudice are swept away. Read Jesus' story in Matt. 18:21-35 and also the startling words in Matt. 6:14-16.

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2:13-16

It is only by careful study of these great epistles that we grasp clearly the basic doctrines of salvation and are then able to make them the foundation and motivation of our lives. Paul speaks of hostility, separation and reconciliation and we have to see that the effect of sin is to scatter and divide and the effect of Christ is to gather in and unite. Sin causes both personality and society to disintegrate, but Christ puts both together again. In the story of the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:22-24), we see that the effect of sin coming into the world was to separate man from God, to exclude him from blessing and fellowship, and therefore the first need is for man to be reconciled to God. This, God alone could do. But the Genesis story soon shows (Gen. 4:8; 6:5-12) that sin

separates man from man and introduces confusion, envy, killing and lack of peace. But God in Christ reconciles us, both to Himself and also to one another, breaking down the barriers and making a new people, who are His people.(2 Cor. 5:16-21). Peace was made through the blood of the Cross (Col. 1:20). The ceremonies and ordinances of God's Law, which down through history had marked out the Jews as a unique and significant people, had been abolished in Christ who had fulfilled the Law (Gal. 3:24-25). A new day had dawned. Hostility and competition were no longer needed. In Christ all who believe are made one new humanity, members together in one body in which our unique personalities and capacities complement each other as we are set together in a glorious spiritual mosaic (1 Pet. 2:4-5). In Christ we become our true selves for the very first time and that is what God wants us to be. We are all different but all needed and wanted (1 Cor. 12:22).

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2:17-18

A God-given, God-established peace is the only corrective to tension, competition and jealousy. Keep in mind the immense differences in culture, tradition and religious background of Jews and Gentiles and think of it in terms of "ignorant outsiders" being converted and coming into a congregation long established in its pattern of worship and life. The "old-timers" would want and even demand the new to "toe the line" because the pattern had been proved over the years. The new people would not be able to understand why some things were done and some forbidden, partly because they had never been taught and partly because some things are established by custom rather than by biblical requirement. In such a situation the Devil will soon have a congregation in a state of conflict so that worship and service will be neglected. Both "sides" have to see that it is only the grace of God that has brought them peace, not their traditional religion nor their outsider status. The work of Christ made peace (Col. 1:20). The gift of Christ is peace (John 14:27; 20:19). The apostles preached peace (Acts 10:36; Rom. 5:1). Peace with God, peace from God and the peace of God which passes understanding should make us so mightily glad that we have no time or inclination to mark and evaluate differences. After all, there are no special entrances into the presence of the Father and no separately marked cubicles in His presence. Whoever we are, we come by the one way into the presence of the one Father through the one Saviour, aided and inspired by the one Holy Spirit. As we stand in the Father's presence we should be thrilled, not surprised, by the different people we find there. What surprises there will be when we get to Heaven; we may be surprised by the bright shining of some whom we rather despised here on earth.

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2:19-22

With the words "so then"(RSV), consequently, Paul indicates he is summing up all he has been saying about the blessing and privilege of being made alive and made one in Christ. All we had been deprived of by sin is fully restored, and we must thrill to the glory of it. We are no longer strangers, outsiders, lodgers with no security, or visitors with no permanence. We belong, and cannot be denied our place, which has been given and secured by Christ. Of course, in the on-going life of the congregations of Christ's church we must see to it that we do not leave some feeling "out of it". Jesus has searching words about welcoming or neglecting others. He takes it personally (Matt. 25:34-40). Paul goes on to say that we are not just accepted, we are greatly honoured because we are fellow citizens with the saints, with full rights, privileges and, of course, responsibilities. What a boost to morale it is to consider that we are, in the right sense, "in with all the best people." We sing sometimes, "Hail, Abram's God and mine!" and we must see ourselves in company with all those of all the ages who have trusted God for salvation and have served Him in the Gospel. There are differences of personality, capacity and service but all are equal and equally necessary and valued, however humble and lowly their background education and gifts may be. As a corrective to pride we should often read 1 Cor. 4: 6-7 and as a corrective to separation, exclusivism and groupings according to preferences and secular skills, we should read 1 Cor. 12: 4-7, 12-27. The church of Jesus Christ should always be a family fellowship and not simply a peer-group, whether of age, interests or social standing. We had better read that most practical of epistles, James 2:1-9 and we will return to our present passage tomorrow.

2: 19-22

In Christ we are accepted, we belong and we have our honoured place, as we noted yesterday. We are in fact brothers and sisters, members of the household of God. We take our place in His "fireside family" (an old illustration which has lost much of its point in days of central heating). Family are not kept at the front door or in the entrance hall but are welcomed right into the heart of things, with the youngest child having as much right to be there as the oldest grandparent. The picture is of God as a Father with His children gathered round Him to hear His gracious words, to enjoy the pleasure of His company, and to benefit from the gracious influence of His Person. Think, for example, of the picture of "The Cottar's Saturday Night" in the poem by Robert Burns. How important it is to have time for each other, to speak and to listen to each other however humble the circumstances. The loss of this from family life has a great deal to do both with the breakdown of society and with the decline of the church. If, in the life and worship of a congregation, the old are left to be with the old, the young with the young, the clever with the clever, and those who speak "properly" with those like themselves, then there is separation, not fellowship. Each takes his or her place and each is equally loved. There are, of course, family rules and requirements, but love encourages and enables each one to grow and develop and to be his or her own true self. We belong to the family and so do others. We admire and are grateful for those who can do what we cannot do but we must not feel guilty or inferior. The little child's efforts please the Father and the family as much as the older children's accomplishments.

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2:19-22

Paul changes the illustration from family to a building, having earlier likened the church to a body (1:23). It is interesting to remind ourselves that the church is also spoken of in terms of Master/Disciples, Vine/Branches, Shepherd/Flock, and Bride/Bridegroom. So rich and full is the concept that all these figures are needed to teach the truth about our position, privilege and blessings in Jesus Christ. The church as the body of Christ is the instrument or means whereby He expresses Himself and carries forward His work of redemption in the world. The church as a "building" made of living stones, who are men and women saved in Christ Jesus, is spoken of as a holy temple into which God Himself comes to dwell. If we read Ps. 118:22-23, which is quoted in Mk. 12:10 and Acts 4:11, it seems that it is the top corner-stone that is referred to. But in Isa. 28:16 and 1 Cor. 3:11 it is the foundation stone. In 1 Pet. 2:4-8 there seems to be suggestion of both foundation and top corner-stone. This is not surprising since Christ is Alpha and Omega, the beginning and ending, the author and finisher of faith (Rev. 1:8; Heb. 12:2). In fact, Christ is everything and stands pre-eminent (Col. 1:18). If we fix our thoughts on Him we will begin to understand these verses.

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2:19-22

From what we said yesterday it is clear that Christ is the foundation-rock of the church, not the apostles and prophets, although they bore witness to Christ. There was no greater prophet than John the Baptist and he made it very plain that he was only a sign-post and a preparation for Christ (Matt. 11:9-11; John 1:19-28). Christ is the rock of foundation and the church built on Him is solid, stable and permanent. It is not just a local church but universal (1 Cor. 1:2) and it is growing and developing because it is made of *living* stones as 1 Pet. 2:5 makes plain. The word used for stones is "lithos", which means polished stones not just rough hewn lumps of rock, and these stones, chosen, prepared and "dressed" are, by the hand of the Master Builder, set in their place with matching and contrasting stones according to the plan of the Architect (Heb. 11:10). If we look back to v.10 we see that we (as individuals) are God's workmanship and we have to think of God fashioning and developing us in Christlike personality and character, growing in grace as 2 Pet. 3:18 describes it, and building ourselves up in our faith as Jude 20 describes it. Then, as living stones, prepared but still growing we are built into our place, and the building grows. The individual stones fulfil their function and express their beauty and glory in relation to each other and to the whole. This helps us to understand much of God's dealing with us. We are being polished and prepared to take our place in something whose glory we have scarcely begun to glimpse. Think on these things, and let gratitude, worship and wonder fill our hearts.

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2:19-22

In 1:13 Paul speaks of "you who heard and believed" (RSV); in 2:1 "you who were dead in sin"; in 2:12 "you who were separated from Christ", despised and of no value. Now in 2:22 he says "you also" have taken your place in this glorious building which is for God, and into which God is pleased to come to dwell. The great God of eternity, high and holy, of purer eyes than to behold iniquity wants to come to us (Ps. 80:1; Isa. 57:15; Hab. 1:13). This, of course, was the testimony of God to His people in the Old Testament in the pillar of cloud and fire that was with them in all their journeys. (Ex. 40:34-38). When Solomon built and dedicated the Temple, the glory of God came down (2 Chron.7:1-3). When the Saviour was born the message was the same, "God with us". Now, when we gather for worship, however great or humble the actual building may be, we must remember that the God of glory dwells among us. Jesus says that wherever two or three are gathered in His name He will be there in the midst (Matt. 18:20). Of course, the thought of God dwelling among us should not only thrill us but should challenge and inspire us individually and corporately to make sure that the "house" of our hearts, lives and churches should be clean worthy and warm to welcome such a wonderful guest. At the Incarnation "a stable place sufficed, the Lord God Almighty, Jesus Christ" (Rossetti), but He deserves better from us who have received so bountifully of His blessings and privileges. Read Rev. 21:1-4. What is true but hidden now, will then be manifest.

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3:1

Even the great mind and spirit of Paul are staggered by the sheer glory of the Gospel and the purposes of God for him and all sinners like him. Several times he breaks off his exposition (1:15; 3:1, 13) sometimes to launch into prayer, sometimes to explain the wonder of God's dealings with him and the ministry entrusted to him (3:1-6), and finally in 4:1 to apply the doctrines of the Gospel to the business of daily living. In today's single verse there are two significant things to ponder. The first is indicated by the phrase "for this reason" which insists that we review what Paul has been teaching in chapter 2 regarding the glory of our personal salvation together with the glorious concept of the church comprised of both Jews and Gentiles redeemed by Christ. Paul was held in prison by the power and authority of Rome, and he was well aware of the glory of the Roman Empire and of the fact that already there were signs of its decay and decline. But he was also very aware that the glory of the Kingdom of God was not in any sense time-bounded nor would that glory ever decline. Again and again he has set the work of the Gospel in the context of the future and of eternity (1:10, 21; 2:7). Paul speaks a great deal in his epistles about the glory of God, the glory of His purposes and the glory to which believers are called and which they will share (Rom. 8:18-21; 2 Cor. 3:18; 4:16-18; Col. 1:17; 3:4; 1 Thess. 2:12; 2 Tim. 2:10; cf. Heb. 2:10; 1 Pet. 5:1, 10). This is not in any sense escapism. It is in fact practical realism because the truth of our glorious calling in Christ enables us to transcend any and every set of circumstances. Paul may have been in prison but his mind, heart, spirit, prayers and service were by no means imprisoned. He was too aware of the real world of eternity.

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3:1

The second emphasis of this verse is the fact that Paul saw himself, not as a prisoner of Rome but a prisoner of Christ, arrested by Him for the specific purpose of being the apostle to the Gentiles. His missionary journeys, so costly in so many ways, had carved an open way for the Gospel into Gentile territory and now, if imprisonment, danger and limitation of movement were all part of that on-going purpose of evangelism, then Paul would rejoice. His travels and his spoken ministry might be being curtailed but his pen was hard at work putting into writing spiritual truth, instruction and exhortation that would still be ministering to the Gentiles centuries after Paul's life was at an end. This theme will be elaborated in the following verses but here we must see how Paul had been gripped and laid hold on not only by the glory of the Gospel message but by the glory of Christ Himself. His imprisonment for Christ Jesus really began on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-9) when the sight of the glorified Christ broke through his pride, prejudice, bitterness and enmity and brought him to an amazing surrender of life. Paul was mastered from that moment onwards but many a person who claims to be "saved" shows no sign of life being "mastered". Every aspect of Paul's life, personality, gifts and interests was "put in prison" and allowed liberty only in as far as it would serve Christ and make Paul a better and more useful

servant. Paul gladly took Christ's yoke on his life (Matt. 11:28-29) and was willing to be hemmed in and to lose all manner of freedoms if only he could bring sinners to the Saviour (1 Cor. 9:19-23). The best way to be free to live is to be a prisoner of Jesus. Among other things, it gives life an eternal dimension, significance and security.

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3:2-6

It is clear from Ephesians that Paul saw plan and purpose in God's scheme of salvation. In the outworking of that plan God orders circumstances, and He also chooses, commissions and places His servants, giving them specific tasks to do. Right from the start Paul had been given His "marching orders" by God and he testifies to this in Acts 26:12-23. Paul never lost his burden for the salvation of his own people, the Jews, as Rom. 9:1-3; 10:1 makes plain. In his missionary journeys, he always began by trying to reach the Jews through their synagogues, until it reached the point when their persistent, bitter and ruthless opposition made him declare publicly that he would go to the Gentiles (Acts 18:5-7). There is a practical lesson here for all of us. If we are called by God to a certain work, no other activity, however spiritual, will be acceptable to God as an alternative. Paul speaks of stewardship (administration) in terms of the Gospel being committed to him for the specific purpose of bringing God's salvation to the Gentiles. Such stewardship is a sacred and solemn trust which brings responsibility (1 Cor 4:1-2; 9:16-17; 2 Tim. 1:14; 2:1-2). Later on (8) Paul speaks of it as the greatest privilege of his life. In today's passage he is emphasising the fact of his specific commission from God: he was not a self-appointed evangelist. And he insists that a special ministry, a special insight and understanding, had been given to him by God. This insight had not been clearly seen or understood by previous generations, even though it had been spoken of and indicated in the Old Testament. This truth was that the Gentiles were to be gathered into Christ and His church, in the same way and on the same basis as the Jews (Isa. 42:6; 49:6; Lk. 2:29-32; Acts 13:44-48).

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3:2-6

Paul, brought up as a very strict Pharisee (Phil. 3:4-6) was obviously immensely thrilled by the God-given revelation of his commission to the Gentiles. In his day it was a totally revolutionary thought to the Jews that "Gentile dogs", outsiders, could have any part in God or His blessing without their becoming Jews by submission to circumcision and all the observance of the Law. We can perhaps understand things a little if we think how easy it is for "church people" to consider themselves better than others and to resent "outsiders" coming into the church in large numbers, dressed differently, not conforming, wanting to change things and not recognising that "we have always done it this way". People object to evangelism because all these "outsiders" who do not really belong come in and take their church away from them. Of course the church is not theirs or ours but God's, and we who regard ourselves as spiritual must not lapse into thinking that somehow God *belongs* to us. That is what the Jews had been doing, keeping God, His blessings and privileges to themselves. But all that is given to us in blessing is given so that we can carry it to and share it with others. Read v.6 and recognise that there are no special or privileged classes, whether in terms of religious background ("my family have worshipped here for generations") or financial or educational background. See the expansiveness of the Gospel as it reaches out to all. Wherever we have come from and in whatever condition, we are saved by grace and are heirs, members and partakers of all the promises of God. But it is all in Christ and only in Christ. The mystery revealed is Christ, and the truth that Christ is everything, and that we are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:28). This is Gospel unity and equality.

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3:7

There is something deeply moving about the way Paul speaks of the Gospel. He was certainly proud of it (Rom. 1:16) and always aware that it is God's Gospel, not his and he would defend it against all who would distort or qualify it (Gal. 1:6-12). His epistles abound with references to the Gospel, to its power and to the fact that it can be hidden from those who need it most, by the wrong and unworthy lives of those who preach it (2 Cor. 4:1-5 AV) and by those who try to impress people by their cleverness and eloquence when preaching the gospel (1

Cor. 1:17). It was God who had made Paul a minister of the Gospel, calling him and setting him apart for this specific task (Rom. 1:1). No doubt Paul would have thought often of those men in the Old Testament, which he knew so well, who had similarly been laid hold on by God to speak His word. Think of Isaiah (Isa. 6:1-8), Jeremiah (Jer. 1:4-12) and Amos (Amos 7:14-16a), not to mention reluctant Moses (Ex. 3:11) and timid Gideon (Judges 6:11-15). Mentioning such names, including Paul's, may make us surprised to read that God chooses the weak things of the world to do His glorious work (1 Cor. 1:26-29). But Paul, above all others, was aware that in and by himself he had nothing to offer. It was by the grace of God that he was the man he was, used as he was (1 Cor. 15:10). The word here for "servant" (minister RSV) is "deacon", which means a working servant. If this word signifies Paul's relationship to his work, the other word he often uses, "bondservant", signifies his relationship to his Master. Here is a man Christ-centred and surrendered. Little wonder God could use him.

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3:8

We take this verse by itself although the sentence does not finish until v.10. This was the text preached on by my brother at my ordination in October 1953. It moved me deeply then and does so every time I consider it. It should make us all review the past and marvel at the grace of God that lays hold on such limited unpromising people and uses them for His service and glory and for the blessing of others. Look back to v.2 and mark the words "*to me, for you*" because Paul was always aware that he was simply a channel or instrument of God's blessing. He himself was nothing and, of course, was willing to be nothing in order to be of service to others. When he described himself as the very least of all the saints he was not indulging in false humility, hoping that someone would contradict him. He was making a statement of fact, as he does in Romans 7:18 and in 1 Cor.15:8-10. In the rich maturity of his life and ministry Paul seems to have gone even further in 1 Tim. 1:12-16, describing himself as the foremost, or chief, of sinners. He was not boasting about his sins, as some do when "giving their testimony" (and that is a form of pride) but is simply saying what he felt very deeply as he considered how wonderfully God had dealt with him allowing him to be a minister of the Gospel. His whole life and service he credited to the grace of God and we must do the same. All our real or imagined gifts, capacities, talents and personalities count for nothing. Without God's gracious blessing we can do nothing (John 15:1-5). It is God alone who gives the growth (1 Cor. 3:3-7). As Paul pondered and penned these truths it was the sense of privilege that gripped him and, if we ever lose this sense of privilege in service, so that Christian service becomes a weary duty, then there is something far wrong with our spiritual lives. In Acts 5:41 we are told that the disciples counted it a joy and privilege to be allowed to suffer for Jesus.

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3:8-9

In v.7 as well as in v.8 there is reference to grace given and we must not fail to grasp the wonderfully encouraging truth that is indicated. True Christian service is costly (it certainly was for Jesus) and, as we go forward in it, it is not surprising that we are increasingly aware of all our weaknesses, limitations, tears and complications. But we must not allow these to hold us back, because we have the promise of God's enabling grace. Where sin and failure abound, grace much more abounds (Rom. 5:20 AV). God's grace is promised in sufficient measure for each and every situation (2 Cor. 12:9) and, since God is generous in all He does, He makes all grace to abound (2 Cor. 9:8). The God we serve is the One who goes before us, who grants us His presence and who promises never to leave us or forsake us (Ex. 33:14; Josh. 1:5). This is something we must learn to count on and to believe, even when our feelings seem to contradict it. But note again Paul's thrill in the Gospel for he speaks of the unsearchable riches of Christ. There is simply no end to the discovering of fresh treasure and truth in Christ and in the Scriptures. We simply cannot understand those who find the Bible dull and even less can we understand those Christians who feel that they know it all. Christian life and service is a journey of endless discovery and thrill as we uncover more and more of what God has prepared for them that love Him (1 Cor. 2:9). But Paul's main theme is not God's blessings to him but rather the thrill and privilege of telling and teaching others so that they, like himself, might begin to see something of the vast and glorious plan of salvation. He sees himself as an ambassador for Christ, a personal representative, to call men and women everywhere to be reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:20) through Christ who is able to save to the uttermost (Heb. 7:25)

AV).

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3:8-10

Read now the complete statement, noting that in v.9 it is not a narrow evangelistic message ("come to Jesus and be saved") that Paul preached, but one that embraced the whole plan of salvation right from the time of creation. We need to widen our concept of salvation, which tends to be thought of too much in mere individual terms. We are taken back here to eternity and to the creative act of God in bringing the worlds into being out of nothing to provide the stage, the "theatre of glory", in which God could show forth the wonder of His perfect plan of salvation, part of which involved His choosing of us in Christ from the very beginning (1:4). These thoughts stretch our limited minds beyond their capacity, but we are being taught to see that all we mean by salvation is the work of the creator God who, by virtue of His sovereign power, rules and guides the destinies of His people. The picture that fascinated Paul is that of God gathering a church to Himself out of every nation under the sun. This He does in His manifold, many-sided wisdom, which very often seems mysterious and contradictory to mere mortals whose spiritual sight is limited. Paul, being grounded in Old Testament Scripture, is really making us sweep through the whole history of the Jews, chosen as God's instruments; failing to be what they were called to be; until in the fulness of time Jesus, born of the Jews, fulfilled in perfection all that was promised and foreshadowed. Not only does the world of men stand amazed, the whole world of spirits, fallen and unfallen, is astonished by what God has done. If we even catch a glimpse of the vast dimension of the plan of salvation we will thrill as Paul did and our Christian witness will have a new throb, assurance and expectation about it.

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3:8-10

We have been speaking about the glorious dimension of God's plan and work of salvation, sweeping through history from eternity to eternity. Of course there are many verses of Scripture, such as 1 Cor 13:12; 2 Cor 4:18; Heb. 11:27; 1 John 3:2, that make plain that in a very real sense we will not see or grasp what we have been involved in until we reach Heaven. Hebrews 11:39-40 indicated that even the great ones of the Old Testament do not find fulfilment until we, in our turn, take our place and play our part. We, likewise, will play our part and hand on the work to others (John 4:37-38). According to 1 Pet. 1:10-12 even the angels are amazed when they consider the prophecies of old and begin to see them worked out. We need to read passages such as Revelation 5:1-5ff, with its reference to a perfect plan and myriads upon myriads of angels, and Rev.7:9-17, with its picture of multitudes from every nation gathered in the presence of the glory of God, all in order to catch a glimpse of what is actually going on in the world below through the preaching of the Gospel. Little wonder Paul was thrilled that he played a part in it. But who are these people in the presence of God and where did they come from? They are described in passages such as 1 Cor. 6:9-11; Eph. 5:3-5; Col. 3:5-10. They came from slums and suburbs, from among the sensual and sophisticated, from the broken, perplexed, lost, rebellious and hungry-hearted. It was to save sinners such as these that Christ came into the world (1 Tim. 1:15) and He went looking for the lost even before they realised they were lost (Lk. 15:4-7). And it is still what happens, because it pleases God through the foolishness of preaching to save those who believe (1 Cor. 1:21 AV). Faith and new life come through the preaching of the Word (Rom. 10:17; 1 Pet. 1:23). Do you see now why Paul was so thrilled to be called to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ?

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3:11-13

All this wonderful panorama of redemption has to be seen as being in accord with God's eternal purpose which began before time, runs unbroken from the beginning of time, and goes on in unqualified certainty to the end of time. Like Paul, we too must see our life and service enfolded in this sure purpose and playing its ordained part in the programme of the ages. When we are confused and uncertain as, for example, Job was, we must do the same as he did and rest in the fact that God knows the way we take (Job 23:1-2, 8-10). God is never confused or uncertain, never dependent on anyone, never prevented from doing His work by men or by the Devil. This is the testimony of the whole of Scripture. God works and no one can hinder (Isa. 43:13). In all things and in

every circumstance God works His good work for the blessing of His people (Rom. 8:28). .And it is open to us at any time and in any place to go right to this wonderful God, through Jesus Christ, and to speak to Him. We must not hesitate to do so (Heb. 4:16). What is more, we can be as blunt as we need to be in pouring out our hearts to God, just as Jeremiah was when he said, "O Lord, thou has deceived me." (Jer. 20:7, 9, 14). Cast your burden on the Lord (Ps.55:22 AV), whether it be a burden of guilt, fear, disappointment, hurt or perplexity. Do not lose heart. Whether it is you who suffer or those whom you pray for who are suffering, remember this, that your labour is not in vain (1 Cor. 15:58). The things that happen do, in the sovereign providence of God, work out for the furtherance of the Gospel (Phil. 1:12, 19). Remember too that suffering and glory go together (Rom. 8:18; 1 Pet. 4:12-14).

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3:14-15

Although we study this sublime prayer section by section it will be good to read right through to the end of the chapter each day, not least to allow the sheer scope of the petitions and possibilities to stir mind, heart and spirit. Paul himself was obviously deeply moved and was very aware of the reality, the presence and the goodness of God towards him, the Ephesians and all believers. This prayer, like the previous one in 1:15-23, stems from and is inspired by the truth of the Gospel he has been expounding. In chapter one Paul expounded the activity of the great God of electing grace, working salvation for His people, and this led to prayer addressed to the Father of glory (1:16-17 AV and RSV), culminating in a reference to the fulness of God. In chapter 2:1-3:13 Paul has expounded the glorious transformation from death to life that salvation brings and how all those who are in Christ are brought together into the family fellowship of faith which is the church. This again led Paul to begin to pray (3:1) but he digressed to speak of how the stewardship of the Gospel had been committed to him (and to us) and how God has to be seen working according to plan and purpose. This means that Paul's imprisonment must be seen as part of God's providence rather than as negative disaster because his times were in God's hand (Ps. 31:15). Paul's prison cell became the Throne Room of God as he bowed in prayer, reaching out to and encircling the church at Ephesus in his intercessions. What a prayer it is and how it should encourage us to pray.

"Thou art coming to a King;
Large petitions with thee bring;
For His grace and power are such,
None can ever ask too much." (Newton)

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3:14-15

It is to the Father that Paul turns in prayer, not just the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (1:17) but our Father, who art in heaven and whose name is hallowed. The name "Father" signifies that we are family, not strangers (2:19), that we belong to Him and to each other as the family of God. The name Father signifies God's attitude and relationship to us, His involvement with us and responsibility for us. It is a name that brings God near in a very personal way and assures us that we need not be afraid to come to Him and to speak to Him. There is something very tender in the concept of God as Father and it is the work of God's Spirit within to make us conscious of the fact that we are indeed the children of God (Rom. 8:15-17). Translations of v.15 vary and commentators argue about what Paul meant. There may be reference to the Fatherhood of God, from which all fatherhood takes its name, and of whom earthly fathers are only a pale, limited shadow. But Paul is quite clear in all his writings that only those who are "in Christ" can claim God as Father. If we read "the whole family" instead of "every family" it would appear that Paul is speaking of all the redeemed on earth and in Heaven as being "one in Christ". In the Apostles' Creed we speak of the communion of saints, thus reducing the harrowing sense of loss and separation from those who have died in Christ and have gone on before us. In Wesley's great hymn calling on a thousand tongues to sing praise, we speak of the church in earth and Heaven. It is not two separate churches nor are we in two separate families. The whole family of God speaks with one voice and calls on the Father. We must see just how close to Heaven this great, active, suffering, praying apostle lived. Our prayer life would be transformed if we were more aware of Heaven and our heavenly Father.

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3:16

Note how this prayer builds up and climaxes in a wonderful doxology (20-21). Today's verse speaks of strengthening by the Spirit and leads on to speak of the indwelling Christ and then the fullness of God. The whole eternal Trinity is involved in our salvation (Heb. 9:14) in the interest of the outworking of that salvation in daily life (4:1). The three phases mentioned indicate a progression of *thought* as we seek to grasp the truth about salvation but do not indicate a progression of *experience*, as if salvation became ours in a series of stages or instalments. Paul is teaching us, from different standpoints, the possession and the potential that are ours in this salvation which God has given us in Christ. Go through the prayer and see how it speaks of strengthening or enabling (16), Christ in our hearts (17), rooted and grounded in increasing stability (17b), increasing capacity (18), and awareness and realisation of the love of Christ (19) and being filled with or up to the measure of the fullness of God (19b). Even then there is much more to follow (20). Being filled with the fullness of God signifies a process which goes on in our lives even in Heaven because we never arrive at the fullness of God, else we would be indistinguishable from God. But without doubt, here on earth and then in Heaven, our capacity increases so that there is in fact no limit to what can be possible for us as individuals and as the church together with all the saints. It is when we speak of salvation in such terms and see the magnificent possibilities that we understand Paul's feelings as he bowed his knees in prayer there in a prison cell. Stone walls certainly could not imprison this man's spirit which soared heavenward as he prayed that other Christians would begin to see the glory of salvation.

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3:16

We must recognise that the phrase "according to the riches of His glory" (RSV and AV), "out of his glorious riches" (NIV) indicates the scale of Paul's petition and the expected answer. There is nothing narrow or limited about God's working. It is all done according to, or on the scale of, the riches of His grace and attributes. When we speak of the riches of God's glory we must learn, as Moses learned, that glory is inseparable from goodness (Ex. 33:17-19). The picture here is of the riches of God being poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (Rom. 5: 6). It is the function and work of the Spirit to strengthen us, to enable us and to give us capacity, and this He does from within. The power of the Spirit does not come upon us from outside, nor as an occasional, spasmodic surge. The power is within and it is both permanent and limitless. Indeed, we cannot be Christians unless the Spirit who quickened us into life lives within us (Rom. 8:9-11). Paul is praying that believers will realise that the power is there because only then will they begin to live by it, expecting it to be available for every contingency, quiet or critical. This is something to count on. Think of it this way: if we are told the water supply is shut off at the main we will not turn on the tap except in a tentative or speculative way. But if the supply is there we expect it to work. If the car will not start we use "jump leads" to get power from another source, but if our battery is charged we expect power. What we have within us is not a battery which can go down but a generator which is totally dependable for all the power we need. Note that Paul speaks of the "inner being", something at the very core of our lives, not something superficial or effervescent. We speak sometimes of the poise of those who seem to have an inner strength which enables them to cope. We have that inner strength by the Holy Spirit who is quietly and powerfully present.

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3:17

We must not think that Paul separates the fact of the indwelling Spirit from that of the indwelling Christ, because they belong together. Nor must we think that there is a suggestion here of "stages" in the process of salvation. There is always harmony in the Trinity. The Father sends the Spirit in answer to the request of the Son (John 14:16-17) and the Spirit quickens those dead in sin and points them to Christ the Saviour, who brings them to God and to a place in His family. The indwelling Spirit works to confirm to us the fact that Christ is there in our hearts in all His power, glory and victory over sin, death and Hell. The Spirit assures us that Christ is there to stay and urges us to give Him the free run of the house of our lives. This glorious Christ who was and is the friend of sinners, the shepherd of the sheep, the prince of peace, the Word of God, is a wonderfully natural guest who brings the sweetest fellowship (Rev. 3:20-21). The Holy Spirit in our hearts focuses our attention and desire on Jesus and urges us to keep on abiding in Him who abides in us. It is for keeps. This

Jesus is not going to leave us, ever. And by the Spirit's power within we are able to refuse and to subdue anything and everything in our lives that would grieve Jesus. In this way we are rooted ever more deeply in "the full ocean of the great Redeemer's love" drawing up the life-giving, life-refreshing, life-sustaining power we need. And we are also grounded like a building on a sure foundation which cannot be shaken. That foundation is God's love for us, not our love for Him, although we do learn to love Him who first loved us (1 John 4:19). It will be a natural development and progression that we will begin to love others with the love we ourselves have received (1 John 4:7-11). If we begin to grasp what God has given us and what He plans to give us we will have no difficulty in maintaining the spiritual glow (Rom. 12:11 Moffat).

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3:18

The picture we have been given is one of growing in the grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is a growing in understanding with an ever deeper comprehending and embracing and grasping of the love of Christ which, of course, is always too great to be grasped fully. But note the emphasis on the church in the phrase "together with all the saints". We cannot grasp, thrill to, respond to and witness to the redeeming love of God in Jesus Christ simply on an individual basis. Praise, prayer, worship and witness must all have a personal basis and exercise but the effectiveness, benefit, joy and pleasure are all immeasurably increased and heightened when exercised in fellowship. An unbelieving outsider coming into a living church service should be shaken to his foundations by an awareness of God amongst His people. And, if that person continues, he should very soon begin to be aware that the secret explanation of the life of the congregation is simply the fact of the love of God in Jesus Christ. Paul speaks of the breadth of love, reaching out in width to include all; its length speaks of continuity, when it began and how long it lasts, everlasting love indeed (Jer. 31:3); its depth speaks of the fact that no matter how far down you are, or feel you are, this love goes deeper; and the height of this love speaks of where it seeks to lead us. It is all very practical. We need to make the sure foundation of our daily lives the fact that we are loved like this with the love of Christ, rich, full, free, unchanging love that will not let us go. What security and peace such a thought should bring! It takes a life-time to discover its fulness.

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3:18

We spoke a little about the fullness of God in an earlier note, but we need further thought on this fascinating concept. Paul is certainly thinking of the sheer extent of the blessing God wants His people to have in and among themselves. This thought of being "filled" occurs several times in the epistle (1:23; 3:19; 4:13; 5:18). In Col. 1:19 we are told that all the fullness of God is in Christ, and in Col. 2:9-10 we are told that, as believers, we have come to fulness of life in Christ. It is an accomplished fact. If we have Christ we have all the fulness of God, because all He is and has and gives is *in Christ*. Then in John 1:16 we are told that from His fullness we have received grace upon grace upon grace, "one blessing after another" (NIV). The emphasis is on something that continues. We need both tenses to grasp the truth. We have been filled with Christ and we are being filled with Christ more and more and on and on. The significance is that there are highlighted for us the limitless possibilities for our life and service. When the fullness of God, in all His attributes of love, grace, wisdom, power and blessing, is poured into our redeemed human lives and personalities, there is an increase and development of capacity so that we can receive more and more. And yet, such is the flood of God's goodness given to us that there is an inevitable overflow which reaches others whose lives as yet are somewhat dried up and who need to be touched with life-giving grace. Atmosphere is a difficult word to use but it is true that because Christ lives in us we carry something of His savour (Matt.5:13) or fragrance (2 Cor.2:14,16), some awareness of His presence with us wherever we go. All this, which we have tried to expound in a whole week of studies in v.14-19, Paul prays that we shall have in full measure.

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3:20-21

We said at the close of yesterday's reading that Paul prayed for all this rich blessing for us (14-19) and he prayed in faith, believing God wanted us to have it all. Now he goes on in a wonderful doxology to affirm that God is able to do far more than we have yet begun to ask or think. There is both confidence and expectation in

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Paul's words and there is a real sense of thrill because all that God is going to do, on a scale that will astonish us, is to be done by the power or dynamic that is at work, energising us from within. When Paul thinks of this in respect of himself, the church at Ephesus and the church throughout the world, he is filled with praise and thanksgiving. He sees that God is not limited in His working to the scale of our prayers, faith and capacity at any given time. He does more than we ask or expect, and, at times, more than we actually want! Nor does God necessarily wait for us to ask before He starts to work. Inasmuch as we are believers and Christ lives in us, God's power is already at work to fulfil His perfect purposes in and through us. Paul's mind, heart and spirit are fixed on God and he marvels that this wonderful God should have done and planned such marvellous things for the sinful children of men. Everything in him wells up and he sings, "To God be the glory, great things He hath done." Paul's reaction to all he has shown us, in these three chapters, of God's great salvation is to make one final statement. It is to the effect that each part of it and all of it together show forth the glory of God, and the full shining of that glory is seen in the Person and Work of Christ Jesus. Let the whole life of the church on earth and Heaven give glory to God, as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end, Amen.

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3:20-21

Paul has completed the doctrinal section of the epistle and is about to apply it all in practical exhortation. But before we move to that section let us take time to worship. We have been shown the God of our salvation, the glory of His grace, and the destiny to which we have been called (chapter 1). We have been shown our salvation to be life from the dead, access and acceptance into the family of God who delights in His children and comes to dwell with them (chapter 2). We have been shown the power and purposes of God, the privilege of service, and the limitless possibilities open to us, prepared for us, and empowered by God through Christ who dwells in our hearts by the Holy Spirit (chapter 3). What can we say as we stand amazed, recognising it is all God's doing from beginning to end?

"When all Thy mercies, O my God!
My rising soul surveys,
Transported with the view, I'm lost
In wonder, love and praise.

"Unnumbered comforts to my soul
Thy tender care bestowed,
Before my infant heart conceived
From whom these comforts flowed.

"When in the slippery paths of youth
With heedless steps I ran,
Thine arm, unseen, conveyed me safe,
And led me up to man.

"When worn with sickness, oft hast Thou
With health renewed my face;
And, when in sins and sorrow sunk,
Revived my soul with grace.

"Through every period of my life
Thy goodness I'll pursue;
And after death in distant worlds,
The glorious theme renew."

(Addison)

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4:1

There are two sides to the Gospel, the believing side and the behaving side and the two go together. They must not be separated and the first supplies the power for the second. Our doctrine may be impeccably Biblical but if we do not begin to show in our daily lives the graces of Jesus Christ, there is something wrong. In three chapters Paul has expounded the wealth that is ours in Christ: a full and perfect salvation accomplished and given by God and planted within us in all its power and potential by the Holy Spirit (1:19; 3:16, 20). Since we are new creatures in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17); since we have been raised to newness of life (Rom. 6:4); and since we have been blessed with every spiritual blessing and are called to demonstrate God's workmanship in and through our good works (1:3; 2:10), it is natural that Paul should beg, beseech, appeal and urge us to live lives worthy of our calling. To Paul's mind this is the least we can do in response to God's unbounded goodness and blessing. If we have been chosen by God, called to be His people, welcomed into His family and bearing His name, then we should naturally want to be worthy and to be recognisable as Christian believers. To feel otherwise would be a denial of all we believe and have in Christ. The whole of the section from 4:1-6:9 amplifies this exhortation and spells it out in detail in relation to all the various areas of life. But in this one verse we must see and feel just how total Paul's appeal is. In Rom. 12:1-2 he issues the same kind of call for an absolute surrender of our lives, so that being set free from the sinister conditioning of worldliness we might be conformed to the pattern of Christ. This, says Paul, is our reasonable service and spiritual worship. The words of Isaac Watts sum it up: "Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all."

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4:1

In making his appeal for and call to true Christian living, Paul describes himself as a prisoner *for* the Lord and is no doubt describing his attitude to his present costly imprisonment. The AV renders the phrase "the prisoner *of* the Lord" and Paul was certainly that, captured and captivated by the Son of God and no longer regarding himself as a free man. Other translations emphasise that Paul was a prisoner "*in* the Lord" and this is how Paul always thought of himself. He was a man *in* Christ (2 Cor. 12:2). Wherever he was and whatever his circumstances, this could not be changed. He was *in* Christ. His life was hid with Christ in God (Col. 3:3). This is why Paul could regard even the most adverse circumstances as being opportunities in the providential ordering of his life by God. He might be limited physically because he was in prison, but spiritually he was free because he was in Christ. In a very real sense he carried with him his own spiritual "atmosphere" and this is part of the reason why he knew so much about the peace of God keeping his heart and mind (Phil. 4:4-7). He could indeed be content even when he was being prevented from doing all the things he wanted so much to do. He was "*in* the Lord" and that could be nothing but good. It was also safe. This is a very practical lesson, because we do not know what a day may bring. We must remind ourselves that, whatever battles, struggles and service we are involved in, nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. In Christ we cannot but be near the love of God! The amazing thing is that being imprisoned in and with the Lord we begin to discover what freedom and liberty are.

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4:2

The reason our lives must be worthy is because God and the Gospel are often assessed and evaluated by what people see in those who profess to be Christians. A lifestyle that is not worthy of Christ discredits the Word of God (Titus 2:5) but a worthy life adorns the Gospel (Titus 2:10), just as rich velvet in a jeweller's window shows off the jewels to best advantage. This worthy life begins in personal character and in terms of our attitude to ourselves. We must not think more highly of ourselves, our spirituality, our significance or our service than we ought to think (Rom. 12:3). After all, everything worthwhile in our persons and lives is the gift and work of God's grace (1 Cor. 4:7). The only things we can really claim as our own are our sins and failures. If we think we are something when we are nothing, and if we compare ourselves with ourselves, we are proud and self-deceived (Gal. 6:3; 2 Cor. 10:12). If we feel we have strong faith we must not show it off (Rom. 14:22) nor must we think our faith is limitless (Rom. 12:3b). We do not denigrate ourselves because that can be a subtle form of self-centredness. "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:1-8). This is the Jesus who, when all the disciples were too aware of position and preference, became the lowly servant and

washed their feet. (John 13:1-17) This is the example we have been given to follow (1 Pet. 2:21). Lowliness is all bound up with meekness (not weakness), which is a disposition of mind, heart and spirit which is free from rebellion and resentment when under pressure or being provoked. But why should we be like this, especially with people who exasperate, hurt and disappoint us? It is because Christ has been like this to us. Did not Jesus speak about this in one of His stories in Matt. 18:23-35?

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4:2

Patience, forbearance and love belong together and have to be shown in our dealings with others, whether they are Christians or not, whether they are easy people to get on with or not. It has to do with attitude towards them, our speech and our actions. This is more important than having warm feelings towards them, although the feelings should come if we are willing to share with them the care we have received from God. We are in the realm of very basic testing of the reality of our love for God, as 1 John 4:19-21 makes plain. The words "patience" and "forbearing" can be summed up in the word "longsuffering" which is one of the attributes or characteristics of God (Exod. 34:6 AV). Long-suffering is the opposite of short temper and quick annoyance. It outlasts provocation and does not weary. "Love suffers long, and is kind" (1 Cor. 13:4-7 AV). Read 1 Corinthians 13 in J B Phillips' translation, and note the phrase, "does not cherish inflated ideas of its own importance". That is the area where patience often breaks down. We feel that people have not appreciated us nor recognised all we have done for them. But that is an indication of how much they are in need. (It may also indicate how self-centred we are). We must make allowances for people, not least because we may not know just what a struggle they are having and how they may find *themselves* difficult to get on with. But then God has been so patient with us in all our tantrums, rebellions and slowness to change. Of course, we must also learn patience with God, being willing to wait on His time for answer to prayer and for change in circumstances. And, as we learn to submit to God and to trust Him with the most personal areas of our lives, we will begin to be able to deal with others with a new quiet confidence. We will want the best for them and we will put up with anything rather than frustrate or hinder God's blessing in their lives.

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4:3

To live a life worthy of God calls for a right attitude to self (lowly and meek); a right attitude to others (patience and forbearance); and also an eagerness to maintain the unity of the Spirit within the fellowship of God's people, which is the church. Note that it is the "unity of the Spirit" that has to be guarded. Christ divides people as well as unites them. Some are determined to go on in obedient discipleship, while others want to compromise for an easier, less demanding, more pleasurable church and ministry, and some will turn away from Christ (Heb. 3:12; 10:39). There is a parting of the ways at the straight and narrow gate (Matt. 7:13-14; John 6:66-68). It is sore and sad when we part company with and lose the friendship of some because they are no longer willing to go on with God. How we need to pray for those who are hesitating and contracting out! That is far more useful than criticising them or being hurt by them or being sorry for ourselves because we have been deprived of their company. Keep in mind that in Ephesus the congregation was composed of Jews and Gentiles gathered to Christ from very different backgrounds and traditions, and having a great variety of personalities and capacities. The potential for tension and division was great on a natural level and there is always a Devil who delights to emphasise differences, create and exaggerate misunderstandings, cause division and make people take sides, one against the other, usually by jumping to conclusions. When that happens the first things to suffer are the worship of God's people, the prayer life of the fellowship, and the whole range of Christian service which is the responsibility of the congregation. Little wonder we are called on, as far as it lies in our power, to live at peace with all (Rom. 12:18).

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4:3

This verse is so important we study it again. Recall Paul's words of final counsel to the elders of the church at Ephesus (Acts 20:28ff.) warning them to guard the flock from influences and people who would scatter the sheep. The Devil loves confusion, and when such a spirit enters the congregation we can be sure it is the Devil's

work and the people causing it are doing Devil's work, because God is never the source of confusion (1 Cor. 14:33). If the church is, as Paul has taught us (1:23; 2:19, 21, 22), a body, a family and a holy house, then to divide it is to contradict, to scar and demolish. It will grieve, resist and quench the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:30; 1Thess. 5:19). That is the seriousness which lies behind Paul's exhortation. There are many ways to divide the fellowship and destroy its unity. Jealousy can do it; so can criticism, or keeping aloof from the main stream of the work; or setting up a little "Christian" kingdom of work we can count as "our" work, in which we like to be "king" (although we would never admit it). At the heart of this call to unity is the fact that we *are* all one in Christ: we cannot go it alone; nor can the church go on without us. We have often referred to 1 Cor. 12:12-27 and the picture of all the individual members of the body cohering and working together with even the simplest member being necessary. But each member must be true to itself and no member of the body must be expected to be what it is not. An arm cannot be a leg! So, in maintaining the unity of the Spirit, we must not expect of any one person what they are not capable of being or doing. We must not be unreasonable. But neither must we allow people to be spiritual passengers when they are well able to carry a share of the burden. Unity is real, practical and pleasurable when we see it in its true nature. We must not spoil it. That is Paul's call.

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4:4-6

Whenever Paul challenges he also encourages and inspires and this he does with facts. We are not called to create spiritual unity but to maintain it and, in understanding its nature, to be encouraged. Paul gives a seven-fold ground for hope. There is one body, uniting all believers of all nations of all time, because they live in the salvation of God in Jesus Christ. In relation to salvation (but not necessarily to church order) there are no distinctions (Gal. 3:26-28). This one body which is the church is not in any sense a man-made institution but the work of the one Holy Spirit. It is by the power of the Holy Spirit in the preaching and hearing of the Gospel that sinners are quickened and brought to repentance and faith. And, if sinners are brought to faith by a vast variety of different routes (but always through Christ), then that is the privilege of the Holy Spirit, the free and unfettered third Person of the Trinity. Jesus Himself said that the Spirit moves and works as He will (John 3:8). This one Holy Spirit, indivisible and unlimited, is the life-giving, indwelling, enabling Spirit without whom we remain in total inability. The effectual calling to salvation which is the work of the Spirit inevitably kindles in the heart of every believer the sure hope of the Gospel, which is the hope of Glory, and this sets the direction and the ambition of the whole of life. It is hope integral and basic to our calling and it is hope we share together. Perhaps if we all spoke more about our hope of Heaven and our confidence in getting there and our thrill and enjoyment when we do get there, we might all be brighter and better and more confident Christians, not nearly so ensnared with this temporary, passing world as we tend to be.

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4:4-6

We still have four of the seven aspects of Paul's encouragement to consider. In doing so we do well to think of the hymn, "Thy hand, O God, has guided Thy flock from age to age," with the affirmation, "Thy mercy will not fail us, nor leave Thy work undone," and with the great refrain, "One church, one faith, one Lord." Paul's heart is obviously singing as he urges these truths on the Ephesian believers. This is certainly meant to be inspirational instruction. There is one Lord, His name is Jesus, and God has given Him the name above all names (Phil. 2:9-11). It is to that one glorious Lord that each and every one of us owes total allegiance and He it is who rules in majesty over us as individuals, as a church, and over the whole order and progress of creation's history. This Jesus Christ is Lord, and "He owns us, loves us, cares for us, and protects us. We recognise His sovereignty, own Him as our Deliverer and Ruler, trust, obey, love and worship Him." (Hendriksen) Whether on earth or in Heaven the church testifies that He is King of Kings and Lord of Lords and rejoices (Rev. 17:14; 19:16). When Paul goes on to speak of "one faith" it is difficult to know whether he is referring to our subjective faith which we confess in terms of our own experience, or to the objective body of truth, the faith once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3), or to the way of faith, the life of faith which we live, looking away to Jesus. Perhaps it is best to keep the various aspects together, always remembering that faith is not just an emotional experience, nor a leap in the dark, but trust in a Person and in the truth about that Person and His saving death and glorious resurrection. The faith we confess is not a "free- for-all" so that people can pick and

choose what to believe and what to reject. We need to read only 1 Cor. 15:1-5, 12; and Gal. 1:6-9 to realise how seriously Paul regarded this issue.

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4:4-6

When Paul speaks of one baptism he is not simply putting a check on the tendency in some to have a second baptism or repeated baptisms but referring rather to the public act of baptism which was both a testimony and a confirmation for those baptised and for those watching that there had been a commitment to Christ. But the emphasis cannot be primarily on the action of man, because the first three chapters of Ephesians were concerned to make plain that the whole of salvation stems from the sovereign initiative of God. Grace always comes before faith and, for Paul, baptism (like circumcision in the Old Covenant) was the sign and the seal of God's Covenant of Grace. There is nothing in this passage about any particular mode of baptism, nothing about the amount of water used, and nothing about who administers baptism, nor about who should receive baptism, although Paul is obviously writing to believers. But inasmuch as children received the sign of the Covenant under the Old Covenant even though they could not possibly understand or consent (Gen. 17:9-14), it would seem strange to many of us (this writer included) if children of believers were excluded from the New Covenant. But the main thrust of Paul's words about one baptism is to bring home to the very mixed company of Christians in Ephesus that they had this in common, this glorious unifying fact that put them all on the same level: they had been baptised into Christ (Gal. 3:26-29).

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4:4-6

Paul speaks finally about God the Father, and this is not surprising in a confession of faith because all can be traced back to its origin in the sovereignty of God and His glorious grace. But note in our verses that there is wonderful harmony, unity and co-operation in the eternal Trinity. Each of the three Persons, the Spirit, the Son and the Father is spoken of, and each in relation to certain aspects of the glory and completeness of salvation, and that salvation expressed in the life of the church. There is no suggestion of Paul dividing up either the Godhead or salvation into sections. Indeed this passage is more a public confession of faith (such as we make when we say the Apostles' Creed) than a detailed theological exposition. There is something grand and thrilling in the statement about God the Father, omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent. He is above all, ruling and providing. He is present in and through all things and circumstances working His sovereign will. He is in all of us who believe by the Holy Spirit and He is among us when we gather as His church for worship. In relation to the family of believers He is all that is meant by "Father" and if we think of the patient, waiting, praying, loving, restoring attitude of the father of the prodigal we will see a heavenly Father we can run to. If we think of the saints of old blessing their children (Gen. 48:14-16; Heb. 11:20-22) we will know and feel what it is to have our hearts towards this great God who is infinite, eternal and unchangeable in all His attributes. Little wonder the Psalmist speaks of the eternal God as a refuge (Ps. 46:1; Deut. 33:27) and all of us need the gentle but searching encouragement of Isaiah when he makes us think of how great our God is (Isa. 40:18ff).

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4:7

The glorious unity spoken of in the previous verses is developed now to make plain that within that unity which is in Christ there is an equally glorious diversity. Paul has just said that God is Father of all who believe, no matter their background, tradition, capacity or limitation. Each child in the family has full right to be there and is fully accepted and valued. That is why we must never despise or deal wrongly with another Christian, especially if in various human areas that believer seems to be less gifted, integrated or capable than ourselves. As human parents we can so easily impose on our children our "ideas" of what success should mean for them, and we can handle our children in a way that is simply living out through our children our own emotional lacks and insecurities. But this must not be carried over into Christian life in the church and any who feel inhibited, undervalued and insignificant need to grasp the truth of this verse. Note that it speaks first of "grace", which is the source of any "worth" we have. It also mentions "each of us", so that there are no exceptions at all. Every single believer is "gifted". Go back to 1:3,19; 3:16,20 to grasp yet again the wealth we have been given in

Christ. If we have Christ we have all of this and cannot possibly think of ourselves as not being gifted. Then note the reference to the "measure" (apportioned) of Christ's gift. We are not all the same nor are we intended to be, although in terms of salvation we are all of equal value. God will never ask us to be or to do what He has not equipped us to be and do. That means we do not need to try to be something we are not. We are allowed to be "ourselves". In fact that is what God wants us to be: our true selves, enlivened and developed in balance and maturity. To realise this is the beginning of release in our personalities and lives and the beginning of a new and increasing peace and joy. We know the difference in our fellowship with God and in freedom to serve.

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4:8-10

There are obviously two sections here. Verse 8 leads right on to v.10 and the intervening verse of basic theology anchors all the blessings and possibilities in the Person and Work of Christ. In v.8 Paul is quoting freely from Psalm 68:18-20, which we love to sing in the metrical version,

"Thou hast, O Lord, most glorious,
Ascended up on high;

Bless'd be the Lord who is to us
Of our salvation God;
Who daily with his benefits
Us plenteously doth load."

Do we really think of God as someone who really loads us with benefits and blessings, enablings and opportunities? We need to be aware of this else we will sometimes mistake blessings for rebukes! The picture in v.8 is in terms of a conquering king returning from battle with the spoils of his victory which he gives to his people. It is a vivid picture of Christ conquering and leading away captive all the powers that could vex and militate against His people, their blessing and their service. It is the picture of total victory, accomplished once for all, decisive, comprehensive and never needing to be repeated. When Jesus cried from the Cross, "It is finished!" it was the proclamation of the fact that sin, death and the Devil were all conquered. For us who are in Christ the issue is certain. The gates of Hell will not prevail. In our own generation we will need to grasp this truth more and more securely. Paul will teach us much about this in chapter 6:10ff. Here we must grasp the clear statements of Scripture that Christ came to destroy the Devil and all his works and to deliver us all from that dark bondage (1 John 3:8; Heb. 2:14; Col. 1:13; 2:15) . On the basis of this victory we are given the gifts we need.

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4:8-10

What was gripping Paul's mind and heart when he paused to make the statement in v.9? Speaking of how Christ ascended into Heaven after His victorious death and resurrection, Paul affirms that this could never have been but for the fact that Christ had first come down from Heaven, down to such a world as this. Paul may even have had in mind the same rather mysterious descent "into Hell", as the Apostles' Creed expresses it, and which Peter speaks about (1 Pet. 3:18-19). Paul himself speaks of this same coming down, rising up and ascending in the great passage in Phil. 2:5-11. It would be easy to get lost in Paul's and Peter's words but this much is dear: we are being taught that the Jesus who entered Heaven, having won the victory for us in terms of salvation, is the Jesus who left Heaven's glory and came down to be one of us. The glorious Christ is the human Jesus who lived and suffered down here, tempted in all points like us, yet without sin (Heb. 4:15), learning obedience in the context of suffering (Heb. 2:17-18; 5:8), going about doing good, showing kindness, care and compassion (Acts 10:38). If ever there was someone who can understand the whole of human experience in a world like this it is Jesus. Whatever our circumstances, He knows what it is like. He knows what it is to be alone, to be misunderstood, to be forsaken and let down by even His closest friends. He knows what it is to yield to God's good and perfect will, no matter how costly. Think of Gethsemane! What a Saviour we have! How sweet the name of Jesus sounds to a believer, and what pardon and peace it brings to every penitent sinner.

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4:11-13

Note the sequence of thought running through from the beginning of the chapter. There is unity in Christ; diversity in Christ and in His church; and there is ministry or service. But we must not forget maturity, stability and continuance in the interest of the Gospel. Before we speak of the "gifts" the risen Christ gives to His church we must note the objective for which these gifts are given and this will help us to understand the nature of the gifts. It is all too easy for the "gifts" of the Spirit to make those who have them (or think they have them) proud, considering themselves somewhat different from and independent of others. But in our passage it is clear that the objective of the gifts is the work of service (diaconate service) and the building up of the church which is the body of Christ. It is in this way that we all together, in inter-dependence, not "freelance" individuality, grow into spiritual maturity. In the following verse (14) there is the emphasis on moving away from childish attitudes and reactions which lead to confusion and limitation of service, and it is not without significance that this final note comes at the end of a passage dealing with spiritual gifts. It makes us think of Paul's words to the Corinthian congregation which was so unduly preoccupied with spiritual gifts that they competed with each other. We need to take 1 Cor. 13:8-13 seriously, recognising that faith, hope and love are not characteristics that mark childhood. Children are largely concerned with immediate satisfaction; adults, if they are wise, take a long-term view of both life and service.

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4:11-13

Five different classes of "gifted" people are spoken of as being given to the church. Because they are given by God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit - v.4-6) these people are to be received, respected and loved, inasmuch as they present Christ and represent Christ (cf. 2 Cor. 5:20). They are not to be idolised, because they are commissioned to be what they are for the service of the church, and they are what they are only by the gift of God. They have nothing to be proud of (1Cor. 4:7). God gave some to be apostles: the word means "sent-ones". They are strictly the chosen Twelve (Judas excluded) together with Paul, who met with the Risen Christ. They are "the charter-witnesses of Christ's resurrection, clothed with life-long and church-wide authority over life and doctrine, but introduced here in order to stress the service they render." (Hendriksen) There are no new apostles; there is no-one who can supplant them, and through them the full and final Word of God had been given. This prior place given to the apostles indicates that the ministry given to the church is essentially a ministry of the Word, a prophetic, teaching ministry rather than a priestly ministry. The church needs God's chosen men (not volunteers or usurpers) to speak to it from God, not priests to stand between the people and God. We have our Great High Priest in Jesus in whose name we can come freely to God (Heb. 4:16). Prophets are those who speak for God by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and they, along with the apostles, have been spoken of as the foundation of the church (2:20; 3:5). Whether we think of these "given" (not self-appointed) prophets as forth-telling or fore-telling the Word from God, we must be quite clear that any who are inspired by the Holy Spirit will not speak contrary to or independent of the Spirit-inspired Word of God. No "word of prophecy" (1 Cor. 14:29-33) can be thought of as replacing or taking precedence over the word of Scripture.

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4:11-13

God, from time to time, raises up men (and sometimes women - Judges 4:4; Acts 21:9) to be prophetic voices to their generation. They may indeed bring new light to our understanding of the Scriptures but neither they nor anyone else must dare to add to the canon of Scripture, which is closed (Rev. 22:18-19). We should exercise caution when some come claiming to speak "new truth", especially if we know little of their background or influence in other places. There *are* false prophets (2 Cor. 11:13-15; Matt. 24:11; 1 John 4:1) and fraudulent messages (2 Thess. 2:1 -3a). When Paul speaks of evangelists, pastors and teachers he seems to be referring to three distinct classes of people, but their ministries certainly belong together in a vital way. If an evangelist is a travelling preacher (although that is not necessarily the case), he will know full well that some "gifted" persons will be needed to pastor or care for the new converts. But pastoral care cannot be divorced from the need to teach the converts so that they will understand, be grounded in and grow up in their new faith. Without doubt some are uniquely gifted in evangelism, able to reach and speak to the unconverted about the Gospel. Some again have a marvellous capacity for pastoring and caring, sensitive to the hurt, the lonely and the needy.

Others again are without doubt able to teach, to open up and to apply the Word of God in a living comprehensive way. Speaking thus it is clear that a true congregation will never be a one-man ministry for, according to the capacities given by God, the work will be shared and the flock cared for. The danger arises when some seek to be what they are not meant to be, or when they seek to go to excess in what they are good at. Self can so easily intrude.

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4:11-13

We must not think that only those who are "experts" in any given area of service are of significant use, nor must we think of a rigid "demarcation" in the business of Christian service. In Acts 13:1-3 some men seem to have been both prophets and teachers, and those sent out to be missionary evangelists were sent by God *and* by the church. In Acts 6:1-6 and 21:8 we see Philip set apart for practical administrative service and also serving as an evangelist. In 2 Tim. 4:1-5 the young man is counselled to carry out a many-sided ministry. We must not be rigid in terms of church order or classification but neither must we be indiscriminate. We must be submissive to and obedient to God with no desire to make a name for anyone but Jesus. One great safety in all service is that each person should be a committed member of some local church so that in all their service they have both the caution and encouragement of the fellowship of believers; and be able, as even the great apostle Paul did, to return and to report back to home base. It would be of immense benefit to the on-going evangelistic and missionary work of the Gospel if organising societies *as a first move* in considering volunteers referred the matter to the home congregation. That would give a good indication of the reality and dependability of the applicant's spirituality. What we must see in these verses is the comprehensive nature of all we mean by ministry. Evangelism without teaching is like midwifery without child-care or schools. Teaching, however sound doctrinally, without pastoral care is less than human. After all, we are dealing with people with feelings, not just with theological brains.

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4:11-13

The emphasis in v.12 is on preparing or equipping people for service. We are dealing here with the ministry of all in the fellowship, serving one another as they have capacity and gifts to do so, and in this way, and in this way alone, the church is built up and the whole family of God's people grows up into increasing maturity and adulthood in both attitude and activity. Children who do not grow up, adolescents who do not become adult, and older people who revert to childishness in spiritual things are all a contradiction of the grace and purpose of God. The word for "preparing" (equipping) the people of God is an interesting one used here in terms of completing something unfinished. It is used in Gal. 6:1 for re-setting something that has been injured and dislocated, and in Matt. 4:21 for mending nets to make them ready for further use. This gives a marvellous insight into the life of a fellowship under the ministry of God's Word. All sorts of people with different hurts, failures, limitations, sorrows and joys, and all at different stages and with different personalities, minister to and serve each other to nurture and encourage Christian life and service. This certainly binds a people together in God-honouring unity and, growing in grace and knowledge, they build up each other in faith, and grow to be like Jesus in character, attitude and activity. This is what pleases God. We never presume to have arrived but, like Paul, we press on to the mark (Phil. 3:12).

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4:14

Stability and steadiness, together with personal spiritual safety and the safety of the work committed to us, are the objectives to which Paul has been pointing us. Remember that this is part of leading a life worthy of God (4:1), and if the life of the church is to be worthy then each member of it must take responsibility, not being a passenger, spectator, and certainly not being a critic. Even when we feel something is wrong we must consider the possibility that we contribute to the wrong, before we start throwing stones of judgment (John 8:7). Paul warns particularly about the danger of being attracted and distracted by every new or novel doctrine or activity, even if these things are biblically sound. We must recognise we have been given a work to do and, of course, the Devil will be glad if we can be turned away from it. When we are spiritually childish we will act on

impulse, dislike duty and resent correction. If we are tossed to and fro we will be like rudder-less boats with no direction and a potential danger to all around us. Our Christian service will at best be fitful. Think of Peter, who was always rushing into situations, speaking before thinking. Think of Mark who started off to be a missionary and then contracted out. Think of the Galatian believers who so soon went astray, influenced by clever speakers. The only way to be kept from wild swings from one extreme to the other is to be grounded in the Scriptures (as we shall see in tomorrow's verse) and to be persuaded of the glory of ordinary service, so that we simply keep on going on. When we are committed to duty and to obedience we will have little time or inclination to listen to beguiling voices, recognising that they seek to take us away from what is growing more and more precious to us.

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4:15-16

Paul has spoken of the evil influences that fragment the church, and we must be mindful of the ever increasing para-church activities which, although claiming to be servants or extensions of the church's work, often prove to be avenues whereby the church's vital life is syphoned away. Many a congregation is hard pressed to staff its on-going work because its useful people are otherwise committed. There is also the danger of strong personalities gathering to themselves a little kingdom in which they will be king. Remember that even the disciples in the company of Jesus argued as to who was greatest (Mark 9:34). There is a Devil who wants to stop any vital work and Peter wisely warns that the enemy looks carefully to see which one of us will be of use to him (1 Pet. 5:8; Lk. 22:31). The great safety is speaking or holding the truth in love, stating the truth and standing on the truth, no matter who seeks to move us, and doing it in love not in bitterness or antagonism. By lip and life we speak truth and we do so because we love the truth. We love God and we love our fellows. Moule speaks of "cultivating an instinct for the truth" so that we distinguish the real from the counterfeit which can look so similar. We need to be eager for the truth (1 Pet. 2:1-3), to revel in it as the Psalmist does (Ps. 119), and to be ever willing to put ourselves under its gracious instruction and correction. When we get impatient with the preaching and reading of the Word, when the Word becomes tasteless to us and neglected, there is something wrong. But Paul is not speaking simply of acquiring an ever greater knowledge of the Word but, by the Word growing in the knowledge of Christ. We are to grow in grace and knowledge (2 Pet. 3:18) and we are to build ourselves up in our faith (Jude 20) and so to be more and more conformed to Christ (Rom. 8:29).

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4:15-16

Read along with these verses 2 Pet. 1:3-11 and see again the on-going developing process of growing up in Christ. There is something very attractive about babies but if they do not grow up we are heartbroken. There is something attractive about the eagerness, enthusiasm and even the obstreperous confidence of new converts, but if they do not begin to grow up and become workers and burden-bearers in the church, we grieve. The Christ-life within us must grow so that we, like Him, will be full of grace and truth, delighting in the Father's will and glad to live and work as servants. But if we read John 17 carefully we will see that there is a great emphasis on Jesus' unity with the Father and with us His people. Paul speaks here of the same kind of unity in the church, the body of believers, headed up in Christ. It is from Christ, and in union with Christ, that the whole body draws its life and vitality and grows. In Col. 2:19 Paul speaks of "strands" of the body knit together, holding together, the thought of close integration that produces both beauty and strength. Here in Ephesians he emphasises the vital nature of every strand because it is only when every individual member of the body (the church) is developing and working properly that the whole body can be and become what it is meant to be for the glory of God and the furtherance of His marvellous plan of salvation. The growth and the strong upbuilding has at its heart, love. Do not fail to see that integral to all this is evangelism. A real church will be self-propagating. Its increase will riot necessarily be measured in numbers but in character, stability, and above all, love. Where there is love for God there will be love for each other and there will be love for those outside of Christ. That is the kind of love that will be willing to sacrifice "self" to bring others to the Saviour.

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4:17-19

Paul has called the Ephesian believers to live lives worthy of God (4:1) and now he calls them to see to it that their lives are different from those of unbelievers. We do well to consider just to what extent and in what ways our life-style is different from that of people around us who make no profession of faith in God. This may give some clue as to why we make little impact by way of witness. It is all too easy to be conformed to the spirit of the world and that has a lot to do with the content and pattern of our thinking about things (Phil. 4:8; Rom. 12:1-2). In many ways the battle for holiness has to be fought and won in the realm of our thinking. What we value will condition our motives and from there actions flow. We could well read Rom. 1:18-32, especially v.28-32 and also Rom. 2:14-16. There is a strange "double-think" in human nature that recognises wrong and yet excuses and justifies it. There is the same "constant war to wage with sin" in the life of the believer, as Paul knew only too well (Rom. 7:15-25). But we have been shown already in Eph. 2:1-3 that there is not only the perversity and bondage of fallen human nature to contend with but also the influence and power of Satan. We have in today's verses a brief but powerful statement regarding the darkening, hardening and deadening power of sin. It is not something to be trifled with! In past days in evangelical preaching there was much emphasis on "separation from the world" (2 Cor. 6:14-7:1) but nowadays in personal, family and business life, in relationships and even in the realm of dress (which can be an expression of personality and attitude) there seems to be a blurring of distinctions. We do not defend legalistic, arbitrary standards, but would neutral observers of our lives conclude that we are different from unbelievers? We may even be less reverent than some who worship false gods.

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4:17-19

In chapters 1-3 Paul has made it plain that we are different in nature, calling and destiny from those who are without Christ and this is the reason why we must live differently from them and from how we lived when we were "one of them". Think of the culture and way of life these Ephesians had been converted from and in which society they still had to live (Acts 19:18-19). Paul makes it clear that there is a way of life not permissible for Christians, not acceptable to God, and on which God's rebuke will fall (Eph. 5:5-6). Note the detailed description given of the essential nature of the life of the unbeliever, whether or not that life degenerates into crude carnality. It is all so contemporary that we study it in detail in order to understand it better, to correct any such tendency in ourselves, and to know best how to work and witness in the face of it. Futility of mind is not just emptiness but has the suggestion of illusion, with people confusing gratification with satisfaction, and sin with happiness. Read Eccles. 2:1-11, 17-21 for an example of futile life and compare that picture with what Jesus says in John 4:13; 6:5-35; 7:37-38. Appetite for life is important but it is only those who hunger and thirst for righteousness who shall be filled (Matt. 5:6). Darkened understanding indicates people who are unable to think things through because they think only on a humanistic level with no other considerations, no outside point of reference. They have replaced the Creator with a creature of their own imagining (Rom. 1:21, 22, 28). This situation and condition stems from the fact that they are alienated from the life of God, not just from the people of God (2:12). They are estranged and cut off from the source of life.

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4:17-19

As Paul continued his description of the life they once lived, we can imagine the Ephesian converts shrinking from the possibility of going back to that kind of desolation. This is the point of realistic speaking about sin, and it is necessary because right from the Garden of Eden the Devil has tried to suggest the innocence and harmlessness of sin (Gen. 3:1-4). We do not deny that sin can bring "pleasures" but the Bible says these are very temporary (Heb. 11:25) and highly priced (Rom. 6:23). Note in v.18 how Paul links alienation with wilful ignorance (2 Pet. 3:5) for which there is no excuse (Rom. 1:18-21). Hardness of heart is spoken of as the cause of ignorance not the result of it. When God speaks and people harden their hearts, a process of hardening takes over and the Word of God, the things of God and awareness of God register less and less. There are warnings of this in Hebrews 2:1; 3:7-8, 15; 4:7, and it must be important to have such repetition within a few chapters of Scripture. The next stage in this hardening is that people become callous, indifferent, emotionless, past feeling, so that nothing registers. The kindest, most tender or the most solemn sermons leave the mind and heart

unmoved. Conscience becomes seared (1 Tim. 4:2) so that there is no longer any restraint. This leads to ruthlessness, indulgence, greed and all that is meant by decadence, so that life is lived on the basis of seeking for sensation, a life that can never be satisfied. It is by being reminded of these things and realising just how easily we could have been trapped in that kind of life that we begin to feel a great sense of gratitude to God who saved us, brought us from a fearful pit, and set our feet on the rock of real life in Jesus Christ. (Psalm 40:1-3) If once we see what sin can do (Jas. 1:14-15) we will learn to flee from it. (2 Tim. 2:22)

4:20-24

The words in v. 20-21 are a cry from Paul's heart to and for his converts. Note that he speaks not simply about believing in Christ but learning Christ, indicating that there is an on-going progress in the life of salvation. No doubt these young Christians had shown real change in their lives but like everyone else they will have fallen and failed many a time. Failure, especially in the areas of our besetting sins, always tends to make us want to give up. But Paul insists that we simply cannot do that because it would mean going back to the life we once lived. We must run afresh to Jesus, grasping again the truth about forgiveness and the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit, and setting ourselves to walk with Him. We must be in earnest, listening well to the truth of God, even if our actual experience has not brought us into touch with raw and ugly evil. Godly influences, the prayers of friends and family, the security and protection we gain from being part of a living, spiritual, well-taught congregation all have played a part in keeping us safe. But that must not make us careless or complacent lest we begin to trifle with things best left alone. We need to be warned because the atmosphere of society is powerfully evil. Read 1 John 2:15-17; 5:19, verses we often refer to. We would not go near a rabid dog, nor trifle with a gas leak, nor go abroad without inoculations, nor skate on thin ice when warnings are displayed. But we take chances with some things we do, some places we go to and some people we get too friendly with. Now, says Paul, you did not learn that attitude to life from Jesus.

"Principalities and powers,
Mustering their unseen array,
Wait for thy unguarded hours:
Watch and pray."
(Elliott)

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4:20-24

We are told to do three things: put off; be renewed; and put on. We can learn the truth in Christ only if we first grasp its basic element which is that in Christ we have been made new creatures (2 Cor. 5:17). We have been born from above, given a new heart and a new spirit, a new "life force" which is perfectly tuned to God's will. This fundamental change in our nature and position has taken place. It is so radical that Paul speaks of it as having been crucified with Christ (Gal. 2: 20). Our old "self" was put to death in the death of Christ and we have been raised to newness of life (Rom. 6:1-14) and in that life sin has neither the right nor the power to dominate us. This is something we must count on, and on that basis we are to put off the old nature with its inborn tendency to sin. We do not *need* it anymore because we have a new life full of potential. We must deliberately grasp and lay hold on that new life and, in order to live it to the full, we must see to it that we make neither provision nor opportunity for the old nature to be indulged or gratified (Rom. 13:11-14). Again and again we must affirm that we are in Christ, taking our stand in Him, and refusing to be deceived by the stirrings and longings of the old nature even when they are very, very strong. The "flesh" will not be satisfied with a few occasional concessions. Given the chance, it will demand more and more until it tyrannises the whole of life. The only thing to do with sin is to die to it; put it to death (Rom. 8:12-13). This is the way of life. The "putting off" and the "putting on" are once-for-all decisive acts as we take our stand in Christ, but the renewing is an on-going life motivated by new concepts, desires and powers.

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4:25-27

Studying this section of the epistle verse by verse must not make us lose sight of the expansiveness and the thrilling dimension of the Christian life to which we are called and for which we were saved. In the note

referring to Eph. 2:10, we suggested the word "workmanship" could be read "masterpiece", and this links with the end of yesterday's note because the new life we live in Christ is life made in the image of God. It is a restoring of God's glorious initial purpose which was marred and distorted by the Fall. (Gen. 1:26-28) Our lives in Christ are to be God-like. This is a practical possibility not wishful thinking. In a way that was never before within our capability we have the power to choose the kind of life we will live, and we will live it for Christ because we are His. Look back to v.18 and see again how different it is for us who are in Christ. We are no longer darkened because God has shone into our hearts (2 Cor. 4:6). We are no longer alienated because God has reconciled us to Himself (Col. 1:11-14, 21-22). We are no longer ignorant because God has made Himself known to us in Christ (Heb. 1:1-2). And we are no longer hardened because we have been given new, tender, God-disposed hearts (Jer. 31:33; Ezek. 36: 25-27). Just rehearsing the facts kindles the spirit. We begin to be glad we are Christians and we set ourselves to be and to become all God has so graciously planned for us. The facts of salvation show us the wide open door of life, *therefore* let us get down to business and come to grips with the changes that we are now being called to make in our whole way of life. But remember it is only because we are in Christ that the power and possibility are there. We have the power, and we must use it.

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4:25-27

We have been called to live worthily (4:1), to live differently (4:17) and now we are called to live in holiness. There has to be a total abstinence from all that would stain life, limit usefulness, harm others and grieve God (4:25-31). In personal and social life we are to have done with falsehood, anything that is "pseudo"; we have to be true in speech and action so that we can be trusted. There must be nothing artificial or sham about our spirituality. It must ring true, because if it doesn't people will be repelled not attracted, and God's name and honour will be shadowed (Rom. 2:21-24). Note the emphasis in v.25 on interdependence and right relationships. In v.26 the theme is anger and resentment and seems to apply to situations in which we have been hurt. We must not allow angry feelings to flare up nor must we allow bitter feelings to be nursed to keep them alive. There is no suggestion that we should have no reaction of anger in the face of manifest wrong. Anger is the right reaction when we see what sin does to lives and homes, when we see the bitterness and harshness of unbelief, and when we see people in the name of religion prostituting and corrupting holy things that belong to God. We see this in Jesus in Mk. 3:5; John 2:13-17. But we must not let anger lead us into sin. It is all too easy to say and do things in a flash of anger and regret it almost immediately. There is a danger in anger that we take into our own hands the rebuke and chastisement that should be left to God (Rom. 12:19). Anger flares easily but can take a long time to settle and ease, and that is why we must hurry the process, keeping short accounts with God and with others, so that we do not carry forward the bitterness to the next day. There is good reason for this as we shall see tomorrow.

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4:25-27

When anger takes possession of us and is allowed to develop into bitterness, we create a situation for ourselves and for those we are bitter against which the Devil is ready to use. The enemy will see to it that our bitter feelings are not kept private and in no time others in our neighbourhood and, sadly, in the fellowship will take sides. The Devil has to be resisted, and any personal sense of grievance must give way to the good of the fellowship and the unhindered progress of the work. If believers are at odds with each other, thinking bitter thoughts, speaking hurtful words and nursing grievances, then they cannot possibly be freely and creatively committed to the Lord's work. Nor can they be in fellowship with God. Our anger has deprived God of the open-hearted company of His children. What a triumph for the Devil! How he must gloat! Now, it is not easy to forgive and to put behind us real hurts, especially if we are rightly angry because people have manipulated and made use of us. But we need to remember just how forgiving God has been towards us even though our sins and wrongs have pierced His loving heart. When we consider our foolish disobedience and our proud rebellions, does not God have cause to be angry with us? But He forgives. He reaches out to us. He does not want the estrangement to linger on. He wants His children to be together in harmony and love (Matt. 18:21-35). Don't forget the Devil! Read 2 Cor. 2:5-11. Don't give him entrance to the fellowship. He is hard to get rid of once you get entangled with him. He is a liar, accuser, tormentor and loves to cause trouble. (John 8:44; Rev.

12:10) Paul will teach us much about Satan before he ends this epistle.

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4:28

Paul now deals with a right attitude to practical, daily life and, in passing, we must see that in Ephesus people with criminal tendencies and records had been converted to Christ. They had to be taught that former practices were no longer permissible in the life of a believer. The Gospel promises forgiveness and power to break the tyranny of sin and at the same time calls for moral reformation. We have here a contrast between stealing and working, together with a reminder of the need to minister to others. Right from Creation man has been called to work (Gen. 2:15) and it is the fact of the Fall and the invasion of sin into human experience that has made work costly toil (Gen. 3:17-19). We are reminded here that it is not enough simply to give God His rightful share of the proceeds of our work and then spend the rest on ourselves. We have to help those in need (Jas. 2:14-17). But we can think of this verse as giving a contrast between working, doing our rightful share, and living off others, whether materially or spiritually. At the root of this issue is selfishness, grasping all there is to get of the blessings of ministry and fellowship but giving nothing, never going out of our way to serve unless it is something which appeals to us. Will a man rob God (Mal. 3:8)? When we are never available for God, never ready to do the necessary tasks in our home-congregation, never offering to give up some of our time to baby-sit or to sit with a lonely old person, never speaking a word of thanks or encouragement to those who have been a blessing and help to us, we may be stealing from those who are entitled to our help. Bad timekeeping and shoddy work steal from our employer. Gossip can steal a reputation. Jealousy can steal affections and break friendships and marriages. Stop stealing and begin serving.

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4:29

The theme is bad and good talking, a theme introduced in v.25 and now developed in terms of positive, spiritual service for the good of others. We should read James 3:1-12; Col. 4:6; Titus 2:8; and Jesus' searching words in Matt. 12:33-37. What do we talk about? Some talk endlessly about themselves but some are secretive and selective in what they say because they want to manipulate every situation. Some always seem to utter words that are snide, cynical, sour and complaining, leaving others upset and uncertain. There have always been such people in the church, as 1 Tim. 5:13; 6:3-5; 2 Tim. 2:16 make plain. It is so easy to waste precious time by idle chatter and pointless preoccupation with incidental worldly issues. This does not mean we must be gloomy and always serious, Christians above all others have grounds for being happy and joyful. But a heart in tune with Jesus will always be sensitively aware of the need and condition of others and will be wise in what is said, when it is said and in what spirit it is said. Indeed, it will be careful not to say in company what should he said in private. It is cruel to expose someone's vulnerabilities. If we think of the society in which these Christians had lived before their conversion, and if we think of the putrid, profane and salacious conversation that marks so many areas of our own society (and many of the books people read and films they watch), we will see the powerful challenge of this verse. The words spoken to Peter, "Your speech betrays you" (Matt. 26:73 AV) can be very searching. Sometimes when we protest, "I didn't say a thing," we know our silence spoke volumes, and it was meant to! Do we "edify", that is, build up people and make them stronger and better by our talk, or do we demolish them?

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4:30

It is in relation to all the aspects of v.25-29 and also in relation to what comes in v.31-32 that we have this sweetly tender but poignant appeal not to grieve the Holy Spirit. The climax of the appeal does not come until 5:1, "Walk in love," and we have to see that walking in righteousness, holiness and integrity cannot be separated from the motivation of love. We must also see that when we give way to the impulses of our old nature, the Devil is waiting to recapture us (v.27), to rob us of life and fellowship, and the Holy Spirit within us is grieved, cut to the heart. And, since Father, Son and Holy Spirit cannot ever be separated, we have to think of the whole eternal Trinity grieved by such turning back to sinful ways. We can sense and feel something of the turmoil of the loving heart of God when faced with the backsliding of His people if we read Hosea 11:7-9. But

Paul speaks specifically of grieving the Holy Spirit, and we must not forget that the Spirit within us is indeed holy and has no desire to be in contact with anything unholy. But, inasmuch as we are sealed unto salvation by that Spirit, He cannot leave us. He cannot abandon His great and gracious task to be our Comforter, Counsellor and Teacher to lead us into truth, and the inspirer and enabler of our prayers (John 16:12-15; Rom. 8:26). We commit the Holy Spirit to a terrible life of grief and hurt when we play false to our high and holy calling as children of God. We are individually and corporately the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16-17; 6:15-20). We are united to Christ and when we turn to what is wrong we defile the Spirit's temple and we drag Christ with us. These thoughts should urge us powerfully to have nothing to do with things that are sinful, and if we have doubts as to whether or not things are wrong, we should want to err on the safe side rather than grieve the Spirit and wound the God who gave His Son for our salvation.

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4:31-32

A bitter spirit that holds on to and nurtures grudges soon leads to nasty words and noisy distraction, and in the clamour Christ is forgotten and His work neglected because people are taken up with themselves. We must see how a bitter spirit poisons the heart and spreads the infection of evil and discontent to many with whom we come in contact (Heb. 12:12-15). The words used in the first of today's verses seem to suggest a potent mixture in a pot that is always just at the point of boiling over. The first three words speak of inward things which people may not immediately see but the next two words show that what is in the heart will sooner or later be expressed in fairly strong terms. The last word, "malice" (31) indicates a disposition of ill will or mischief that takes delight in setting people at odds, always seeking to manipulate situations and people, and has no real desire to change. It is the kind of thing that is found in some people who are always wanting attention. They *say* that they want help but they have no real intention of changing. It is the kind of spirit that finds perverse pleasure in making others feel guilty. Can true Christians really behave like this? If we remember that there is a Devil; and if we learn from Scripture and experience that the heart is deceitful and fatally flawed (Jer. 17:9); and if we realise from past experience that we have been made vulnerable in certain areas, then we will have no difficulty in recognising the danger of falling into sin. We will also see to it that we set a particular guard over those areas of life and personality where we know we have fallen in the past. If our attitude is like this then, far from being grieved, the Holy Spirit will be a mighty helper.

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4:31-32

Hendriksen's exposition of the terms in v.31 is powerfully instructive. He says the six items are all connected with the sins of the tongue. "Bitterness is the disposition of the person with a tongue sharp as an arrow, keen as a razor. He resents his neighbour, and so he 'needles' him, is ever ready to 'fly off the handle' with a reply that bites or stings. Anger or fury is a strong feeling of antagonism which is expressed in the tumultuous outburst, the hot retort. As used here in the evil company of words like bitterness and brawling it is potential murder (Matt. 5:21, 22). Wrath is settled indignation, when the heart is like a roaring furnace. Brawling (clamour) is the violent outburst of the person who has completely lost his temper and begins to yell at others. Slander or reviling is abusive speech, whether directed against God or against man. This catalogue of the evil use of the tongue is summarised in the words 'along with all malice.' Malice is not merely 'mischief' but, in general, the evil inclination of the mind, the perversity or baseness of disposition that even takes delight in inflicting hurt or injury on one's fellow-men. 'Let all of these things be put away from you,' says Paul by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit"(Hendriksen) .Charles Hodge comments, "The venom of the serpent lies harmless in its fang; but all evil feelings are poison to the subject of them as well as venom to their object. The command, therefore, to lay aside all bitterness, is a command to lay aside everything which corrodes our own minds or wounds the feelings of others" (Hodge). We do well to think on these things.

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4:31-32

What a relief it is to turn from the ugliness of the vices, of v.31 to the sweet graces of v.32. We do well to read the passage in Col. 3:12-17 by way of supplement. Jesus spoke of God as being kind (Lk. 6:32-36). The

introduction to the Christmas story speaks of the tender mercy of our God (Lk. 1:78). According to James, the story of Job tells of the compassion and mercy of God (Jas. 5:11). There are many references in Scripture to the longsuffering and tender mercy of God (Lam. 3:19-23; Ps. 103:1-4, 8, 10-14; Ps. 145:8-9). Kindness is goodness of heart that does not gossip about someone's faults and failures but tries to counter criticism by pointing out the good things about the person. Kindness grieves when others are hurt and sad. Tender-hearted means to be capable of caring, sensing the hurt and deep pain someone is feeling, and always being as gentle as possible when dealing with others, especially if it is necessary to rebuke and discipline them. A forgiving spirit does not weary of forgiving nor does it get exasperated with the stumbling, blundering saint but makes allowances for the background that person has come from and, perhaps, how little he may have known of ministry or fellowship. These three Christ-like, God-like graces will always make us pause to consider just how often and at what cost someone may have fought with temptation and won the battle, and we will be slow to judge the obvious failure. These graces will also make us sensitive to the hurt, shame and distress Christians will feel when they have failed, and we will be willing to stand with them in their distress, because even if others did not stand with us, the Saviour did. Never forget that Jesus is touched with the feeling of our infirmities (Heb. 4:15 AV). He knows and understands, but, oh what comfort, He also feels.

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4:31-32

If we take time to think of how immensely kind and forgiving God has been to us all along the way we will see the power in Paul's plea that we should do the same for others. See to it that in church today, or at home, we sing God's praise with gratitude in our hearts.

"When worn with sickness, oft hast Thou
With health renewed my face;
And, when in sins and sorrow sunk,
Revived my soul with grace."
(Addison)

"There is no place where earth's sorrows
Are more felt than up in heaven:
There is no place where earth's failings
Have such kindly judgment given.

"For the love of God is broader
Than the measures of man's mind;
And the heart of the Eternal
Is most wonderfully kind."
(Faber)

"Down in the human heart, crushed by the tempter,
Feelings lie buried that grace can restore;
Touched by a loving hand, wakened by kindness,
Chords that were broken will vibrate once more."
(Alstyne)

Hymns like these, and many more, speak to our hearts of how God has in fact dealt with us. We owe Him such a debt of gratitude. The way to express that gratitude is by showing to others the love and gentleness He has shown to us. We are under obligation to do so, as 1 John 4:7-12 makes plain. Is it not a privilege to be the loving hand that touches and helps another, and to do so in the love of Jesus? There is something wrong if we can take so much of God's love and yet pass by on the other side when we see someone battered and bruised and left behind by the cruelty of the world. (Lk. 10:29-37)

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5:1-2

These two verses sum up all that Paul has been saying in 4:22-32. He spoke first about our new God-like, Christ-like nature (4:24); then came the word "therefore" which indicates that we are not in the realm of impossibility. It is because we are born of God that we are called to behave like God. It is "natural" for the believer and to be expected. In 4:32 we have been reminded of the glorious undeserved forgiveness we have received from God, and again comes the word "therefore" and the appeal to be like children who naturally copy and imitate their father. The pattern is our "elder Brother", Jesus, who in all His life lived looking to the Father and doing His will to please Him. Everything he did was an offering and a sacrifice of worship to the Father, and the Father's response was the spoken testimony that this was His Son in whom He was well pleased (Matt. 3:17; 17:5). There is, of course, in these verses a wonderful encouragement because we who are in Christ are referred to as "dearly loved children". This is how God thinks of us and this is the value He sets on us. We do well to read 1 John 3:1-3 and also to ponder the words, "God so loved the world". It is love that warms the heart, and a warm heart should find it impossible to be cold towards others, no matter how they may have grieved and hurt us. We say it is costly. True! But it was costly for Jesus who gave Himself up for us. That is the example we have to follow (1 Pet. 2:21). Jesus' own words are sometimes quite staggering. Think of Matt. 5:43-48; Luke 6:35-36; John 13:34-35; 15:12-15. Note also how Paul, who has been addressing the Ephesians, now includes himself when he says that Christ loved *us*. The great apostle could never get away from the wonderful thought that the Son of God had loved him, and gave Himself up for him (Gal. 1:15-16; 2:20). It is when we are fixed on the amazing love of God for us that we begin to walk in love.

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5:3-5

We are to live lives that please God and actually give God pleasure when He looks on us and thinks of us. A child is pleased when his father smiles with approval but the smile is clouded when things are said and done that indicate disobedience, rebellion and perversity. That is why Paul now speaks specifically about things that must have no place in the life of a child of God. Keep in mind the sordid and sensual culture of the city of Ephesus in which these believers were a small minority. When "dirt" of every kind is commonplace in the life and speech of the population (as it is now in our own land), it is all too easy to become influenced and contaminated. Over against that there can be a counter-influence, a witness and an "air-freshener" effect introduced by Christians. Note that Paul speaks first of all of the area of relationships and the three words, immorality, impurity and covetousness (greedy desire), all have reference to the realm of sexuality but this need not be applied only to the gross physical aspects. Christian behaviour in this area of life has to be out in the open so that no-one has the opportunity to draw wrong conclusions. In our dealings with the opposite sex there must be a seemliness so that no critical unbeliever has the opportunity to name or suggest that Christians are living unclean lives. And when there is unseemly behaviour among Christians we will be grieved but we must not make excuses for people simply because they are Christians. After all, it is the good name of Christ and His church that is soiled.

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5:3-5

Paul's words about sexual impurity lead him on to the dangerous area in which such things are spoken of in a casual, joking way as if that area of life was so unimportant that it was good for a laugh. It is a significant comment on contemporary society that in the entertainment world, including the pantomime season that is supposed to appeal to children, suggestive jokes about sexuality are commonplace and regarded as necessary. No one defends prudery and there is no suggestion that matters relating to sexuality should never be spoken of. After all, Paul is doing that very thing. But there is a right time and place and a right and worthy level that must be observed, because if this is not done then the Devil (4:27) will soon drag everything down to the basest of levels. Of course there is need in life for good clean healthy laughter and joking, and Christians more than any others can be lighthearted because we are so sure about the things that really matter. Our great safeguard is an attitude of thanksgiving to God who has given us all things in rich measure to enjoy (1 Tim. 6:17) and that includes relationships. It is when hearts are thankful that our disposition of life is towards God, and because God is light (1 John 1:5) the whole of life is drawn out of the shadows.

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5:3-5

Paul has been speaking strong words about Christian behaviour in relation to our witness in the world which is always trying to squeeze us into its God-excluding mould of attitudes and practices. We must refuse and our resistance must be radical. Consider these references: Phil. 2:14-16; 1 Thess. 5:4-8; Rom. 12:2; 13:12-14. It will be a battle, but it is not a hopeless battle because we have been given and are constantly being given the victory in Christ (1 Cor. 15:57; Rom. 6:14). And we have the promise from God that we will not be tempted above what we are able to bear and that the way of escape will always be there (1 Cor. 10:13). Sometimes we have to stand and face the blast of temptation but sometimes the right and wise thing to do is to run away and get clear of the situation and the people who constitute the danger, as quickly as possible. There can be a false bravado in Christians and we need to remember the petition Jesus taught us, "Lead us not into temptation". But to pray that prayer and then take "chances" is utter folly. We need to be reminded of the solemn warning in v.5. No matter our profession of faith, if we choose to live a certain kind of life of carnal indulgence (note the inclusion of covetousness) then we are making it plain that in fact we have no place in God's kingdom. How careful we need to be that we allow nothing (carnal or cultured) in our lives that wages war against our spiritual health and usefulness (1 Pet. 2:11). Let us be quite clear: there is forgiveness, glorious, comprehensive and on-going (1 John 1:7-9), but we must be serious about sin. If we keep ourselves mindful of the wonderful salvation and life and hope we have been given in Christ, our minds and hearts will be kindled in thanksgiving (4) and that is an attitude that both safeguards and inspires.

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5:6

Paul was not only a great theologian, preacher and teacher but also a wise and caring pastor who was always helping his people to understand life so that, as Christians, they and we will be able to cope with it. There are always those who, following various social and psychological philosophies, belittle the consequences of sin, dismiss the whole concept of sin, and virtually say that the things the Bible calls "sin" are in fact necessary "helps" in the business of developing our human personalities. This, of course, is simply the lie of the Devil, portrayed so clearly in the story of the Garden of Eden. The woman and then the man fell for the lie and chose the way of rejecting God and His Word as the way of fulfilment. But this led to the Fall, not to an advance to divinity and dignity. They did not come to "know" good and evil or to be able to handle themselves and their lives. They simply discovered evil and with that came fear, shame and an instinctive desire to hide from God (Gen. 3:1-13). Sin brings consequences physically, psychologically and spiritually, and when it has run its full devastating course it brings death (Jas. 1:13-15). If sin had not entered the world (and it was man's doing - Rom. 5:12) there would have been no death (Jas. 1:15). But there are more than "natural" consequences to sin, and this needs to be stated clearly in our generation which is so confused about a wide range of afflictions in society. Sin, and sinful behaviour, bring the judgment of God. He is angry and His displeasure and rebuke come upon individuals and society. There are many "judgments" of God before the great and final Day of Judgment. God's wrath is revealed against all unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18). All is open to His sight and we have to deal with Him both now and in the world to come (Heb. 4:13).

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5:7-10

Here is the earnest plea of the pastor's heart, calling the people away from any complicity in the evils that are being done in society. It is so easy to get entangled with the wrong people, doing wrong things, and to get trapped and carried along with them even when we have begun to regret ever getting involved. Then, when the powers of the law catch up with the wrongdoers, we also are caught in the net. We must learn to say no, to say it at the right time and to stand out against complicity with evildoers, some of whom are very attractive characters. We must not think that we can go along with them without being infected in our attitudes by them. Think of the story of Lot who chose to stay in the city of Sodom and even became an important citizen and a magistrate. In the end he had to be dragged out; he lost his testimony (seemingly he was a justified sinner - 2 Pet. 2:7); and he was despised by the citizens of Sodom who resented his "holier than thou" attitude. But that

was only the beginning of the disastrous consequences of his involvement with Sodom. His way of life led his wife into permanent bondage to sensual worldliness and it finally destroyed his daughters. Read the story in Gen 19 and see how vital it is for those who have been brought out of darkness into God's light to keep themselves separate from all forms of darkness, which not only cloud their Christian testimony but draw them away from the light of fellowship with God back into shady ways which grow darker and darker. Consider well Paul's words in 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1 and learn to walk in the light of God (1 John 1:5-7), because that is the way of life, blessing, fellowship and satisfaction.

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5:7-10

These verses are difficult but staggering in what they say. Before we became Christians we were not simply in the dark, we were "darkness". We were impregnated with darkness, identified with darkness, and having the effect of darkness wherever we went. It is a fact of experience that the company of godless, unbelieving, profane people obliterates the sense of God and in so doing increases the darkness of society. But we who are "in Christ" are not only in the light, we are "light" and are possibly the only spiritual light that people in our community and circle of friends and workmates ever see. This is why we must live as children of light, doing nothing that would cloud the light of Christ that shines in us and through us, whether we are aware of it or not. We know from our car headlights or the strip lights in our homes how easy it is for a film of dust and dirt to build up without our noticing until the time comes when we need clear, bright light and it is not there. We are called to let our light shine (steadily, not waving it around frantically) (Matt. 5:14-16; Phil. 2:15) because the result of light is the production of what is good and true (9). Nothing grows properly when there is not enough light and, in society, when there is not enough Christian light nor enough of the fresh air of the Spirit, then the spores of evil things breed and grow. Of course, shining as light can give you a deep shock because you discover just how dark things in the world are and just how bitterly people can react to the light which exposes them for what they are. Some people prefer darkness to light for obvious reasons (John 3:19). Light can produce hate (John 15:22-24). But when we know in our own lives the beneficial effect of the light of Jesus can we possibly refuse to shine as lights in order that others might see the way to life? To live like this is to be pleasing to the Lord.

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5:11-14

We are called to live, walk and work as children of light (8) and to do so we must be sensitive to and ever learning what is pleasing to the Lord (10). Paul now insists that a vital part of such a life is in fact negative. We must refuse to become involved in anything that is in darkness or is "shady", and by so doing we bear testimony against such people and practices, exposing them for what they are, contrary to God. This is not narrow-mindedness but simply practical morality. It is neither censorship nor a denial of human rights and liberties. It is an affirmation that on a personal and a national level it is righteousness alone that brings stability and health and liberty (Prov. 14:34). It is only when light shines that some people begin to see just what a disastrous and disintegrating course they have been following in their lives. Read and ponder John 3:19-21 in relation to Paul's words here and see again how we need to be prepared for violent reaction at times when we bear witness to the light, life, peace and joy that Jesus has brought into our lives. Such testimony can penetrate into the darkest recesses of society and bring deep conviction of sin, righteousness and judgment. This is the work of the Holy Spirit (John 16: 7-11) and we must rejoice in it even when there is violent reaction. Think of how the witness of the dying martyr Stephen pierced the soul of Saul of Tarsus and made him like a fiend of Hell until he was finally brought to the feet of Jesus (Acts 9:3-6). We must not, ever, underestimate the effect of the simple, unassuming, unselfconscious witness of lives being lived to please Jesus. Nor must we underestimate the effect when the most shy and sensitive person takes courage "to speak a word for Jesus." It does not even need to be in holy language. Perhaps some of us try to be too holy!

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5:11-14

J B Phillips paraphrases v.13 - "Light is capable of 'showing up' everything for what it really is. It is even

possible (after all, it happened with you!) for light to turn the thing it shines upon into light also." Having emphasised the radical contrast between the conduct of believers with that of those in the darkness of unbelief, Paul now calls the believers to be up and doing and he quotes words from the prophet Isaiah, although it is not quite clear which of various verses he is quoting (Isa. 9:2; 26:19; 52:1a; 60:1-3). This is in fact a call from God and it is a reminder of what Paul himself has taught earlier in the epistle. We have been brought not just from darkness to light but from death to life. That is certainly something that should be manifest in our lives and all our attitudes. But Paul also speaks of being awakened from sleep in the sense of being roused by an important and significant alarm. Such are the issues involved in the Gospel that there is no time for that rather indulgent half-awake half-asleep process of starting the day when there is nothing special to do. This is a word to those who are becoming spiritually lazy, tending to waste time and to put off until another time everything that *can* be put off. Get up, says Paul, and get going. Go out into the darkness and shine with the light Christ will give you. We could, of course, apply the challenge to those who have been awakened to the reality of God and convicted of sin and of the need for salvation by the witness of Christian testimony. That makes v.14 a Gospel call full of urgency and promise. Wesley spoke of the dungeon of sin flaming with light and his chains falling off. Bonar spoke of hearing the voice of Jesus saying, "I am this dark world's light" and how, looking to Jesus he began to walk in the light of life. Read the hymns "And can it be," and "I heard the voice of Jesus say," because some people suggest Paul was in fact quoting words from an Easter hymn known to his readers.

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5:15-16

To speak of how we walk rather than just how we live is good, because it indicates walking rather than running and of a step by step steady progress rather than sudden spurts of enthusiasm. When Christian life becomes a "rush" there is a tendency to become careless, with little time to ponder the significance of what we are doing and the way we are doing it. Rush also leads to strain, tension and exhaustion, and this can lead to people having of necessity to contract out of Christian service and to pass on duties to other people who may already be carrying a legitimate and appropriate load. We need to be wise, making distinction between what is important and what is secondary, planning both life and service long-term rather than just giving all our energy to the things of the moment, even if these things are Christian things. Consider the wise counsel in Isaiah 40:28-31 and the emphasis on the fact that the young, in spite of their enthusiasm and energy, are in fact the ones who get weary while those who have learned to wait on God (and to rest in Him - Ps. 37:5-7 AV) are the ones who achieve. Note also the significant progression from the moments of wonderful soaring, to running and then to the long-distance walking. Note also that the call for wisdom and balance comes before the call to make the most of our time and our opportunity. It is all too easy to end up driving ourselves, almost as if everything depended on us, forgetting the promise Jesus made that when "yoked" with Him and keeping step with Him, the yoke will prove to be easy, that is, free from strain without any diminishing of effectiveness. Such thoughts should make a difference to the way we plan our days.

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5:17

Paul has called believers to walk carefully, accurately, wisely, going forward step by step, with due consideration of the direction our lives are taking, and reviewing from time to time what lies behind in terms of fruitful service. We have to be wise in our use of time because it belongs to God, not to us, and it is all too easy to let our hobbies and our friends steal from God what is His by right. Think of the rebuke in Daniel 5:22-27. The chief end or purpose of our lives is to glorify God and that is the only way to enjoy Him. This call to careful life-style is because the days are evil and the whole spirit and atmosphere of this world is no friend to the grace of God and to Christian living. Think of all the areas of our activities in which we would not bear witness to Christ either by speech or by that life-style which says, "No, thank you, I am a Christian." But we must not be "unwise", witless, unthinking and insensitive, with no sense of what is fitting in time or language. We have to understand what the will of the Lord is and that can only be ours if we make it our business to walk with God, to cultivate His friendship so that we think alike. If we are to understand then we have to think things through, and this emphasis on thinking, as opposed to being moved merely by emotion, is emphasised in the next verse. We must be clear that sudden, irrational promptings, changes of direction and exaggerated actions,

have more to do with being drunk than with being led, guided and controlled by the Holy Spirit. We are in the realm of guidance here and a safeguard in this is a sense of duty which is more likely to keep us in the will of God than mere inclination and preference. We develop this theme tomorrow when we must review the very practical advice we are being given about living the Christian life.

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5:18

Start at v.15 and trace the various emphases. We are to walk carefully or accurately. We are to make the most of our time, buying it up ("redeeming the time" - AV), buying it back for God from other things. This does not mean cramming every day with as much of Christian things as possible, because without true rest and relaxation this simply means that when real service is called for we have lost our edge because we are too tired. We have to be realistic about evil, and about the Devil (16), because if we forget about him he will slink in on us and deceive us. We have to use our brains to understand what God wants us to do. That does not mean we are to deny all emotion and become mere theological machines with no humanity, but our feelings must not be allowed to dominate. Paul contrasts those under the influence of wine and those filled with the Spirit. The first will have emotion, excitement, enthusiasm and an endless flow of words, together with an absolute sense of being right and in total control of themselves and their situation, even when it is obvious to everyone else that they are "out of their minds". This condition leads to debauchery, unrestrained living and, of course, regrets. That is not the kind of life that honours God. But there is another important reason why Paul contrasts the two "spirits" that influence people so strongly. Why do people get drunk (often not meaning to do so)? It can be to create atmosphere, to generate inner excitement, to give false courage or to escape from fear, disappointment and low self-esteem. But Christians do not need such artificial stimulus. They are chosen of God, valued highly, privileged in service and guaranteed a glorious destiny. What is more, they are indwelt by the gracious, mighty, all-sufficient Holy Spirit who is able to fulfil in and through them God's perfect will. And, all the while, they are in balanced control of themselves because the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets (1 Cor. 14:32). A man or woman filled with wine is not in control, and that is the danger.

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5:18

Exaggeration and instability are the marks of the man filled with wine. He has chosen the way of self-indulgence but has no self-control. Paul calls the believers to be filled with the Spirit, to let the Spirit fill our lives, to draw us to the Father, to desire and delight in the Father's will and to be led on in that good and perfect will (Rom. 8:14-17; John 16:12-14). Yes, there is thrill in being filled with the Spirit, but it is not the same as falsely generated excitement, and the Holy Spirit is blamed for a great deal of commotion in which some believers indulge their emotions with little reference to the Scriptures or to duty and service. Think of Jesus who was undoubtedly a man filled with the Spirit, fully supplied with the Spirit. What do we see? A daily life in the will and service of the Father, balanced, composed, responsible, dependable, clear in mind and heart, full of grace and truth, totally human and wonderfully free of false excitement. Being filled with the Spirit as an on-going experience is to allow that Spirit to occupy, sanctify and supply every aspect of life and personality so that we grow to be like Jesus. Being filled with the Spirit is not something extra to salvation, nor a detached particular experience, but the practical "know how" for living lives worthy of God (5:1-2). If we look at Col. 3:16-17 we find Paul dealing with the same issue as here in Eph. 5:18-20, but putting the emphasis on letting the Word of God dwell richly in us to do its work of conforming us to the will and pattern of God. The Spirit and the Word go together and work together and any doctrine or experience of the Holy Spirit that makes people say, as some do say, that they do not need the Scriptures now because they have been filled with the Spirit and the Spirit now leads them, is quite false.

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5:19-20

On April Fool's Day we remind ourselves that one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit in our lives is that we are willing to be fools for Christ's sake (1 Cor. 4:8-13). In that passage Paul is addressing those who were proud of their spirituality because they were "filled". But Paul was the man truly filled with the Spirit and his whole life

testified to this. Here in Ephesians in today's verses, Paul begins to show what it means in practical terms to be filled with the Spirit. The first thing he mentions is fellowship, the believers coming together for worship, praise, mutual encouragement and thanksgiving. The natural desire of the Holy Spirit is to bring together all who are indwelt by Him and so to create a happy, harmonious fellowship. The Spirit does not make us exclusive or independent as if we did not need anyone except God. God is a Father and Paul has already spoken in chapter 2 about our being brought together into one family in Christ. The Holy Spirit would never have the effect of countermanding what Christ has done, and a spirit that divides a fellowship and sets Christian at odds with Christian is not the Holy Spirit. If v.19 refers to Christian praise, harmonious, joyful and hearty, why does it say we are addressing or speaking to each other? Should not praise be addressed to God? It is for Him and it is a by-product of God-directed praise that we are blessed in it. It seems that in "singing our hearts out" to God we do in fact minister to each other in the truth being affirmed. We are saying to each other as we sing, "It is all gloriously true. Isn't it great? We have a God who saves and keeps." This makes congregational praise a very significant part of worship and witness and that is why both words and music should be worthy. To go back to Paul's comparison in v.18, we are aware that the singing of a crowd of people full of drink tells a lot about them. In like manner the singing of a company of Christian believers should make the rafters ring with faith, hope, love, joy and peace.

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5:19-20

We must take time to consider carefully the last verse because its truth has often been distorted, and sometimes Christians have been told to give thanks for sad and painful tragedies. The right and true reaction to hurt, bereavement, disappointment and to personal and national tragedy is to sorrow and indeed to weep. Our feelings need to be expressed, else they will produce reactions that may prove harmful. We must never understand Paul's words in 1 Thess. 4:13 to mean that he forbids sorrow. We do sorrow, but not in the same way as unbelievers, because we have sure hope of Heaven. The full story and the full enjoyment of all we mean by life is not and can never be in this world alone. The explanations, the fruit and fulfilment will all come in due time and we will indeed "bless the hand that guided, and bless the heart that planned". This we believe, and our trust is in the God who does all things well and who does not willingly afflict or grieve (Lam. 3:31-33). What we do give thanks for is that there is not an experience of joy or sorrow that we go through without the personal presence and care of our God (Isa. 43:1-3; Ps. 103:10-14). Gratitude needs to be expressed to God and to the men and women through whom God's rich goodness is ministered to us. Paul himself did this in passages such as Phil. 1:3-5; 4:2-3; 1 Cor. 16:17-18; Rom. 16:1-4; 2 Tim. 1:16-18. He was glad to acknowledge his debt because without these people, their love and care, his ministry could not have gone on so smoothly. In 1 Thess. 5:16-19 thanksgiving is linked with our prayer life and with grieving the Spirit. Perhaps if we expressed our gratitude more truly we would know more of the gracious power of the Spirit in our lives. Thanksgiving is linked with prayer and peace in Phil. 4:4-7, and these words were spoken when Paul was in prison. O, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good and He has been nothing but good to us. (Ps. 73:1; 136:1-3)

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5:21

Being filled with the Spirit is a theme which seems to lead Paul right through the area of worship and thanksgiving to the subject of husband and wife relationships. This leads him on to speak of the love of Christ for His church, and then on to other areas of relationships and behaviour. Note how the teaching flows right on from v.19 to v.21. Being filled with the Spirit manifests itself in joy, gladness, singing and thanksgiving, all expressed with enthusiasm and happiness of heart. But the same gladness, willingness and enthusiasm should be manifest in the area of being subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. Of course, in a generation that is obsessed with individual rights and privileges there is not much enthusiasm for submission, not even among Christians. Independence, refusal to conform in behaviour, worship or service, and reserving the right to "do our own thing" must not be assumed to be the fruit of the Spirit, even if the area of activity is that of Christian things. It can be the fruit of carnal self-will that simply refuses to consider the feelings, hopes, hurts and claims of other people. A driving desire to be different can be simply an expression of human and spiritual insecurity. This is why we need to be willing to be in submission to one another. We recognise the worth,

dignity, place and vital function of each other and we set ourselves to learn and to discern the order, pattern and plan which God has instituted. Read 1 Pet. 5:5-7 and remember these words were written by headstrong Peter who had tended to be over-concerned with comparison with others (John 21:20-22). Read also Phil. 2:1-5. Rom. 12:10 speaks of honouring one another, and that is very different from criticising, denigrating or oppressing.

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5:22-24

In stating the principle in v.21, Paul has made plain it is a two-sided thing with no suggestion of anyone "lording it" over another to his or her detriment. He also makes plain this attitude of submission is for Christ's sake in order to do and fulfil the will and purpose of God. If we look down to v.25, 31, 32 we see that the whole marriage relationship is spoken of in terms of being grounded in the plan and purpose of creation and also lifted on to the level of the relationship of love and purpose between Christ and the church. It is important then to think of relationships in terms of God's plan for both blessing and fulfilment. If men and women are to be truly themselves and rise to the dignity and function which God has planned for them, then it must be by way of His clear principles and directions. Wives, children and servants (5:22; 6:1,5) are called in turn to be in submission, but in like manner husbands, parents and masters are also called and challenged but to an even higher and more demanding standard (5:25; 6:4,9). It cannot be without significance that Paul, writing by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, deals with these relationship matters immediately before dealing with the basic issue of spiritual warfare. If we are to be victorious in the spiritual battle of Christian service we need to be thinking about the whole of life in the terms that God has ordained, otherwise we will be distracted and confused in our attitudes, and our own self-centred thoughts will effectively keep us from whole-hearted commitment to the on-going work of the Gospel. These things need to be said before we get down to the details of these verses because, to an increasing extent, the spirit of the world is causing people to think about life in a way totally independent of and often contrary to God's will revealed in Scripture.

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5:22-24

These verses and the passage which follows, together with corresponding passages in Col. 3: 17-19 and 1 Pet. 3:1-7, tend to arouse great fury and resentment in our day, when the attitudes and relationships of the sexes seem to be those of confrontation, antagonism and competition. The same seems to be so in both family and industrial relationships where a basic spirit of non-cooperation tends to make harmony impossible. This makes us face the fact that we live in a fallen and disordered world, not the world as God made it and intended it to be. There is discord instead of harmony, and only in the context of salvation is there any possibility of order and peace. This is why those who are in Christ are called to live out their new life in accordance with God's pattern. We have to see these areas of relationships as being part of our witness to show what God can do: showing that, in Christ, there are marriages and relationships which are God-honouring from the start, set to last for a life-time, and providing a safe context for children to grow without being manipulated or even destroyed by their parents' self-indulgence. Right relationships and right attitudes and actions between the sexes are also parts of the colossal and elemental conflict between the powers of darkness and the gracious purposes of God. In the thinking of many, marriage has been reduced from a life-long union to a convenient arrangement so long as two people feel they are "in love" or are "being fulfilled". Think of how family life with its security and sense of identity for children is being destroyed, producing an aimlessness, lostness, rebellion and vandalism that no-one knows how to deal with. These are the issues that compel us to take Paul's teaching seriously.

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5:22-24

The Bible is very clear that God made men and women of equal value and significance in His sight with no suggestion of inferiority or superiority (Gal. 3:28). In terms of salvation both are equally precious, and both are saved in the same way, by grace alone. But God made men and women different not just in human constitution but in spiritual function, and that is why in relationships and in church order the distinctions made clear in Scripture must be observed. If we feel God made a mistake in the order He set at creation and the pattern set for

His church, then our argument is with God. If we resent God's order of things in relationships then we are yielding to the same kind of lie as the Devil presented to Eve when he suggested that God's pattern was one which would deny human fulfilment and destiny, and that another way would be better. Taking the other way, the woman tempting the man (Gen. 3:6; 1 Tim. 2:13, 14), the whole human race was led into disaster. If we keep in mind that God's plan and purpose is to bless us in salvation, then the call to "be subject" or "to submit" is not a harsh imposition but a means of grace whereby both life and service are enriched. The submission is "as unto the Lord" with the same glad love and trust as we show to Jesus. In v.23 we have the same emphasis and comparison. The husband is the head of the wife in the same way and for the same glorious purpose as Christ is head of the church which is His body and it is by Him that the church is saved. Christ and His church cannot be separated. Their life, service and destiny belong together, and for the church to be in submission to her Lord is honour, privilege, security, peace, joy and fruitful service. It is a relationship that is positive and full of destiny, and so is the God-ordained relationship of husband and wife.

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5:25-27

Nothing is being said in this long passage, 5:21-33, about unmarried women or men. There is nothing being said that denies worth or forbids rightful ambition or fulfilment, but the pattern is always that of Christ who never imposed or denigrated, and who was always ready and willing to forego His rights in order to minister to others (Phil. 2:5-7). Men, married or single, must be true men, and women have the right to look to them to be like Jesus, otherwise there can be no trust. The headship of the man (23) is to be like the headship of Christ over the church. This is the only headship that is legitimate, and Christ took full responsibility for the welfare, guidance, protection and provision for His church, because the bonds that bound them together were His love for the church, to which the church responded safely in love. Note the two little words in v.24, "as" and "so", because that is the pattern which governs the word "everything". There are Christian wives who have no idea what their Christian husbands earn, and there are wives who regard "their" money as no part of the marriage sharing. Should not love share everything? Jesus gives us Himself and all He has, and even our failure to use all in the right way does not make Him go back on His commitment or withdraw His love. Some husbands and wives seldom talk to each other about the things that matter most to them, whether things about work or spiritual things. But "secrets" or "no go areas" do not lead to trust, and love and trust grow together.

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5:25-27

It is becoming clearer that both the submission and headship spoken of and called for are that of love. If wives think they have been challenged deeply in the matter of submission, just think of the challenge set in the standard for husbands. They are to love their wives with the totality and sacrifice of love which Christ showed for the church. He valued that church beyond all calculation, saw in her beauty and worth above all others, and desired to have her by His side to live and work together in a relationship that would grow increasingly glorious. Think of these things when we gather in our various churches and consider the active, operative love of Christ for and amongst His people, giving Himself to each and all with a generosity of absolute love, and leading each and all along the road of blessing, enrichment and glory. Consider the picture of the glorious Christ in the midst of His church as shown in Rev. 1:12-18, and the description of the church as a bride adorned for her husband in Rev. 21: 1, 2. There is nothing in all this that demeans women and everything that gives them their rightful and glorious place. Is it not true that every wife is glad to stand in this right relationship with her husband when he shows himself in attitude, word and action to be a Christ-like man? Keep very clearly in mind today Christ's love for the church, revel in it, rest in it and be encouraged, and then see to it that we also love Christ's church in all its different aspects, and never despise or neglect or do wrong to any one member, for each one is precious to Him.

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5:25-27

Note how Paul moves so quickly from the relationship of husbands and wives to that of Christ and the church. He obviously sees the pattern and development of the relationships having much in common and he is certainly

thinking of both the Person and the work of Christ. He gave Himself up for the church, the just for the unjust to bring the people to God (1 Pet. 3:18). He sanctified or set her apart for God, all her sins being forgiven and put away so that there is no shadow or barrier to spoil or hinder the relationship and fellowship. The reference to washing of water may refer to baptism as "the sign and seal of our ingrafting into Christ", or to the ongoing washing and cleansing that keeps us clean and makes us increasingly clean. Paul speaks of washing by the Word, whereas John speaks of cleansing by the blood of Jesus Christ (1 John 1:7). Paul may be thinking of Jesus' words in John 17:17 referring to sanctification in or by the truth. Note also that Paul speaks of Christ "having cleansed" (RSV) or "cleansing" the church, and we can hold both the accomplished fact and the ongoing process together. After all, our salvation is an accomplished fact. We have been saved and yet we are being saved day by day, indeed hour by hour, kept and progressed by Him who loved us and gave Himself for us. But we must not forget that the end result is glorification (Rom. 8:29, 30). The church is seen as glorious in splendour, without flaw of any kind, and this is our destiny as part of the church which is both Christ's body and bride. The church will be seen as a radiant (glorious AV or in splendour RSV) bride and, in fact, this is how Christ sees the church now. It does not yet appear what we shall be (1 John 3:1, 2) but we shall be like this by the power of God's grace (Jude 24). Ponder the words of Wesley's hymn, "Love divine, all loves excelling" and let your heart long to be worthy of such love.

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5:28-30

Without a break, Paul goes right on to speak of husbands and wives and of the unqualified nature of the love that should bind them together. If the church is the body of Christ then Christ cannot ever be thought of as complete without the church, His body. But the church is also His bride, and Heaven is spoken of in terms of the marriage feast of the Lamb, who is Christ (Rev. 19:5-9). Our Lord must never be thought of as lacking anything in His Person or work, and yet the completeness of His work is spoken of in terms of the fulfilment of union with His Bride, the Church. This illustration is used by Paul when he says "in the same way" and goes on to speak of the fulfilment and completeness of the husband who cannot ever reach that completeness without his wife to whom he is joined by love. Go back to Gen. 2:18 (AV) where the woman is spoken of as "helpmeet" for the man: the one who stands over against him, not in confrontation and competition, but in terms of both calling on, inspiring and enabling him to be and to become all he is able for. In this way in partnership of love both reach and enjoy true fulfilment. It is all based on, and emerging from and enabled by love. Nothing else can do this. But love has to be nourished, cared for and valued in the way that Christ cares for and ministers to His church. The reference in these verses to "bodies" seems to suggest that it is through each other's bodies, personalities and lives that each partner in the marriage is able to express in a true and full sense what they are, what they are capable of rising to, what they were created and redeemed for, and what will bring them in every sense fulfilment. If we thought of our partnerships in church and in marriage in this way we would have a far more glorious outlook on life.

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5:31-33

Paul quotes Gen. 2:24 and the words "for this reason" link these verses specifically to what has gone before. According to the Genesis story the husband-wife relationship, built into the very basis of the order of creation, is a different and stronger relationship than any other. God brought the woman to the man and in so doing recognised the need and the natural longing of human nature (Gen. 2:18,23). In marriage the two (equal, different and complementary) become one flesh and the words make plain the Ephesian passage that the physical, sexual union is set in the context of love and as an expression of love. Sexual fulfilment and satisfaction is not the primary thing in a relationship, and when it does come first, especially outside marriage, there is inevitably an inhibiting of personality and a narrowing down of the relationship. Two people do not get to know each other by physical union; it is when they do know each other and have allowed love to be born and to develop that they can then express their love by way of physical intimacy, but only within the context and commitment of marriage. Paul again breaks in to speak of the sweet, strong union between Christ and His church and then returns to the human relationship. Human love should reflect and be patterned on Christ's love for His church. It must be a unique and exclusive love. Let each one love *his own* wife. Love patterned on

Christ can never be unfaithful. Perhaps the best text to use with regard to marriage is 1 Pet. 3:7 (AV):- "Heirs together of the grace of life." One last comment: note how the Bible says that marriage calls for and requires a leaving of the parental home and the beginning of a new family unit. But there must be no lack of gratitude for all that parents have done, nor a "running home to mother" form of escapism from responsibility. Neither must there be the tyranny of parents who refuse to let their adult children go so that they might become truly independent.

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6:1-4

Paul has expounded the Christian view of relationships within the marriage bond and has shown that Christ-centred love, submission and responsibility are the things that make for a happy home. Ponder the words of the hymn by Karl Spitta, "O happy home, where Thou art loved the dearest," with its emphasis on security and love for the children. But there is also need for challenge, discipline and instruction in the home because, after all, at every age we face the problem of fallen human nature, the propensity for sin and the temptations and influences of Satan. It is not without significance that, in a letter which would be read out to the gathered congregation, Paul assumed that children of all ages would be present. They may well have been baffled and bored by much, even most, of the earlier teaching, but the call in v.1 would register, and no doubt would be repeated to the children when they got home. Of course, the children may then have quoted v.4, an experience some of us have had! Do not forget that even at this stage Paul is clearly heading for the theme of spiritual warfare in which he deals with the well-laid schemes of the Devil. If the enemy can distort and destroy family life and instil a spirit of rebellion in young, growing children in Christian homes, then he can work havoc in the future of Christ's church. We will study these verses very carefully over a number of days because the exhortations can be misunderstood and distorted. This can lead to a hard, harsh, domineering authoritarianism which robs children of their identity, crushes their personalities and tends to make them rebel against, and refuse, their parents' beliefs, faith and way of life. At the same time we must see in references such as Rom. 1:30; 2 Tim. 3:2; in the lists of evils that corrupt society, there is mention of disobedience to parents.

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6:1-4

Because the humanist philosophy which dominates society does not believe in the fallenness of human nature, it takes the attitude that, given the right circumstances and proper encouragement, children and adults will "naturally" rise to their best. The Bible says that the human heart is hopelessly diseased, corrupted and disabled (Gen. 6:5-6; Jer. 17:9; Rom. 7:15-21), and that we need to be born all over again with a new heart and new spirit (John 1:12-13; 3:3-8; Jer. 31:33). Now, it is to children gathered within the church, whether or not they have come to personal faith, that Paul addresses his challenge. But the command, since it is enshrined in the Ten Commandments, is addressed to all. The world says, "Let the child express itself; don't inhibit it, lest damage is done to the growing personality." The world says, "Let the child develop its potential without hindrance!" But think of the reaction a child can have when a new baby arrives:- resentment, envy, fear, to name but a few possibilities and think how soon a little child will seek to impose its will on the whole household and how soon it learns to say "No," and to say it with defiance. The world says, "Let the child choose for itself; do not force it to go to church or believe in God because that is prejudice and manipulation." But in a garden we do not give the weeds an equal chance with the flowers. We rip them up to give the flowers the best chance to grow. In like manner we pre-dispose children to go with God and teach them the truths and duties of the Christian faith, seeking by prayer, precept and example to lead them into life, the life which only Jesus Christ can give.

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6:1-4

Paul does not mention divided homes where one parent is not a believer, nor homes where the children are Christians but not the parents, nor situations where parents are backsliders. The words "in the Lord" (1) must not be taken to mean "if your parents are Christians". The call is to obey parents because this is what the Lord bids us to do. But this does not require children to obey when the parents are asking what is clearly against the

will of God. Some parents, even those who claim to be Christians, try to prevent their children from going to the church prayer meeting. They may not forbid it openly but simply apply pressure or suggest alternative activities. In such a situation a child can honour his or her parents, holding them in great affection and respect, and yet choose to be loyal to Christ even though parents may see this as stubbornness. When we think of all our parents have done for us, to the best of their ability and as far as they knew what was best, we owe them a great debt of gratitude which should be expressed in many ways. One way of honouring parents, whether they are Christians or not, is to show them in our lives the grace and truth of Jesus Christ and the moral and spiritual integrity that should accompany a profession of faith. In this way even a little child may lead its parents to God (Isa. 11:6). Paul reminds the young of the commandment's promise to those who honour their parents. This does not mean that every good son or daughter will have a long life in terms of years lived, because there are many other factors to be considered. The promise seems to refer to individual wellbeing, a sense of peace, purpose and contentment, not least in being aware that life is in God's good hand. The promise also refers to social stability, national continuance, and the continuing life and witness of the church as the people of God. Read Titus 2:1-10 and think what effect this would have on contemporary society.

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6:1-4

Discipline, obedience, honouring and loving make for good, balanced family life. If these break down in the home it is inevitable that the breakdown of society will be even more radical, because there are not the restraints of common loyalty that operate instinctively in the family. Discipline leads to freedom not to bondage, and if we do not learn self-discipline and submission to rightful discipline when we are young, we are likely to grow up with an attitude of selfishness, feeling that the world owes us a living. The time to learn is when young, and principles inculcated then tend to last a lifetime (Prov. 22:1-6). But there is a right way to teach and influence the young and Paul challenges fathers, as the heads of families, not to provoke their children. Parents must not baffle their children by double standards, "don't do as I do, do as I say." Parents must not steal their children's lives and personalities by trying to realise their own frustrated ambitions and emotions through them. When children are asked a question, the parent *must not* jump in with the answer, nor must the parent tell "hilarious" stories about the children, especially when the children are present. We have seen some children (some of them far from young) cringing with embarrassment in this kind of situation. Little wonder some young people rebel or become secretive when they are aware they are being imposed upon or when they are being given all manner of physical and material gifts when what they really want is for parents to give them time and to be willing to listen to them without dismissing their ideas out of hand. Parents must not deprive their children of wise spiritual instruction nor deny them spiritual atmosphere in the home, but neither must parents stifle or suffocate their children with a spiritual regime that excludes happy humanity. Some do this because they fear their children will go astray. But faith is more important than fear in bringing up children.

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6:5-8

Here again we have a great deal of concentrated spiritual and practical teaching in a few verses. Remember that, although these words were not written in an age of unemployment, inflation and microchip technology, they were written in an age that knew terrible poverty and hardship, with a great gulf between rich and poor and with slaves having no rights or freedoms, although some masters were noble, humane and generous. The words Paul uses make it plain that there were clock-watchers, idlers and schemers, just as there are now. There were others who made it their business to create tension, unrest and rebellion, seeking to change the social and economic structures of society in that way. But Paul, far from launching an attack on slavery and on employers and those in power, calls on the converts in Ephesus to do their secular work with humility, honesty and heartiness, showing loyalty, diligence and dedication, just as they would show these characteristics in their spiritual service. Remember, of course, that there would no doubt be slaves and masters in the same congregation and the slave, by spiritual maturity and capacity, might be an elder or leader and the master a new convert. But there had to be no wrong familiarity when both returned to the work-place. When Paul calls for fear and trembling he does not mean servility because, after all, in Christ we are raised to royal and honourable status whatever our social station may be (2:6). Fear and trembling are spoken of in 2 Cor. 7:15 and Phil. 2:12, and what we have to

remember is that in daily work we are in the presence of God, dealing with God, and are ambassadors for God. His reputation may be getting assessed and judged by the quality of our work and our attitude in doing it.

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6:5-8

Without doubt there were in Paul's day cruel, ruthless and manipulative masters, just as there are today. This is not dealt with here, but in v.9 we shall see that there *is* a day of reckoning for all employers when they will face an impartial and righteous tribunal. This fact helps us to cope with injustice and at the same time seek by all legitimate *and* Christian means to change the situation. Of course we must recognise that working to Christian standards will not necessarily meet with approval from all our fellow-workers, because if it is once evident to the master what a really good day's work done with the heart can accomplish, he may expect all his workers to rise to that standard. This could cause a riot among workers and Trade Union officials alike because, as v.6 makes plain, all too often the attitude can be to work if the boss is watching but otherwise to get off with as little as possible. Consider just how prominently there is seen in industrial relations both complaint and greed on both sides, and, of course, jealousy if we feel someone is getting a better grade, better wages and better promotion than we are. We agree that the system is often bad, administration ineffective, and rewards poor. But do we not believe we are in the hand of God not the power of the system, and that God can change things radically and swiftly if He so wills? Think of the character and testimony of Daniel in a godless, ruthless society (Dan. 6:4-5). How well he served proud, perverse Darius. Now read 1 Tim. 6:1-10, and think to what extent a spirit of contentment marks our lives.

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6:5-8

It is thrilling, alarming and challenging, but also encouraging, to realise that whatever the nature of our workplace we are set there to do the will of God. However humdrum or demanding, it is spiritual service just as our sharing in worship and in the prayer meeting is spiritual service. In every area of life and work Jesus deserves the best. As a start we must get to our work in time and in a fit condition to do it. Even when we are taken advantage of and not appreciated, we must remember we are servants of The Servant who knelt down and washed the feet of the disciples who were busy arguing which of them was the most spiritual and most important. If we remember that we are working for the King of Kings, we will no longer feel ourselves slaves, and in spirit we will be gloriously free recognising that the humblest of tasks is contributing to the building of the glorious kingdom of God. The Lord knows how things are with us, how we are being dealt with, and what we are doing and, because He knows it is all for His sake, He assures us we will have our reward, if not in this life then certainly in the world to come. We do well to read the Beatitudes in Matt. 5: 1-12 where it seems that it is always those who are up against it, denied and down-trodden, who are blessed. We referred in earlier readings to 1 Pet. 2:13-23 and the passage deserves close study. Read also 1 Pet. 4:12-19. Perhaps the secret of detachment, poise and the capacity to cope with all the demand of the work-place is to be aware that we have been set there by God, to serve God, always in the sight of God and cared for by God. People will not understand our attitudes to life and work. They might even ask how we can cope with so much that is unpleasant and unfair. What an opportunity for witness to our Saviour and Lord!

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6:9

The sheer brevity of this "word" to masters gives it searching power. If we have the privilege in any way of being in charge of people, then we have to be concerned for their welfare and good, just as we hope they will be concerned to serve us well. There must be no bullying or browbeating, no oppressive pulling of rank, no negative or destructive criticism which will simply demoralise the worker, no setting of tasks which we know to be beyond the servant's capacity, no public showing of contempt and no public rebukes for matters that should be dealt with in private. Neither must the master take away from the worker the dignity and satisfaction of having a task to do, simply because the master feels someone else might do it quicker and for more profit. There has to be respect for the servant and he has to be regarded as having worth in himself and not just for what he is able to do. This respect is what the servant has been called on to have regarding the master, and this

is how the Lord Jesus Christ has regarded both master and servant. Remember the note of anger in Jesus when he told the story of the man who had been forgiven much and yet refused to forgive another the small debt that was owed (Matt.18:23-39). Masters must remember that they too are under a Master and will be answerable to Him for the whole of their life, especially in respect of their stewardship of the lives entrusted to them in their workplaces. All of us need to remember that when injustice is done the Lord takes the side of the injured one, especially if on a natural level he is what might be called a weaker brother. There is no partiality, prejudice or preference on God's part. *We* may turn a blind eye to manifest faults if the person happens to be someone we like or someone who flatters us. But *God* sees things as they really are and all of us are called to account.

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6:10-11

Paul has been teaching the very practical aspects of living the Christian life and he has dealt with a variety of situations and relationships. If we are to be realistic, victorious and constant in these matters, we have to see the whole of Christian life and service in terms of spiritual warfare. If we are to live a life worthy of the Lord (4:1); maintaining the unity of the fellowship (4:3); growing in spiritual stability (4:14); having nothing to do with lies or anger (4:25-26) or impurity (5:3); maintaining a clear witness to the light of Christ (5:8); and being subject to one another in all our relationships for Jesus' sake (5:21ff.), then we will have a fight on our hands. The battle will not be simply with our own and others' fallen natures, nor simply with the pressures and conditioning of godless society, but with the temptations, snares and attacks of the Devil himself and all his many assistants. We all know that there is a perversity and stubbornness in our human nature and this remains even though we are new creatures in Christ Jesus. This has to be dealt with. Paul speaks of this in Rom. 6:12-14, calling on believers to take their stand in Christ's victory and make the choices of righteousness. In Rom. 7:15-23 he speaks of the on-going battle and in a very real sense he "disowns" the stirrings of sin, recognising them as alien intruders into his new life in Christ. They have no right to be there and he has no desire to have them there. When he says that "evil" lies close at hand (Rom.7:21), we could well add the letter "D" and pinpoint the activity of the Devil who makes it his business to stir up evil and introduce its pernicious influence into thoughts, feelings and physical longings, while at the same time accusing us of having these very things. This is part of the "wiles of the devil" and we must think carefully about it.

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6:10-11

Satan is a crafty enemy and he is rightly called the accuser (Rev. 12:10). If he can get us preoccupied with our sins and failures, leading us into a bondage of guilt from which there is no escape no matter how much we "repent" or struggle or weep. When that happens the Devil has destroyed our peace, distracted us from service, and virtually blotted out all thoughts of Jesus, who is for ever saying, "Your sins are forgiven" (Matt. 9: 2). There are times when we have sinned and there is no remedy until sin is put away, restitution made *if and when necessary*, and forgiveness assured. But there *are* times when we are genuinely and utterly seeking only God's will and it seems that all hell is stirred up within us. That is the time to say, and to say very clearly and decisively, "This is the Devil" and to resist him, refusing to feel guilty in respect of what he has so craftily insinuated into our thoughts and feelings. In Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress" Christian is shown as being terribly distressed by all sorts of blasphemous thoughts which he assumed came from his own mind. He was feeling very guilty that he should be so unworthy of the One who had loved him so much. "He had not the discretion either to stop his ears, nor to know from whence those blasphemies came." We forget that there is a Devil, and when we blame him (rightly) for these surges of evil we are not excusing ourselves or simply letting ourselves "off the hook". We are being totally realistic. The Devil is real and temptation is real but the situation has to be seen for what it really is. The Devil has to be discerned, resisted and refused on the basis of the truth of Scripture. (Matt. 4: 4, 7, 10; 1 Pet. 5: 9) We must at times recognise that our well-meaning friends *may* be doing Devil's work (Matt. 16: 21-23). For their sake as well as our own there has to be plain speaking.

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6: 10-11

By this stage in the epistle the Christians to whom Paul was writing would surely have responded in a new desire and dedication inspired by the Holy Spirit. That being so, Paul knew they would certainly be opposed by Satan and they needed to be taught and encouraged. We must never be surprised by the Devil's anger (Rev. 12: 12). Christians who are spiritually asleep, complacent and backslidden, seldom know much about battles with the Devil, except when the Lord lets the Devil loose on them to waken them up. Those who are determined to go on with Christ will certainly have the Devil to deal with. If we are never confronted by the Devil we must be going in the same direction! But we must face the Devil in the right way, keeping the evil one in right perspective, remembering that he is not really strong as he suggests, for he is a totally defeated foe. Jesus dealt with him once for all (Col. 1:15; Heb. 2:14; 1 John 3:8). If we can grasp this Gospel fact then we will have some understanding of the old hymn that says, "The Devil and me, we don't agree, Glory, Hallelujah!" That will help us to be strong in the Lord and, if we have studied this epistle rightly, we will realise that we are *in fact* strong in the Lord. We have been blessed in a total and limitless way (1:3-8; cf. 2 Pet. 1:31ff); we have been raised to life on a new and victorious dimension (2:4-6); and we have the limitless power of the indwelling Holy Spirit (3:14-21). Why then should we be anything other than strong? It is one of the constant wiles or stratagems of the Devil to make us think and feel that we are weak and that the odds against us are too great. This is how the enemy gets us to give up the struggle too soon, whether in terms of personal victory over sin, or in a certain area of service, or in the matter of specific prayer. But to take a stand like this we need to put on or take up the whole armour of God and Paul will tell us what that means.

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6:10-11

The phrase "the wiles of the devil" (the Devil's schemes) indicates both the cleverness of his tactics and the well planned nature of them. Right from the Garden of Eden when Satan appeared as the "shining one" and beguiled Eve by his specious spiritual talk that appealed essentially to her pride (Gen. 3:1-6), the enemy has sought to disguise himself as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14). This means that we may encounter Satan more in the realm of the aesthetic, artistic, intellectual realms than in the temptation to gross and ugly immorality and perversion, although the Devil's activity *is* seen clearly there. But in a sense, those who end up "in the gutter" are the Devil's failures because, having ambition for a kingdom, he does not want that kingdom populated by wrecks. Satan has real ambition to be higher and better and more powerful than any, usurping God's throne if he could (Isa. 4:12- 15) and we can see his influence in those who are consumed by ambition and who simply lust for power over others. Remember how quickly Jesus acted when He realised His disciples were taken in by popularity and had ideas of being His right hand men in a kingdom (Jn. 6:15). The cleverness of the Devil is matched by his efficiency, because he studies situations and personalities and lays his temptations and traps not in areas where disciples are strong, nor at times when they are watchful and on guard, but when they are careless or exhausted and along the lines of the vulnerable areas of personality. We could read and study the lives of the great men and women of faith in the Old Testament and trace the activity of the Devil. Think how the great warrior Elijah collapsed into suicidal depression, thinking himself a total failure, when in fact he had a great deal of work yet to do. Tiredness and confusion, encouraged by the Devil, brought him down (1 Kings 19:1-4). But God held him, cared for him, refused to answer his request, and restored him. The Devil was defeated.

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6:10-11

One of the wiles of the Devil (for example) would be to make us impatient of slow progress in studying this passage because we feel we know it all. Look again at Gen. 3:1-5 and see how Satan slandered the character of God, making Him out to be hard and unreasonable and suggesting that obedience to God would result in a frustration of human aspiration and a denial of human dignity and destiny. He also cast doubt on the clear truth of what God had said, causing Eve to doubt God's Word. Now, if we once begin to have doubts about the dependability of God and what He says, then we soon doubt His intentions and have difficulty in believing that God is for us rather than against us (Gen. 18:25; Rom. 8:31). This leads to confusion. Another wile of the Devil is to make us either forget his existence or to think of him as a creature of music hall jokes, with horns and

forked tail for instance, someone no-one takes seriously. There is no end to the Devil's ingenuity. The Bible speaks of false Christs (Matt. 24:24), false apostles (2 Cor. 11:13), false epistles (2 Thess. 2:2) and false miracles (Matt. 7:21-23; Exod. 7:8-13). We must not accept as spiritual all that *seems* to be spiritual (1 John 4:1). Nor must we think, especially if we are having a quiet spell in life in which there is no sign of the Devil's snares and disruption, that he has forgotten about us. Read again the story of our Lord's temptation as recorded in Luke 4:1-13 and take special note of how Satan departed until an opportune time (RSV), biding his time (NEB), for a season (AV), until his next opportunity (JBP). The Devil is determined. Watch and pray (Mk. 14:38) and, because there is a war on, see to it that you wear the armour provided.

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6:12

In the booklet "Kingdom against Kingdom" (referred to earlier) we developed the theme of the wiles of the Devil, giving illustrations from the stories of Abraham, Moses, Joseph, David, Jesus, the disciples after the Resurrection, and Paul. We need to think well and clearly about the theme of spiritual warfare and to be persuaded that it is not merely a clash of human personalities, philosophies and ideas, nor even just the clash of faith and unbelief. "We must reckon on the omnipresence, the steady persistent pressure, the sleepless malignity of the evil forces that beset man's life" (Denney). Scripture is clear that the whole world order lies in the evil one (1 John 5:19) and that the whole ethos and pressure of the world is contrary to God (1 John 2:15-17). In Rom. 12:1-2 Paul urges us not to allow our patterns and content of thought to be squeezed into the mould of this world, which is a world that has not just forgotten God but has rejected Him. We need to recognise that there is a spirit of lawlessness (2 Thess. 2:3-9) and a spirit of anti-Christ (1 John 2:18,22; 4:3; 2 John 7) pervading the world, and that there is a whole organised kingdom of evil with its agents (both spirit and human) actively at work against God and all that professes allegiance to God. Always remember that the Devil's main objective is not us, although he will hate, disturb and try to destroy us simply because we belong to Christ. He will also use us, if he gets the chance, to harm God's work and people, and then when we have served his purpose he will cast us off without mercy or reward, just as he cast off Judas and left him in darkness (Matt. 27:3,4). But always keep in mind that however far-reaching and complex the activities of this kingdom of evil may be, and however powerful it all may seem, the truth is that it is a defeated kingdom. We are to put on the armour of God and stand firm against evil. We must not be afraid.

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6:12

This verse is really very encouraging when we are faced with people who are not just difficult to handle but who seem to be ruthless, merciless, and determined against us and against the work of the Gospel. If we can see that they are in fact dupes of the Devil and that the evil ferocity does not stem from their human personalities but from spiritual powers of evil behind them (and sometimes in them), then we will be able to cope with them and deal with them with some real measure of understanding and with some easing of the personal hurt and grief we feel. We may even see some degree of excuse for evil people when we realise that, possibly without their being aware of it, they are in fact blinded by the god of this world (2 Cor. 4:4) and held captive by him. The wrestling is not with mere flesh and blood, our own and others., but with the worldwide network of evil in its aspects of principalities, powers and rulers, in a conflict that goes beyond the mere confines of this world and extends into the "heavenly realms". Such concepts stretch our minds to and beyond their limits, even though we are becoming accustomed in our generation to a whole lot of unseen activity going on in space, far out of sight and seldom being thought of. We know there are satellite of opposing powers circling the dearth and able to watch in detail all that is going on. Extend the bounds of space to the "heavenlies" and take the reference to war in heaven in Rev. 12:7, whatever that may mean. It could all be frightening but for two facts. The whole kingdom of principalities and powers *has been* defeated and shown to be so (Col. 2:15) in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The second fact is that there is no suggestion anywhere in Scripture that the throne of God is ever disturbed or uncertain, let alone assailed and toppled. The God of peace reigns. The issue is never in doubt.

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6:13

Note that in v.10, 13, 14 there are four references to standing firm. The first reference indicates that we will not have to go looking for the Devil so that we can fight against him. He will certainly come to us and we need to be ready. The second reference (14) emphasises again the need for the whole armour of God and warns against any carelessness or presumption. We do not take any liberties with the Devil. He is a clever foe, and determined, and quick to note any flaws in our armour. This verse speaks of the day of evil coming, perhaps some significant assault or confrontation, when an all-out attack comes against us, something of a spiritual (or moral) blitz seeking by sheer force to destroy us and our work in one assault. We are to stand, fight to a standstill, and when the fire and dust settle, we are still standing. We are speaking here of the determination of faith. We are to stand, stand up, stand out, stand firm and stand against all the lies and powers of the evil one. There is a time to stand still, to say and do nothing, but to wait upon God (2 Chron.20:15-17). We stand on redemption ground and we refuse to move. Christ has given us the victory (1 Cor. 15:57) and we are conquerors by a clear margin (Rom. 8:37). No one is going to take from us what is ours by right. Read Psalm 46 with its words about raging storms and how in the midst of it all there is the peaceful quiet of those who have made God their rock and refuge. We stand, because we have run into the shelter which cannot be breached (Prov. 18:10). It may often seem and feel that defeat is inevitable, and observers may write us off personally and in terms of the work, but it will not be so. Think of how Paul speaks elsewhere of being pressed beyond measure, despairing of life, brought to the limit of endurance, knocked down but not kept down (2 Cor. 1:8-9; 4:7-12). The battle is real and there is an urgency about being prepared. Take up the whole armour, the panoply of God; every part of it, and the whole of it in completeness, is in Christ.

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6:13

The emphasis here is in terms of standing against repeated assaults from the powers of evil, and this would have been the first necessary application for the converts in such a demon-ridden city as Ephesus. People there would have been very aware of the activities of evil powers and may well have lived in great fear of them for most of their lives. The call to stand their ground in the victory of Christ was a necessary exhortation and encouragement. But we must not ever think of Christ, the church and the Gospel, being essentially on the defensive. When Jesus said that the gates Hell would not prevail, the picture is of the kingdom of evil reeling back under the power of the advancing Gospel (Matt. 16:18). Granted the world is Satan's territory (Eph. 2:2; John 14:30; 1 John 5:19) but when the Saviour was born in Bethlehem the invasion of the Conqueror started. When Jesus died and rose again, the victory was gained totally and once for all. What we are now involved in is the "mopping up" operation and the liberation of prisoners-of-war. The defeated foe does not give up easily, and for that reason the church and the world will always be on collision course, and the soldiers of the King of Kings will always be targets of the enemy. Paul's experience as a missionary was marked by conflict and behind his human enemies lay the inspiration, power and malice of the Devil. Paul was also aware that the work of the Gospel was to liberate men and women from a dark and evil kingdom and bring them into the kingdom of light, life and love. (Col. 1:13; 1 Pet. 2:9; Acts 26:18). Of course it is vital to know when to stand, when to advance, and when, in the interest of long-term work, to give ground. We will know this only if we make it our business to keep close to the Lord, to be attentive to His every word and aware of the gentle but sure constraints of His Spirit.

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6:14

Keep in mind that the battle is not just in terms of our personal salvation, growth in grace and service, but is to be seen as part of the world-wide, on-going plan of redemption. That means our personal battles and victories are vital. This could alarm us were it not for the fact that we have been told so very clearly that it is not in our own strength that we go to the fight. We are to be strong and resolute in the power of Christ's might which is all-sufficient and limitless (1:19; 3:20). We must never think of the battle as uncertain. This is part of the truth with which we must gird our minds and hearts. Of course, the Devil immediately sidetracks our thinking to the subject of our many sins and failures, because he knows that if we are preoccupied with our sins we will not be focused on Christ and His victory. We need to be girded with the truth about forgiveness and to see clearly that

our sins and failures cannot ever be stronger than God. Indeed God sweeps away the accusations of the Devil (Zech. 3:1-5). The prodigal, however sin-stained, is restored and reinstated to privilege and service, with joy and without a moment's hesitation (Lk. 15:20-24). The truth that must gird us and make us ready for the fight is the truth about the glorious salvation that is ours in Christ and which cannot be reversed. It is the truth that the kingdoms of this world shall indeed be the kingdom of our Lord (Rev. 11:15-17). We need our minds and hearts to be gripped and held firm, kept from straying and entangled confusion, by the unassailable truths of the Gospel on which we stand and by which we live. Peter speaks of girding up our minds (1 Pet. 1:13). Paul speaks of the renewing of our minds (Rom. 12:2) and of the need to know what we believe (Rom. 6:3). Our assurance, confidence and courage in the battle come from facts, truths that we can count on, not least the fact that there is now no condemnation and the fact that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:31-39).

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6:14

We stand ready for battle, girded with the truths of salvation, but that truth must be expressed in our daily lives. True doctrine linked to false living is an offence to God and a hindrance to the Gospel. Think of Jesus' searching words about the Pharisees in Matt. 23:1-3. Paul lived his life in the way of truth and was able to call men as witnesses (Acts 20:17-18, 33-35; 1 Thess. 2:3-12). The same testimony to truth and integrity of life is found in respect of both Samuel and Daniel (1 Sam. 12:1-5; Dan. 6:1-5). Perhaps one of the most searching passages in this respect is 2 Cor. 4:1-3 (especially in AV) where Paul speaks of putting away from his life all the hidden things of wrong that would militate against his service in the Gospel. We can be totally sound in terms of doctrine, and people may think us good examples of all a Christian should be, but God looks on the heart (1 Sam. 16:7) and desires truth in the inward parts (Ps. 51:6). Faith and a good conscience go together and when one is missing the life of service is shipwrecked (1 Tim. 1:18-19). Our lives must ring true, and if there are flaws the Devil will be sure to make use of them, not so much to shame us, although that gives him pleasure, but to cast a shadow on the Gospel. How we need to heed the words of the hymn we sing so easily:

"Yet who can fight for truth and God,
Enthralled by lies and sin?
He who would wage such war on earth
Must first be true within.

"O God of truth, for whom we long,
O Thou that hearest prayer,
Do Thine own battle in our hearts,
And slay the falsehood there."
(Hughes)

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6:14

The breastplate of righteousness by which the heart is kept must be thought of in the same two-fold way as we have spoken of the girdle of truth. The foundation and dynamic of all practical righteousness of life is the perfect righteousness which is ours in Christ. The Lord is our righteousness (Jer. 23:5-6) and Paul speaks of having a righteousness which is not his own (Phil. 3:9). Wesley's great hymn pictures the believer as "clothed in righteousness divine" and Paul again, in 1 Cor. 1:30, speaks of how Christ is our righteousness, and he links this with the thought of Christ as the source of our life. Now, unless that given righteousness is being worked out and displayed in our practical daily lives, there is something wrong and there will be cracks in the protective armour. Indeed, the Devil will have found some access to tempt and to distract the heart away from Jesus, and it is out of the heart that all the issues of life flow. A heart kept in righteousness is a glorious blessing. It delivers us from a sense of shame and gives us the relief of cleanness. A clean heart and a right spirit are of the essence of fruitful service (Ps. 51: 10-15). In connection with the armour of truth and righteousness we do well to consider Isa. 11:5; 59:16-17; Rom. 13:12-14; 2 Cor. 6:7; and 1 Thess. 5:8. Paul is

very clear that, in the matter of being entrusted with the stewardship of the Gospel, personal righteousness is vital if we are to know God's gracious power attending our service (1 Thess. 1:5). See to it that the heart is kept not only safe but warm, because it is as the heart is kindled in love to Jesus that willingness to serve and to fight spiritual battles is preserved. It was the church at Ephesus that was later challenged about losing its first love (Rev. 2:4).

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6:15

If the Devil cannot move us from our stand in, and practice of truth, nor from the ground of salvation-righteousness and the expression of it in daily life, he will certainly try to destroy our peace. When peace of heart and mind is disturbed we become increasingly restless, that is, without rest physically, mentally and emotionally. This makes us drive ourselves on and on and the more tired we get, the more work we take on, never feeling we are succeeding. We become Christians who are *driven* by the Devil rather than *led* by Christ the good Shepherd. We will know little of the quietness and confidence that give us the strength to keep on going on (Isa. 30: 15). It is when we learn to be still, and to cease from all our striving, that we become aware of God (Ps. 46:10), and this is what keeps us from rushing about in haste and panic, almost as if the whole structure of God's kingdom would collapse if we did not attend to every detail at once. If we believe that God is indeed in control, that we live, work and serve under His orders, and that from time to time He wisely orders us to rest (Mk. 6:30-31), then we will not rush around in a flurry of dis-peace (Isa. 28:16). Then we will begin to let the peace of God rule in our hearts, calling our flurried feelings to order and calm (Col. 3:15). Did not Jesus say He would give us His peace (John 14:27) in the assurance that He would go on before us to prepare the way (John 14:3)? It is when we forget the facts of our salvation that we begin to lose our peace. Peace comes from having confidence in God, and there is no reason why, whatever the circumstances, we should not have that confidence. Paul gives us a good prescription for peace in Phil. 4:4-7, 10-13. But we still have to think of peace in the context of spiritual warfare and service.

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6:15

We are speaking of shoes rather than slippers; of being ready for the road rather than bed; of standing rather than marching; and of the preparation, or readiness for whatever we meet, that comes from having peace in our minds and hearts. If our feet are not comfortable we are at first distracted and then increasingly disabled in terms of long-term activity, whether in standing guard or in marching to war. If we are to tackle Christian service, especially long-term, then we need to be quietly and inwardly assured about the nature of our service and confident about the outcome. The Roman military power in Paul's day was quite sure about its capacity, competence, justice and right, and had no thoughts of ever being displaced. A squad of soldiers on the march was an impressive sight and their appearance would have the effect of discouraging and restraining would-be trouble-makers. Now, if individual believers and the organised Christian church were so persuaded about the truth of their message and the issue of their service, then the same powerful, positive impression would be communicated. We are not on the defensive but are under orders to go into all the world with the powerful saving message of the Gospel, assured that we are not and never will be alone (Matt. 28:19-20). Peace is a positive, encouraging thing, and it is grounded in facts. The battle is not ours but God's (2 Chron. 20: 12-17) and His resources are limitless, even though invisible except to the eye of faith (2 Kings 6:15-17). We need to think of God's patrols throughout the earth and of God's guardian care over His work and His people (Zech. 1:8-10; 2:5, 8). Preparedness and capacity for service depend on what we stand on and our conviction regarding our message. If we really believe we have the message that brings peace with God, that delivers from the bondage of sin, and brings sure hope of Heaven, we will be able to stand firm and speak confidently. Shoes with holes in the soles, down at heel and lacking care are not much use. Better examine our spiritual shoes.

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6:16

There are important lessons to learn from both aspects of this verse. Think first of the flaming darts, the shower of fiery arrows which can land on us without warning, coming from an enemy who has crept up and kept

himself concealed. We are dealing here with things, situations, temptations and surges of feelings that take us by surprise and sting us into *reaction* (which is not the same as faith). Whether in personal life or in that of the fellowship, there is all of a sudden a whole host of "little" fires calculated to panic us, whereas a little calm assessment would enable us to see things in the right proportion and deal with them one by one. These fire-raising arrows, be they fears, thoughts, compulsions, suspicions, disagreements, criticisms or accusations from close friends, or a feeling that someone is deliberately ignoring you, are calculated to cause confusion and distress and so to distract and divide the fellowship. We can be quite sure they come from the Devil. God does not work that way, because He is the God of peace and is not the author of confusion (1 Cor. 14:33 AV). The Devil has a great variety of darts, which are smaller than arrows, but he often uses the same kind of dart against us repeatedly because he knows where we are vulnerable and he is quite content to use a mere pin-prick if that can start the unsettling reaction. It can be something from the past and the feeling, "What if people knew?" But God knows, and the past has been dealt with (Rom. 8:1). It can be sudden, irrational panic, such as gripped David in 1 Sam. 27:1. It can be compulsive "guidance" out of the blue, feeling "God wants me to do", or "I must do it right now", or "I must tell every secret sin and shame.....," or "I am such a sinner I should stay away from church lest I am a danger to others". Learn to recognise the fiery arrows of Satan, and remember that it is only in a spiritually dry heart and life that the fires can take a hold.

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6:16

Paul may have been thinking of the shield, measuring 4 feet by 2½ feet, carried by Roman soldiers and we could think of the riot shields carried by police and others in grim dangerous situations. The Roman shield, made of leather and heavy, could be swung round to catch the arrows before they could reach anything that would burn. The fires would be quenched. But these shields would be best used in company, shoulder to shoulder, whether for defence or attack. We need to remember that the Devil, like a ravaging wolf, will always try to get individuals separated from the flock, especially the ones who are weak or injured. This is why we need to belong to an organised congregation of God's people and to make it our business to stay close to one another in its work. This united shield of faith provides a secure protection for those who are weak or wounded and gives them time and opportunity to recover and so be able to take their place once again in the on-going battle. But each one must be ready and able to hold the shield of faith for protection. It takes effort to swing round to face every fiery arrow from Satan, but it is the hard work of faith, setting faith in God and in His promises over against all the unsettling attacks, lies and suggestions of the Devil. There is an element of defiance in this aspect of faith and it can be illustrated by Paul's words in Acts 27:21-25 when it seemed that the sheer violence of the storm was bound to bring everything to disaster. He said, "I believe God" AV (I have faith in God NIV). God had said Paul was going to Rome; nothing the Devil could do could prevent that happening; therefore nothing must be allowed to flare up and confuse the issue. One thing we must remember, when all sorts of "arrows" are seeking to make doubt and fear flare up, is that it is because we are going on with God that the Devil is taking so much trouble to hinder and hold us back (1 Pet.4:12ff). When fire flares up the tendency is to run away or at least change direction, and this we must not do.

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6:16

With the shield of faith we are in fact able to quench all, not just some, of the fiery darts of the evil one. We need to remember that even in the heat of battle, no matter the noise or confusion, we are never for a moment out of sight of our Great Commander and Captain. But He does not simply watch over us, He prays for us in relation to the evil designs and intentions of Satan (Lk. 22:31-32). It is important to remember (and this is part of using the shield of faith) that God is *for* us not against us (Rom. 8:31). It is a fierce lie of the Devil that makes us feel that God is waiting, ready to cast us off, when we sin, fail and blunder. Faith affirms that God is good, loving, caring and compassionate, and that His call is always that we should come back to Him. Indeed, right from the Garden of Eden it is God who is shown as seeking for the one who has strayed. Who then makes us feel useless, finished, rejected and casts us into depression? It is the evil one. Not all his fiery darts flare up fiercely. Some are of the slow burning type which cause a long, on-going feeling of dis-ease. No matter how we search our hearts and cry to God in prayer, we cannot find any specific wrong that needs to be put right, but the

unhappy pressure continues. This is the work of the Devil and we can end up flaying ourselves with rebuke and shame and agonising in prayer to no avail. This is not how God deals with His children and servants. If there is something wrong He will gently but firmly make it plain and enable us by His grace to put it right, so that His peace can once again be ours. Satan does not like peace. We must recognise his activity, and shelter behind the shield of faith saying, in defiance of our feelings, "This is not God's doing. This is the Devil. I refuse to take him seriously. He is not strong. My life is hid with Christ in God" (Col. 3:3). We will then begin to understand David's words about a table of refreshing and enjoyment in the presence of the enemy (Ps. 23:5).

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It becomes obvious that a great part of the battle in spiritual warfare has to do with our minds and a lot of hard, clear thinking has to be done, else we will be constantly swayed by our feelings. It is so important to "keep the head", as otherwise we will launch into wild actions and reactions without ever considering their effect or where they will lead. Salvation, and the sure hope of salvation, is the helmet that keeps the mind (1 Thess. 5:8). If we are persuaded that our salvation has been eternally secured (Heb. 9:12), that it cannot be reversed, that it is guaranteed in respect of the past, present and future, so that we can even rejoice in trials and tribulations (Rom. 5:1-5), then we will be able to think calmly, rationally and expectantly about the whole of life and experience. Think of the repeated emphasis on the need to use our minds, and to think in biblical and spiritual categories rather than in worldly ones (Rom. 12:1-2; Col. 3:1-2; Phil. 4:7-9; 1 Pet. 1:13). To use a concordance and make a major study of the many references to our minds and thoughts would be a worthy project! There is no doubt that the Devil uses mental tiredness which leads to confused thinking and can induce temporary depression, with the objective of taking our minds away from God and thus hindering or restricting our service. To be concerned and burdened for people and churches is natural and right, but it can become excessive and even obsessive, as Paul's words in 2 Cor. 2:12-13; 7:5 suggest. No-one, however mature spiritually and however much used by God, is immune from the subtle and disturbing assaults on the mind initiated by the Devil. He can make the most innocent comments register as clear criticism, accusation and rejection, and the very fact that these "thoughts" come in such a total and sweeping manner indicates the origin of them to be the evil one.

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There is undoubtedly in our generation a great battle going on to win the minds of men and women. This operates not only on the intellectual, philosophical, theological and ideological levels but through the mass-media and the entire advertising industry, whereby those who wish to advance their own case, regardless of truth or error, put relentless pressure of conditioning on people's thinking. The evil genius of the propaganda machine of the Nazi regime operated on the principle that if you tell people something often enough they will eventually believe it. Since advertising is a process of conditioning rather than of rational thought we are rapidly becoming a "feelings" generation, moved by impulse and inclination rather than by thought and fact. This is why so much of Christian life is now "experience" centred and it is leading to the emergence of a "gospel" that has neither theology nor ethics; that has neither sound salvation-doctrine nor biblical patterns of behaviour. Too many Christians never seem to think through their faith and seem unable to state clearly what they believe and on what grounds they believe it, other than how it has been in their own limited experience. Little wonder the Bible speaks of "seducing spirits", "doctrines of devils", "strong delusions" and "believing lies" (1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Thess. 2:11). We need the helmet of salvation to keep our minds so that our thinking, in its content and patterns, can be governed by God's truth. Of course there is need for balance, for spiritual thinking is not a contradiction of intellectual activity and assessment. People who have no interests other than strict Christian things, and who read nothing except "spiritual books" not only find their mental processes narrowing down, they find themselves less able to cope with the strains and stresses of life in the real world. We need to feed our minds, but with a balanced diet that is free from tainted food!

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We have emphasised the need for our minds to be renewed (Rom. 12:1-2) and this has to be an on-going process, because the natural tendency is to fall back into worldly ways of thinking. The agency in the renewing is the sword of the Spirit, the sword which the Spirit uses, which is the Word of God. Now, if Paul's emphasis is on "standing", and that stance is necessary even if we think of going forward into attack, then we have to see here just how much the Devil will do to take us away from the Word of God and from our confidence in it. This is a contemporary issue stemming not only or primarily from the scholastic and academic areas with their "criticism" of the Scriptures, but from those who say, "We do not need the Scriptures, we have the Spirit." Others insist that we must give heed "to what the Spirit is saying and where the Spirit is leading." But the Spirit and the Word will never be in conflict, let alone contradiction, and the summons both church and individuals need is to "Hear the Word of God." All Scripture is given by inspiration of God (2 Tim. 3: 16-17). It is God-breathed, God's Word breathed out by the Spirit of God in the very words of God, to guard for all generations the truth God has made known about Himself. In giving His Word God used real people, not unfeeling, mechanical typewriters, and we have a whole variety of styles and vocabulary in the record of Scripture. But we are told in 2 Pet. 1: 20, 21 that holy men, chosen and called by God, were moved or carried along by the Holy Spirit, so that God's sure, dependable Word could be given. The Word of God, sharper than any sword, is used by the Holy Spirit in the whole work of salvation, sanctification and service. We must return to this theme tomorrow.

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Note, as we go on, that there is no mention of armour for the back. Christian warfare, and sharing in the work of the Spirit as He wields the sword of the Word of God, is not for those who are unsure about which direction they are going in. The main emphasis in this verse is on the Word preached and that is confirmed by Paul's prayer that he might be given utterance (19 RSV). It is God's Word preached which is the vital instrument in all we mean by evangelism (1 Cor. 1:21; Rom. 10:14-17). But it is not the human eloquence or competence, and certainly not the personality of the preacher that does the work. It is the Spirit of God who empowers the Word, taking it and applying it to the minds and hearts of those who hear, to convict and convert (John 16:8-11). That same Spirit is the Divine Teacher who leads God's people into all the truth (John 14:25-26). He is the God-given librarian or remembrancer who, in the very moment when it is needed, will bring some specific word from Scripture to our minds and hearts. In all the business of proclaiming God's Word, whether from pulpit, in Sunday School or Bible Class, in personal testimony, or by a text on a notice-board outside a church or in any public place, we have the affirmation of God's own assurance that He is watching over His Word to perform it (Jer. 1:12 RSV). What is more, God declares that His Word does not and will not return to Him void or empty but will accomplish what it was sent to do (Isa. 55:10-11). It is therefore all the more important that we do not mishandle the Word of God (2 Tim. 2:14-15) nor use it merely as a means of showing off our own cleverness (1 Cor. 1:17; 2:1-5). We look in confidence and expectation for the Spirit to take up the sword of the Word and use it as only He is able to do. But if *we* are to handle the Sword we must see to it that it is a balanced weapon, and to do that we need to know our Bibles far more accurately and comprehensively. Read Joshua 1:1-9.

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Paul seems to link three things: the Sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God in its fulness with nothing kept back (Acts 20:20,27); the Constraint of the Spirit which is prayer (18); and the Liberty of the Spirit which is free and enabled utterance in the proclamation of the Gospel. We are to pray at all times and in all situations about every issue and about all we are involved in. We are to make prayer the first response and reaction to every situation. And, such should be the natural pattern of our devotional life and our walk with God, that even a major crisis which threatens disaster should not really require any change in the pattern of our praying. Read the story of Daniel (Dan. 6:5-10) and note that there was no need for any desperate crisis adjustment to his prayer life. This is how it should be with churches as well as individuals and if the evangelical church gave itself to prayer as the heart of, and unquestioned priority in, its congregational life there would be little or no need for the multiplied plans and organisations for prayer. It is a fact of experience that para-church "schemes"

for prayer for the nation, for evangelism, and for matters such as the homes of the nation, very often mean that Christians are too involved to be at the on-going prayer meeting of the congregation which has the prior claim on them. We must not forget that in all this passage we are dealing with the wiles of the Devil and we need to examine ourselves regarding our commitment to and our dutiful sharing in the life and work of the fellowship to which we belong because, without doubt, the real work of the Gospel is done at local level rather than on the special occasions.

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The call to pray at all times can be misunderstood. Some decide to pray when they should be listening to the instruction from God in the sermon. Some pray when they should be helping with the household chores, or concentrating on their work. Some do not pray because they are so busy organising other people's lives. "Praying always" means living the kind of life that keeps you walking with God, sensitive to His will, and in a natural relationship talking to God about everything. There are of course special needs. Elijah prayed earnestly: he prayed in his prayer, and he did so at the command and constraint of God (Jas. 5:17-18; 1 Kings 17:1; 18:1, 36). There are many aspects to prayer: worship, adoration, praise, intercession and especially thanksgiving, but there is no suggestion that we should preach in our prayers. After all, in prayer we are speaking to God, not to man, although in our public prayers we are speaking on behalf of a company of God's people and must express the prayer in a way that allows and enables the people to say their "Amen." It also means that in leading a Meeting or in taking part in a prayer-meeting our voices should be loud enough and clear enough to let others share. The call of God's servants is always, "Pray for us," (1Thess. 5:25). The early church gave itself to prayer and ministry (Acts 6: 1-4). When the work was persecuted, the church prayed, society was shaken, and prison walls were breached (Acts 4:23-31; 12:1-17). We are told in the vivid story in Exod. 17:8-13 that the tide of spiritual battle ebbed and flowed in direct proportion to the prevailing prayer of Moses and the men whose support enabled him to go on praying. When Jesus saw the crowd in all their need He called His disciples to pray (Matt. 9:35-38). Whatever your situation or need, take it to the Lord in prayer.

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The phrase "pray in the Spirit" tends to be given a popular charismatic meaning referring to prayer "in tongues", but to introduce such an interpretation here or in relation to Jude 20 is to read into Scripture what is not there. Paul has already spoken of being sealed with the Spirit in terms of salvation (1:13), and of being indwelt by the Spirit in terms of power to live the Christian life (3: 16, 20) and it is quite natural for him to speak now of the gracious, enabling inspiration and power of the Holy Spirit in terms of our speaking to God in prayer. The believer indwelt by the Spirit (Rom. 8:9) and led by the Spirit (Gal. 5:18) - and both of these are basic to being a Christian - will certainly pray in, by and with that same Spirit. It is the indwelling Spirit who prompts and encourages us to speak to God in a trusting way, as to a Father (Rom. 8: 15-16). Without the enabling Spirit we would not even know where to start with our prayers, but He "partners" us in our praying (Rom. 8:26-27), leading us so that we pray in accordance with the Father's will. If we turn to Rev. 5:8; 8:1-5, we read about the prayers of the saints (Paul wrote all we are studying to the saints at Ephesus) and the picture is that of the outworking of God's purposes on earth. From the heavenly side we see the Lamb and His angel helpers and it needs little imagination to see our poor, limited prayers mingling with the heavenly incense and rising to the throne of God in perfection. If this is what the Bible teaches about prayer, its nature and significance, then we must see prayer as the deepest secret and strongest power in the outworking of God's purposes in the earth. Think of how Christ ever lives to make intercession for us (Heb. 7:25), pleading our cause in the presence of God (Rom. 8:31-34). Would He leave us to pray on our own? Since we pray in His name and not our own name, are not our prayers presented at the throne in the right way and without flaw? What an encouragement to pray!

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Because we are involved in spiritual warfare, our eyes and hearts must always be towards our great Captain.

We go to Him and wait upon Him, having confidence in Him and prepared to obey His orders without question. This is the attitude of prayer. We are told to pray with all kinds of prayer, speaking to God in general terms whereby a relationship and friendship are made and maintained in freshness. We made comment earlier on different aspects of prayer and we need to add this thought of supplication which seems to refer to prayer about specific situations and needs. This means we must make it our business to know about world situations, church developments and the needs of people near to us and far away from us. There is no place for self-centredness or cosy spiritual isolation in our prayer life. It is work and it takes effort. This is why Paul urges us to keep alert, knowing how easy it is to drift away into unreality. Satan would rather rock us to sleep than have an out-and-out confrontation with us. Battles often tend to bring out the best in us and make us realistic regarding our stand and our victory in Christ. We need also to persevere in our prayers, not because we feel God is either slow or indifferent, but because we do not know to what extent our prayers have already set in motion significant spiritual activity in the heavenly places or in places where the work of God is making powerful advance. Consider the far reaching result of Daniel's prayers (Dan. 9: 20-23; 10: 10-14) and remember that he needed to be reassured that his praying had not been in vain. The value and significance of prayer is seldom recognised. A group of believers gathered regularly and "doing nothing" but praying can easily be discounted. But someone has said that "the prayers of the saints are the decrees of God beginning to work."

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6:18b-19a

Paul's call to pray for all the saints reminds us of how many people involved in Christian life and work long to be prayed for, because they know they need to be prayed for. We must not try to pray for everyone we know every day, for that would result in an obsessive "shopping list" prayer life. But God lays specific burdens on us personally and as a church prayer meeting, and we must try to be faithful and systematic in our intercessions. There are things to be prayed for in private, things that are very personal to our circle of friends, and there are other things that are and should be prayed for in the gathered prayer-meeting and in public worship. Should we not, in the present world situation, be much in prayer for Russia, Eastern Europe and South Africa, because our brothers and sisters in Christ are in need there? Should we not have a regular place in our private prayers for *all* rulers, governments and proposed legislation? Should we not be in prayer about the significant rise of Islam, even though we may not be in close contact with its operations? We do have a Mosque in our parish and a massive one in the centre of our city! Someone on the far side of the world wrote recently that they calculate the time difference and try to be sharing in prayer at the very time we meet in our church in Glasgow. That is the kind of thing that Paul is calling for. There are no travel or visa restrictions in the realm of prayer and no barriers that can keep us from creative involvement in the affairs of both church and world. We go directly to the Throne of Grace and equally directly from there to the specific situation. In a world accustomed to satellite observation and communication we should be quite excited about prayer. Note that the great apostle told his readers not to forget about him. He wanted to be prayed for and needed to be prayed for and perhaps he (and others) needed to be told that they are prayed for. Prayer is a great catalyst for creating true and lasting fellowship.

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6:19-20

Paul's appeal for prayer is not for his own blessing or even safety although he does speak of that aspect in Phil. 1:19ff. He asks prayer for his ministry and then prayer that he might increasingly be a worthy minister. Paul is quite clear that preaching is not a one-man work, even though specific men are called and set apart for this task. No-one can do all the preaching and all the praying, and the fellowship must share in the work, making the preaching possible and effective by their prayers. It is so easy to be critical when the minister, for various reasons, health and other things, is making heavy weather of preaching, failing to realise that the preacher may be more aware of and distressed by the struggle than anyone else. The thing to do, immediately, and continually in respect of preaching, is to pray. This is what Paul wants specifically. He asks for prayer so that all the barriers to the outgoing of the Word may be pushed back so that the Word might run free and reach the hearts of those who need to hear it. We make no apology for repeating what we have said before many times, linking today's verse with Col. 4:2-4 and 2 Thess. 3:1-2. We pray the living Word into the preacher's mind,

heart and spirit, and then pray it out again in proclamation. We pray open the hearts and minds of those who hear the preaching. We pray people into our churches and meeting places and we pray that they will come with hearts prepared. Pray that the preacher will be so confident in and committed to his message that he will be willing to keep nothing back, regardless of the cost (Acts 20:20,27). People did not think much of Paul's style and capacity for preaching and he himself felt his limitations, even though people gave him no credit for that (2 Cor. 10:10; 11:6). Preachers struggle more than people know, and Paul was often burdened lest he proved a failure and was laid aside as no further use (1 Cor. 9:15-18, 24-27). These references from the letters to Corinth indicate just what a critical congregation it was, not an easy place to be a minister.

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6:19-20

Unfettered liberty for the going forth of the Word was the theme yesterday but one aspect of the problem was not mentioned. Sometimes the difficulty and hindrance are not to be found in the preacher but in the congregation which has become hard to preach to (Heb. 5:11-14). If the fruitful preaching of the Gospel calls for a dedication and commitment on the part of the preacher it also calls for the same commitment on the part of the congregation. And, as the work goes on, so must the commitment, especially when people are sent out by God from the fellowship to serve in the Gospel at home and abroad. Just because people are out of town, out of the country and out of sight, they must not be forgotten, and they would be right to feel grieved and neglected if they did not have a continuing place in the prayers of their home congregation. This means, of course, that the home base must accept an ever increasing burden of responsibility in prayer and, since we cannot pray in detail for every worker and every situation every day, we will need to be disciplined in our prayer lives. Think of how Paul himself was sent out to missionary service by a praying congregation and how in due time he returned to report back to his prayer partners (Acts 14:24-28). All of us, whether our task is in the obvious, public places or in the "back room" of supply and support, are ambassadors for Christ and the Gospel, His personal representatives. The "chains" that bind us to Christ are the bonds of His love for us and ours for Him. But the restricting chains may be circumstances, health, limitations or people, all of which things the Devil will be quick to use. But what does it matter if *we* are restricted so long as the Word of God runs free? Never forget that the real "worker" in the Gospel is the free, unfettered Holy Spirit who can with ease penetrate situations we regard as impossible.

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6:21-22

There is something gloriously sweet, unforced and genuine in the way Paul assumes the Ephesian believers will want to know how he is and to get a report about how things are going with him in his ministry. He assumes rightly, that news about him and about God's blessing on his person and work would be an encouragement to the others. What we are seeing here are the bonds of fellowship, strong and sweet, that should bind us together in Christ. We must note, of course, that it is the passage dealing with the serious issues of spiritual warfare, followed by words about striving together in prayer for the work of the Gospel, that leads on to the theme of fellowship. The kind of caring spoken of here is not found among those who are casual and superficial about spiritual things. It is those who have battled together, side by side, sharing and supporting one another in the costly service of Christ who find these blessed bonds of fellowship that are strong and permanent. We are shown also in these verses that true, rugged and deep spirituality makes people more human in care, feeling and understanding. There is nothing cold or calculating about Paul. He was a man you are attracted to, but of course Jesus was like that too. Jesus needed Peter, James and John on a human level when He asked them to be with Him in Gethsemane (Mk. 14:32ff). Paul was not afraid to let it be seen and known that he needed others, although we may be quite sure some Christians despised him for what they would consider weakness. Read Phil. 4:10-20 and see how Paul opens his heart in gratitude. How slow we are sometimes to express our thanks to those very human servants of God by whose care and sacrificial service much blessing and encouragement has come to us. Read 1 Cor. 16:13-18 and be on the lookout for those who need your encouragement and remember to thank those who have been a blessing to you.

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6:21-22

We have often commented on how Paul received such scorn and persecution in his ministry but we must remember that he also received an immense amount of affection and loyalty. He must have been a great man to work with, although his very stature must have made him difficult to get on with at times. Remember the tremendous friction with Barnabas (Acts 15:36-41) and his resolute refusal of the pleadings and guidance of his friends in Acts 21:4-6, 10-14. But he was quick to praise those who had proved themselves, and his words about Tychicus are a wonderful commendation. Read passages such as Rom. 16:1-4 (and note the contrast in 17-20); Col. 4:12-14 (and remember that Demas eventually forsook Paul and Luke signed on as a servant of Paul in order to accompany him on a sea journey). In 2 Tim. 4:9-16 we have a picture of the hurt loneliness of the great man in his time of final trial. But there is also in these verses a clear indication that Paul did not bear grudges, because Mark, once turned down for the missionary team in Acts 15 is now restored, recognised and trusted. In Titus 3:12 he openly asks for help and in Philemon 17-22, speaking on behalf of the runaway slave, he appeals on the basis of mutual friendship and fellowship. It all has to do with love: God's love for us and, as a natural consequence, our love for each other. Read 1 John 4:7-12,19-21. If we ever feel reluctant to love others, perhaps because we are too aware of their faults and failings, we should turn to 1 John 3: 1 -3. Behold and consider well the amazing gift of love the Father has bestowed on *us* in spite of our multitude of faults and total lack of deserving. Without love (and love needs to be expressed or else it will be stifled and die) we are nothing at all (1 Cor. 13:1- 13).

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6:23-24

What a glorious benediction to end this epistle! Peace with God and the peace of God from the God of peace are ours in Christ and we can be sure of this (Rom. 5:1-2; Phil. 4:7; Col. 3:15; Heb. 13:20-21). It is peace to be enjoyed; the kind of peace that sets us free to work harder and more effectively than ever before because of the absence of strain. We are to let the love of God, which we can count on never to let us go, make us happy in and among ourselves. Think of how God declares His love in Isa. 49:14-16 and how Paul speaks of the Cross as a magnificent demonstration of God's love (Rom. 5:6-8). Faith works by love, and faith, always centres on the great Giver, guards and directs love, refusing to let it become mere sentiment. Love warms faith and makes men and women of faith attractive. All this is from God the Father and His beloved Son who Himself makes it plain, affirming that the Father loves us as much as He loves the Son (John 17: 23-24). This would be unbelievable were it not written in Scripture. The word "grace" is beyond exposition. It is indeed amazing grace that covers all our sin, is sufficient for every need and every day, and always goes before us preparing and guarding our way. These two verses, so full of the generosity of God, are a fitting conclusion to the epistle that began by telling us that God had blessed us with every spiritual blessing. We are beginning to discover just how rich we are in Christ. It should not be difficult to identify ourselves with and to take our stand with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ with undying love. We love Him because He first loved us. It is all very wonderful, but remember to keep a watchful eye open for the Devil, because he would just love to spoil our enjoyment of Jesus and to fill us with doubts and fears.

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Conclusion

To conclude our studies in Ephesians and to draw attention to some aspects of Satan's activity that we have not considered, read Job 1:6-12; 2:1-6; Matt. 13:24-30; 2 Cor. 12:7-12. Note well in the story of Job the clear restriction and total accountability of Satan. He is not allowed to go one inch beyond what God allows, and in Job's sore experiences God is saying to Satan, "I will show you what my grace can do." In the parable of the Weeds and Wheat we are shown the enemy's silent, undetected work of sowing confusion. It had the desired result because the servants were ready to dash in and uproot what was evil, forgetting that this would harm or even destroy the good crop. The Master was quite calm. Not even the full operation and growth of evil could in any way prevent the full harvest. God would see to it! In Paul's case there was some terrible "thorn in the flesh", not a pin-prick but a sharp stake. It was the Devil's doing and it buffeted and harassed him to the point where he felt he could endure no longer and he pleaded with God to take it away. But, in a way beyond Paul's understanding or ours, this sore and terrible affliction was the very thing that made him usable to such a vast

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extent in winning others to Christ. It is doubtful if Paul was really aware of just how significant a part he was playing in establishing and furthering the work of Christ's Kingdom. Satan was allowed to afflict him to an amazing degree but, as in the other illustrations, the mastery of God is totally clear. Assured of this, Paul was content to yield to God and to trust Him. Costly? Yes! But did not Jesus speak of the need for the corn of wheat to fall into the ground and die in order to bring forth fruit? (Jn. 12:24)

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