

## **Ephesians**

Did Paul write this epistle? The early Church leaders thought he did, and quote it extensively. There has been a debate in recent centuries which has tried to prove otherwise. Those against Pauline authorship refer to its impersonal nature, its language and style, its relationship to his other writings, and historical considerations. The fact that there is much early support from those closest to Paul's time does, in my view, swing the balance in the direction of Pauline authorship. But we cannot ignore the issues mentioned above, particularly the impersonal nature of the writing, which is very unusual.

Did he write this from prison in Rome (C.E.60-62) or from prison in Caesarea? (C.E.57-59). Traditionally Ephesians comes from Rome.

### **Abbreviations used**

**B.C.E.** - Before Christian era.

**C.E.** - Christian era.

**LXX** – Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Old Testament.

**N.I.V** - New International version

**A.V.-** Authorised ( King James) version

## **Ephesians Chapter 1**

**Paul, an Apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God. To God's holy people in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus: <sup>2</sup> Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**

Apostle Paul was always very keen to state his credentials. (Romans 1:1.1 Cor.1:1.2 Cor.1:1) His apostleship was a thorny issue in many places, because he wasn't one of the original twelve Apostles. But he stresses here, and elsewhere, that callings come first from God, and are then recognised by the church. He is one sent to represent the King, and deliver the King's message.

**"To the saints"** – to those set apart by God as his people. Paul has a very high view of God's people. Many of them were of little social standing, yet they are the

ones chosen by God for his purposes. **“In Ephesus.”** These words are missing from some of our manuscripts, and have led to the idea that this letter was a circular letter, and the name of the church was included - so Ephesus, Colossians and others of which we have no trace. While this might explain the more impersonal tone of the text, our manuscripts do not read badly for the lack of these two words. “Not proven” is possibly the best position here, although it would be a good explanation for the more general tone of the letter.

**“The faithful”** are those who have put their faith in Jesus, and to do that in the huge and influential city of Ephesus was very brave. They have trusted **“Christ”** (“anointed”) **Jesus**. (“Saviour”)

**“Grace”** (Gk “charis”) and **peace** (Gk “eirene”) are blessings Paul loves to use. “All the blessings of God within the shalom peace of God be yours.” Nice!

**<sup>3</sup> Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. <sup>4</sup> For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love <sup>5</sup>he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— <sup>6</sup> to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.**

**“Praise be to the God”.** This is the heart of faith, both Jewish and Christian. The “Eighteen Benedictions”, a Jewish prayer of the first century C.E. reads “Blessed are you O Lord.” It’s good to remember that everything we are and have starts and finishes in him. We have been abundantly blessed, from God’s throne in glory, and ultimately through Jesus. When we keep our Christian lives focused in this way, we are much less easily knocked over by circumstances. We must keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, not on the waves. (Matt.14:29)

What are we to make of **“chose us”, “predestined us for adoption”** and **“in accordance with his pleasure and will?”** As readers can imagine, there is a vast list of books and huge amounts of doctrine and theology which has come over the generations. Let’s remember that Ephesians is written for God’s people. So we have been chosen, predestined, adopted as sons – then alleluia! Let’s rejoice in who we are and who God has made us, and in this letter, not get embroiled in the endless discussions which these verses have generated. That discussion is for another commentary than this one.

<sup>7</sup> In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace <sup>8</sup> that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, <sup>9</sup> he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, <sup>10</sup> to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfilment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

“Redemption” (Gk: “apolutrosis”) has the sense of being ransomed, or bought out of capture. Paul jams theological concepts together here - we are **ransomed** by his **blood**, for the **forgiveness** of sins – the riches of God's **grace**.” There are about ten sermons in this one verse alone, and more follow. “**He made known to us the mystery of his will.**” In other words, he has made his salvation plan clear to us and in us. It is all because of “**Christ.**” (Gk: “Christos” - the anointed one.) It has all come together at the right time, God's time, so that heaven and earth may come under the reign and authority of Christ.

Wow! If, like me, you are just an ordinary Christian, this seems like being given the crown jewels and that is exactly the point. We may just be ordinary people but by the death and resurrection of Jesus we have become heirs of the most fantastic treasures of the kingdom.

<sup>11</sup> In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, <sup>12</sup> in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. <sup>13</sup> And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, <sup>14</sup> who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.

We are back to the predestination issue again, and here we are reminded that it is all “**according to the plan of him..**” When we are wrestling with this issue, we can often lose sight of the theological truth that predestination and choice are God's business, not ours. The purpose of our predestination was, and is, that we might be the first to our hope in Christ. “**Hope**” is a very important word for Apostle Paul. It encourages us to work hard for the things of the kingdom, and is linked to endurance. These verses are very Christ centred. Our conversion, wonderful though it is for us, is meant to bring praise to the one who saved us. It is so easy

to get trapped into speaking of “my conversion” and not point people to the one who did the saving. Too much “me” and not enough “him.”

**“Marked in him with a seal”**. The seal denotes security, proves genuineness and is a mark of ownership. The presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives is our “seal.” - a guarantee that we belong to Christ. The all-inclusiveness of the seal has always been a thrill to God's people, and remains so to this day. It's a good reminder that it is God who seals us as we respond to Christ. The seal is his, the mark is his and the guarantee is his as well. We were saved by grace, and remain in the kingdom by that same grace.

**<sup>15</sup> For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, <sup>16</sup> I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. <sup>17</sup> I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.**

Paul gives thanks for their love for the Lord, and for all God's people. They have a vertical and a horizontal dimension to their faith. He wants more for them – he wants **“wisdom”** ( Gk: “Sophia”) and **“revelation.”** ( Gk: “Apokalupsis.”) Wisdom is the spiritual gift of understanding and insight, and revelation is the uncovering of the hidden things of God, both functioning by the power and inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

**<sup>18</sup> I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, <sup>19</sup> and his incomparably great power for us who believe.**

**“The hope to which he has called you.”** “Hope”, (Gk: “elpis”) contains the idea of expectation which is not easily taken away, and of confidence in someone or something. For God's people, it means a trust in God and his promises, and the conviction that all will work out according to his plan. It is a vital part of our faith, sustaining us in times of difficulty, and giving us courage in the face of adversity. And his **“great power?”** Read on!

**That power is the same as the mighty strength <sup>20</sup> he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, <sup>21</sup> far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.** The **“power”**, is very big power indeed. It is the same power which raised Jesus from

the dead, lifted him into the heavenly places, gave him authority over all authorities, and a name which is above every name. This is truly big power, and it is given to us, as part of our hope, glory and inheritance. Wow!

**<sup>22</sup> And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, <sup>23</sup> which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.**

The power made Christ the supreme head over everything. But just in case we are getting carried away by all this, Paul brings us back to reality by writing **“head over everything for the church.”** For all the talk of heavenly realms, authorities, enemies under feet and so on the greatest reservoir for the power of God is the Church. So naturally, Christ is Lord of the Church. We take this for granted, but in Paul’s day, theology was still very fluid, and he was casting the foundations on which we now gladly stand.

The Church – the “ecclesia”, the gathering of believers, in whatever form is a frail and weak instrument for God’s purposes. I think most of us are aware of this in our own fellowships and nations. Yet despite this, we are his **“body”**, and in that body, the church, the **“fullness”** dwells. The “plaroma” or fullness means the totality of God, all of God, everything there is of God. It lived in Jesus, and astonishingly, it lives in his church. The Church represents the fullness of God, or should, to the world. We have the potential to be the fullness of God.

What a long and complex chapter the Apostle has written. It is deeply theological, and strangely impersonal for a person who had spent many years in Ephesus, and must have known some, if not many, of the leaders and people, even after a few years absence.

## **Ephesians Chapter 2**

**<sup>1</sup> As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, <sup>2</sup>in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. <sup>3</sup> All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.**

Verse 1 begins to analyse the position of the Christian, but verse 2 and 3 deviate from the natural progression to verse 4, as Paul takes a look at the old ways. As we know, from 1 and 2 Thess, 1 and 2 Corinthians, this is the Apostle's style. He jumps around in his teaching. We just have to learn to jump with him! When we were without Christ, we followed the ways of the world, and **“the ruler of the kingdom of the air”**, an expression applied to Satan, and again in Ephesians 6:12 – **“The spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”** From Paul's teaching elsewhere, we know that disobedience is a personal choice. God wishes that all be saved, but if men reject that salvation, they become disobedient, and they must live with the consequences of that disobedience - one of which is that the prince of the air has a hold over them, which will eventually lead to their utter ruin.

**“Wrath”** is God's righteous response to sin. It is not human anger, but a divine principle. Living under the control of the ruler of the kingdom of the air would put us under wrath, and the doctrine of original sin puts us all there. It's a blessing that the spiritual history of the world did not stop at verse 3!

**<sup>4</sup> But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, <sup>5</sup> made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. <sup>6</sup> And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.**

We deserved wrath, and what do we get? First **“great love.”** Grammatically, this is a brilliant phrase. It leads us to understand that love is love, regardless of its beginning, middle or end. God *is* love, and when we have said that, we have said it all.

We deserved wrath, but get **“Mercy”**. An old definition of mercy reads “an emotional concern for those who have undeservedly suffered some calamity.” In our case, it is not undeserved, but even so, God shows mercy to us, through the death and resurrection of Jesus. All this is by his **“grace”**. This word embraces love, mercy, and the sacrifice of Jesus and the hope of glory for us.

But **“Mercy”**, **“love”** and **“grace”** are not just for this life. If we make this restriction, we are thinking in a non-biblical way. These three blessings open for

us the heavenly places, where we will be called, where we will sit with Jesus, and be the recipients of his “mercy”, “love” and “grace” forever.

**<sup>8</sup> For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—<sup>9</sup> not by works, so that no one can boast. <sup>10</sup> For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.**

From the first 7 verses comes this summary – faith in Jesus has saved us. This salvation is his free grace gift to us. We cannot earn it, nor do we deserve it. But it can be ours anyway, because God loves us. Nice!

“Workmanship” was a word used in classical times for the work of a craftsman in the making of a crown. God has crafted us in the image of Jesus, to serve him and his purposes. What else can we possibly want or need?

**<sup>11</sup> Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (which is done in the body by human hands) — <sup>12</sup> remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. <sup>13</sup> But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.**

There is a union in the Christian faith - a family we belong to which is united by certain principles. This seems obvious to us, but wasn’t so obvious to the Ephesians. So Paul begins to discuss the union within the body.

Originally the Gentiles, as viewed from the Jewish position, had no citizenship in Israel, no hope and no God - an unenviable position. “**Far away**” is, in the O.T. a description of the Gentiles, and “**near**” a description of the Jews. But the blood of Christ has change all that. Union is no longer based on circumcision, race or gender. It is based on the blood, which is common to all Christians, and takes no account of race.

**<sup>14</sup> For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, <sup>15</sup> by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, <sup>16</sup> and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their**

**hostility.** <sup>17</sup> He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. <sup>18</sup> For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

How to unite these groups? Jesus does it by breaking down the **“dividing wall of hostility”**. Is this a reference to the wall which divided the court of the Gentiles from the court of the Jews? Or a reference to the Temple curtain between the holy place and the holy of holies? Or the Mosaic Law? **“Peace”** here means both a lack of hostility and a mutual acceptance by those who were once hostile. **“In his flesh”**, that is on the cross, Jesus broke the dividing wall of the law. Jesus wants union, and he paid the price for that union. The cross is the point of **“reconciliation”**, and as we all believe in the cross, we should all believe in the union. Jesus offered peace to those **“far away”**, the Gentiles, and those **“near”**, the Jews. This “peace” allows us to be close to the Father, by the power of the Spirit.

<sup>19</sup> **Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household,** <sup>20</sup> **built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.** <sup>21</sup> **In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.** <sup>22</sup> **And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.**

Now comes the fruit of the union – **“fellow citizens”**. The Gentiles have been brought near by the blood of Jesus, and now they are fellow citizens of the household of God. The foundation of this new house is the apostles, prophets, and pre-eminently Jesus himself. Even at its conception, the Lord sees the union as involving the earthly part of the house, as well as the heavenly part. The Lord didn’t just build a union, but included us in it. Paul would elsewhere call us “co-workers” with Christ, and so it is here. We together become a **“Holy Temple,”** which God inhabits.

Chapter 2 is a very comprehensive argument for unity, building up step by step. It’s slow progress for us, but good theology. We just have to push through it, and appreciate the depth of the argument. Have any of us in any age ever achieved this union? May be not, but that doesn’t invalidate the argument. We have to aim for the union, even if we keep falling short of it.

## Ephesians Chapter 3

**<sup>1</sup> For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—**

It is easiest to see this sentence as incomplete until Paul finishes the digression, which is about to start, and lasts until verse 14

**<sup>2</sup> Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, <sup>3</sup> that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. <sup>4</sup> In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, <sup>5</sup> which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. <sup>6</sup> This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.**

Paul is the administrator of God's grace - both the one that has the gift of administration, and the one who administers it. He is administering **"the mystery made known to me by revelation."** That which was in God, and hidden, was revealed to Paul, and he shared what he had learnt. This revelation started on the road to Damascus, and has continued ever since, both in visionary and intellectual ways. It is a precious and unique revelation to the current generation. The **"Apostles"** are those commissioned to proclaiming the message of Christ in an authoritative way, and of establishing and building up churches. The **"prophets"** bring prophecy to help, guide and direct the people of God.

What is the "mystery?" It is the union of which he has already spoken. Why did Paul put this short paragraph in, interrupting his flow, and essentially bringing us back to the same point at which he left us? Teachers and preachers will know that repetition is one of the ways we highlight and push home our message. The union was key to Paul's teaching on the body. He wants to make sure we don't miss the point.

**<sup>7</sup> I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. <sup>8</sup> Although I am less than the least of all the Lord's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ, <sup>9</sup> and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery,**

which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things.<sup>10</sup> His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms,<sup>11</sup> according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.<sup>12</sup> In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.<sup>13</sup> I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.

“**Servant**” (Gk:“diakonos”) has a lovely series of definitions, used of a King’s servant, of a waiter at a wedding feast, a disciple of Jesus, a minister and a “**deacon**” of the church. Here the emphasis is on the function of the servant, which is to declare the Gospel in power.

The church has a function in revealing the mystery - it is to be the agent by which the “**rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms**” are to learn of the union, and of the power of Christ. It isn’t easy to define the heavenly rulers, but let’s concentrate on the other amazing aspect - the Church has become the instrument by which God makes things known. God has covenanted with his church to use us to further his gospel. Why he chooses to limit himself in this way is hard to understand – it must be part of his agape love for us.

So because of this, we can approach God in freedom and confidence. Were the Ephesians lacking in these ways? It’s hard to say. They were obviously shaken by Paul’s suffering, some of which had taken place in their presence, and like so many of Paul’s churches, they were very young in experience of the Christian life, and church life.

<sup>14</sup> **For this reason I kneel before the Father,** <sup>15</sup> **from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name.** <sup>16</sup> **I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being,** <sup>17</sup> **so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love,** <sup>18</sup> **may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,** <sup>19</sup> **and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.**

What Paul seems to be suggesting here is that God the Father names every family in heaven and in earth – not an easy concept for us to grasp, and not easy to

understand clearly in the original Greek. Should this naming be restricted to the families of the redeemed? Either way, this prayer presupposes what every Christian believes - that God is active now in the creation of our families and family life. He is no absentee Father. From Father, Paul moves to the Son, praying that he may be in us by the power of the Spirit.

For what purpose? So that we may know his love. In the previous prayer in this chapter, Paul stresses that we are one Union by our faith in Christ. Now he is stressing that we are one body united by and in the love of Jesus. The end result of the union is now made clear – **“that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”** Here “fullness”, (Gk: “plaroma”) suggests “completeness.” We can have it all!

Chapter three is Apostle Paul’s theological basis for union within the body. It’s not an easy chapter to study, but he is dealing with an issue which, two thousand years later, continues to challenge us. The basis of the union, however, is still the same as it was for him - the uniting of us all by the death and by the love of Jesus. If we stick to these principles, at least we are going in the right direction.

**<sup>20</sup> Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, <sup>21</sup> to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.**

## **Ephesians Chapter 4**

**<sup>1</sup> As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. <sup>2</sup> Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. <sup>3</sup> Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.**

“**Urge**” is rather stronger than it suggests. Paul is exhorting God’s people to live up to the standards which Christ demands. Only as we all try to do this can the union be maintained. As always, Paul is challenging us to live our faith, not just to believe it. It is in the living that the union is confirmed. **“Bearing with one another”** is an encouragement to endure the issues and pains which others cause us, to put up with them within the agape of God’s people. We are not to be too critical, but rather to accept one another, faults and all. No one said that maintaining the union would be easy!

**<sup>4</sup> There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; <sup>5</sup> one Lord, one faith, one baptism; <sup>6</sup> one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.**

Here again, Paul restated the foundation of the Union – for at least the third time! Using “**one**” seven times, he drives home the message that we are one because of what we share in Jesus. These verses could be an ancient hymn or confession, or a confession written by Paul, and taken up by the Ephesians.

**<sup>7</sup> But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. <sup>8</sup> This is why it says:**

**“When he ascended on high,  
he took many captives  
and gave gifts to his people.”**

**<sup>9</sup> (What does “he ascended” mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? <sup>10</sup> He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) <sup>11</sup> So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup> to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up <sup>13</sup> until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.**

Paul is now moving from teaching on the union to explaining how things work within the union. His starting point is that all God’s people have received some gift by the grace of God. This he expounds with great enthusiasm in 1 Corinthians 12, which should be read in conjunction with this passage. (See 1 Corinthians in this series on the BIBLE TEACHING page)

The quote from Psalm 68 could fill many books with scholarly comment! Let’s pass over it. “**Ascend**” and “**descend**” has also caused much debate. What was the “descent?” It could be his incarnation, or it could be his descent at Pentecost. This has something to recommend it, as we are about to look at spiritual gifts. But “**the lower, earthly regions**” is also a challenge. Does this mean the earth, or (traditionally) Hades? Or does it reflect his time in the grave? His ultimate destiny was to ascend “**in order to fill the whole universe.**” We have met “fullness” (Gk: “plaroma”) before in this letter. (1:23; 3:19;) It means to complete everything, and enter into a sovereign relationship with the whole world.

We are working our way to the gifts, in typical Pauline fashion. As we have seen in this and other letters, he moves in an elliptical fashion, rather than a linear one!

Verses 11-13 teach a very clear theology of ministry. Let's take a careful look at them.

\* **The Offices.** Paul teaches that the Lord gave us Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors and teachers as the foundation ministries of his church. There isn't a lot of teaching about the structure of church ministry in the N.T., so this is useful. "Apostles" are sent people, who, perform signs and wonders, establish churches and release ministries, and are the deposit of Faith for God's people. "Prophet", in N.T. terms are people who help us understand the "now" heart of God, help us understand events that have happened, and encourage and warn us of the way ahead. "**Evangelists**" are the door keepers of the kingdom inviting people in in the basis of the Gospel. **Pastors**" ("shepherds") care for the flock, **and "teachers"** do just that - teach us the ways of the Lord based on the bible.

\* **Their job.** The function of the Offices is to "**equip the saints**". These ministries are to help the body grow. They are not for personal satisfaction, but are to be used within the body to help the members find their own gifts and ministries. When we keep this position in mind, all is well. But all too easily those who claim these ministries believe that they are for their own personal satisfaction. This has always, and will always lead to trouble. The saints are to be equipped for "**works of service.**" Here again we see Paul's emphasis on faith and works. Faith must result in working for the extension and building up of the kingdom. Idleness and laziness are not permitted. If we love the Lord, we will delight to do his work. The Offices of the church are there to serve us so that we can better serve him.

\* **The ultimate aim.** The Offices of the church, working with the body, are working until "**we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.**" What a challenge! We are working towards unity, which has been the thrust of this Epistle so far. We are to have knowledge of Jesus, here designated for the only time in Ephesians as "**Son of God**", and to become "**mature.**" (Gk:"teleios" which means "having reached its end.") We have looked at "fullness" before. It means that we are to aspire to know the totality of Jesus. This is unlikely to happen in this life, but it is a thrilling and challenging goal.

**<sup>14</sup> Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. <sup>15</sup> Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. <sup>16</sup> From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.**

If we have understood the previous verses rightly, then this passage makes sense. Being built up by the body, we not only stand firm in an uncertain world, but we begin to move towards that maturity which is what Jesus wants for us. Jesus is the origin of this growth, and also the means by which it happens. The Apostle is a faith based theologian and Christian. He seldom misses an opportunity to remind us of this, and it is appropriate here. It would be easy to think that the growth of the church is something we have done by our own effort. But the growth, as the life, all flows from the grace of God through Jesus, and not by works. Many churches have foundered by forgetting this simple but powerful truth.

**<sup>17</sup> So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. <sup>18</sup> They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. <sup>19</sup> Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed.**

The believers in Ephesus must not live like the Gentiles, as they once did – who are by nature alienated from God because of their hardness towards God.

**That, however, is not the way of life you learned when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.**

**“Put off your old self – be made new.”** The old ways must be put off, as we would out off a coat or our clothes. Then we put on the new:-

**\*A new mind.** This is similar to Romans 12:- **“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”**

(Romans 12:2). It is not enough to change our outward way of life. We have to change our thinking. We have to be renewed internally. This is a much harder change to experience and live out.

**\* A new self.** “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” (2 Cor.5:17) Christ’s message transforms our minds, and our way of life. We are not trying to graft the new onto the old. It is a brand new beginning, and the old Gentile ways are gone forever - or should be.

**\* Created to be like God. “So God created man in his own image.”** (Genesis 1:27) This newness - in body and spirit - is part of God’s plan. He built us in his image, and he is trying all he can to bring that image forward in us. What a great privilege and joy. But this cannot happen if the Gentile ways cling on. New wine in new wineskins.

**\* True righteousness and holiness.** We now begin to see what kind of pattern the Lord is looking for in us. We are to live righteous lives - the lives of those who are forgiven and saved by the sacrifice of the Lord. We are to be holy - that means to separate ourselves from the “sins that cling so closely” ( Hebrews 12:1) and try to walk in the ways of the Lord.

<sup>25</sup> **Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbour, for we are all members of one body.** <sup>26</sup> **“In your anger do not sin”:** Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, <sup>27</sup> **and do not give the devil a foothold.** <sup>28</sup> **Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need.**

Now Paul outlined more of what “righteous and holy lives “ means:-

**\* Speak the truth**

**\*Do not get angry, and if we do, sort it out before it gets out of hand.**

**\*Stealing to be replaced by honest work, with an understanding of the responsibility to help those in need with what is earned.**

**<sup>29</sup> Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. <sup>30</sup> And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. <sup>31</sup> Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. <sup>32</sup> Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you**

Still more instruction:-

\* Control what we say, so that it helps others

\* Do not grieve the Holy Spirit. This is a lovely verse, because it makes it clear that the Holy Spirit is a person, because he can be grieved. The grief would probably be at any rebellion from the clear path which the Lord has laid out.

\* Get rid of a whole list of useless experiences - they do not help the kingdom or us.

\*A challenge to the body – be kind, compassionate and forgiving.

Chapter 4 is quite a long haul, but well worth it. When Paul gets to the Offices of the church, the letter springs to life. We can feel, possibly for the first time, that he had a real church in mind - a real church with real people, some of whom he knows, and the foundations of which he laid. This feeling will continue to the end of the Epistle.

## **Ephesians Chapter 5**

**<sup>1</sup> Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children <sup>2</sup>and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.**

Paul has given suggestions about ways of living, and there are more to follow. But what if we can't remember them all? **"Follow God's example."** In other words,

the Spirit will reveal the nature and ways of God to us – follow them. Augustine said something similar when he wrote “Love God and do what you like!” If we love God, we will do what he likes!

**“Christ loved us”**. This is the first time Christ’s love for us is stated in this letter. (See Romans 8:35) How did Christ show that love? He **“gave himself up”**. This is an aorist – in other words he gave himself up once and for all, as a **“sacrifice”** which he made on the cross.

**<sup>3</sup> But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people. <sup>4</sup> Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. <sup>5</sup> For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a person is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. <sup>6</sup> Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God’s wrath comes on those who are disobedient. <sup>7</sup> Therefore do not be partners with them.**

Here we see the very opposite to “Love God and do what you like.” Paul singles out sexual immorality and language as areas where we have to be very careful.

**<sup>8</sup> For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light <sup>9</sup> (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) <sup>10</sup> and find out what pleases the Lord. <sup>11</sup> Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. <sup>12</sup> It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. <sup>13</sup> But everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light. <sup>14</sup> This is why it is said:**

**“Wake up, sleeper,  
rise from the dead,  
and Christ will shine on you.”**

We were all once children of **“darkness”**, where God was not, and we followed our own ways. Now we are children of the light, and we must not follow the children of darkness. Easy to write but hard to do! The world announces the latest ap., car, holiday, home accessory, health fad – and Christians are often seen running after them without asking the obvious question “Is this me just following the children of darkness?” Don’t get the wrong idea – many things are open to us,

but some are not. What is troubling is that many of God's people do not even consider that they are being ensnared by the "darkness."

**"Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."** Finding the O.T. source for this quote has been difficult, and so let's step over the discussion. It has been thought that this might be an old baptismal hymn. **"Wake up sleeper"** is a challenge to shake off lethargy and laziness - ever the danger for the Christian. Then Christ will "shine" on the believer, suggesting divine approval.

**<sup>15</sup> Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, <sup>16</sup> making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. <sup>17</sup> Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. <sup>18</sup> Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, <sup>19</sup> speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, <sup>20</sup> always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

Now the Apostle takes his teaching on the Christian lifestyle, and tells us that we must live it out before our families, friends and employers with care and wisdom. The world presses in on us, tempting us to let our Christian lifestyle slip. We must be wise. We must be **"filled it the Spirit"**. Living within the power of the Spirit leads to joy, praise and thanksgiving. It changes the character of our daily lives, helping us to live in the victorious and supporting presence of the Lord in all circumstances. Life in the Spirit leads to thanksgiving, and a quality of life which is attractive to others. The alternative is to live empty and pointless lives.

**<sup>21</sup> Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.**

**"Submit"** has caused a lot of debate. It translates "worthy of respect" and it is not an experience in itself, but is a consequence of life in the Spirit. It is a hallmark of the Christian that we "submit" to each other because that is how Jesus treated us. By "submitting" we are demonstrating another of the kingdom principles which govern our lives. In the world, it has a harsh side to it, but not in the kingdom. It's important to remember this as we look at the next passages.

**<sup>22</sup> Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. <sup>23</sup> For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Saviour. <sup>24</sup> Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.**

Wives must submit to their husbands as they would to the Lord. This verse has come in for a lot of criticism, but in fact it elevates the married state of women to an incredible height. The wife loves the Lord, and in the same way she must try and love her husband. She submits to the Lord in joy, and in the same way she must submit to her husband. It is disappointing that the awesome nature of this verse, and the honour it gives to wives has been lost in debates about the next verse.

**“Head”**. So much has been written about this word! Some think it means “ruler” or “authority” while other think it means “source”. Both views have strong advocates! But “head” in this context has to be seen in the light of Christ’s headship over the church, and the meaning of “submit” in the previous verse. All things are placed at his feet. His word is the authority for all of us, but he “rules” in agape love, not in human dominance. We don’t mind submitting to his agape, and wives are to behave likewise to their husbands. But this statement cannot be separated from what follows.

**<sup>25</sup> Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her <sup>26</sup> to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, <sup>27</sup> and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. <sup>28</sup> In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. <sup>29</sup> After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church— <sup>30</sup> for we are members of his body. <sup>31</sup> “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” <sup>32</sup> This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. <sup>33</sup> However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.**

The submission of the wife has not only been separated from their position in relation to Christ, but also from this challenging teaching to the husband. Husbands are to agape their wives as Christ loved the church. How can we ever hope to achieve such a love? This places such a high value on the lives and wellbeing of wives, and leave most men floundering! Not only are wives to be objects of agape love, but **“to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.”**

So both partners in marriage are given huge challenges as they build the marriage relationship. It's disappointing that so much attention has been focused on feminist teaching, and not enough on the deep and lasting benefit to be achieved by trying to live up to the standard which the Lord, in love, sets for all marriages.

## **Ephesians chapter 6**

**<sup>1</sup> Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. <sup>2</sup>“Honour your father and mother”—which is the first commandment with a promise— <sup>3</sup> “so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.”**

**<sup>4</sup> Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.**

Paul now moves on to the way children should behave - and the principle is the same as for wives – obey (“To obey, follow, be subject to”) as if they were serving the Lord. It's easy for Christian parents to agree to this, but not so easy for the children. For them, as for all, there is the struggle between self-will and the guidance of the Lord. As with wives, there is a huge challenge laid on the father, who in Roman times had enormous control over his children for life. The attitude is that father must not **“provoke”** ( Gk: “Parorgizo”) them. This word means “to irritate, provoke to anger.” On the contrary, the parent must bring the children up in the **“training and instruction of the Lord.”** “Bring up” means to “bring up from childhood, rear up, nurture.” It's a huge responsibility, which has to be exercised with the same agape love which Christ has for his church.

**<sup>5</sup> Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. <sup>6</sup> Obey them not only to win their favour when their eye is on you, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. <sup>7</sup> Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people, <sup>8</sup> because you know that the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do, whether they are slave or free.**

**<sup>9</sup> And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favouritism with him.**

Kingdom principles do not change, whoever is involved. Slaves and masters have to behave in just the same way as husbands, wives and children. We serve each other as if we were serving the Lord. We act with agape love in all circumstances, as he did. Much has been made of this passage with regard to slavery. I think Paul operated a pragmatic approach here. This situation was not going to change quickly, and he didn't want it to become the focus for the gospel.

**<sup>10</sup> Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. <sup>11</sup>Put on the full armour of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. <sup>12</sup> For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. <sup>13</sup> Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.**

“**Be strong**” – is better translated “to be made strong.” (For the Grammarians, it's a passive). “**In the Lord**” – he is the source of our strength. This verse could be read backwards, and make good sense – “in the mighty power of the Lord be strong.” We are to “**put on**”, as we put on clothes, the “**full armour**”, that is the armour of the Roman foot soldier. Then we can “**take our stand**”, or “offer resistance to” the enemy's “**schemes**”. (Gk: “Methodia”)

The battlefield is now outlined. It is here on earth “**against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world**” and against purely satanic powers “**against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realm.**” These verses have been the subject of much debate, but the issue is fairly clear. Christians are fighting to maintain the kingdom, in the face of assaults from the physical and spiritual realm. So we have to be ready, and able to defend ourselves.

**<sup>14</sup> Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, <sup>15</sup> and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. <sup>16</sup> In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. <sup>17</sup> Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.**

In this very familiar passage, the Apostle describes the armour a Christian needs as he faces up to the spiritual battle in which we are all engaged.

\* **Truth.** “A reality which is reliable and trustworthy.” This describes the Gospel.

\* **Righteousness.** This can be God’s righteousness in us, or our righteous lives lived in the power of the Spirit.

\* **Gospel of peace.** We are prepared to speak, live and act on the Gospel. We are ready to move at God’s command, to confront and overcome the spiritual opposition.

\* **Shield of faith.** The shield was probably the “scutum”, a shield like a door, covering the whole man, and used to provide not only individual protection but used with a group, to provide group protection, and a powerful weapon of advance. The Apostle teaches that our “**shield**” is our faith - individually and collectively. This beats back the enemy’s attack, putting out his “**flaming arrows,**”

\* **Helmet.** With his head protected, the soldier feels safe in battle. In the same way, the believer’s assurance of salvation gives confidence during spiritual struggles.

\* **Sword of the Spirit.** In the spiritual battle, we have the promise and power of the word of God, empowered by the Holy Spirit. We are not without offensive weapons.

To sum up this teaching, we need to remember that soldiers, even in a defensive posture, are ready for offensive action. We too must stand firm, ever ready to act and attack at the Lord’s command, and we will have to attack if we are not to be overcome.

<sup>18</sup> **And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.** <sup>19</sup> **Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel,** <sup>20</sup> **for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.**

Yet more armour - and this time of the offensive variety! “**Pray in the Spirit on all occasions.**” Prayer changes things, releasing the power of the Lord into situations

that seem hopeless and lost. Constant prayer brings constant progress, even if it is only the courage to “**stand firm**”. The fact that the church finds it so hard to get people to pray is an indication of just how powerful prayer is, and how much it is feared by the enemy. The object of our prayers, at least in this Epistle is to be “**the Lord’s people.**” We need to pray for each other constantly - this is a sign of the Union which Paul spoke of in the first part of this epistle. We ought also to pray for individuals, that they might have courage to be bold in faith and testimony. None of us can stand alone. Even strong Christians like Paul need the prayers of God’s people.

“**Ambassador in chains.**” What an irony! Ambassadors are seldom found in prison, yet Paul is unashamed of his chains. He was and is an ambassador for Christ, in whatever circumstance he finds himself. We should draw great confidence from this, as we struggle along, trying to live our Christian lives in an ever darkening world, where God’s people are suffering more and more. Whatever the circumstances, we are all Ambassadors for Christ.

**<sup>21</sup> Tychicus, the dear brother and faithful servant in the Lord, will tell you everything, so that you also may know how I am and what I am doing. <sup>22</sup> I am sending him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage you.**

Tychicus joined Paul after the Ephesian riots. He is a faithful servant, and as well as bringing the message, will add to it the personal things he knows and has seen. So the recipients would get more than just this letter. How we long to know what Tychicus knew!

**<sup>23</sup> Peace to the brothers and sisters, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>24</sup> Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love.**

So this letter comes to its gentle end, as with so many of Paul’s letters. He offers them peace, love, faith and grace. What more could any church ask for?

Ephesians is quite a complex document. The first three chapters are very deep and concentrated, as the Apostle speaks passionately for the union of the Jews and Gentiles within the body of Christ. But once he gets to the teaching on the Offices, his own personality cuts in, and the letter sails along, as do 1 and 2

Corinthians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians and Philippians. What do we take away with us from this epistle? All of us will gather and use different pieces of the teaching. For me, I am reminded again of the deep theological and biblical foundations of my faith, and the need to be ready at all times to fight for that faith, regardless of the cost.

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