

**A thirteen-lesson study of
the book of Ephesians**

Tommy C. Higle

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Journey To A Better Life

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PREFACE

It is not enough to know we are Christians. We must also know the spiritual resources available to us in Christ and how to draw upon them. This “journey” is designed to discover our resources in Christ and how they can lead to a better life in our relationship to God, our church, our family, at work, etc. The book of Ephesians makes it clear the way to a better life can only be found in Jesus Christ.

The lessons in this book are a result of more than 25 years of preaching and teaching the Word of God. However, at least to some degree I have developed many of my thoughts from reading the books listed in the Bibliography. The purpose of *The Journey Series*® is to present the Word of God in a simple, practical way that is true to the Scriptures and will be an exciting growth experience to both mature and new believers.

I want to thank the wonderful people of Marietta’s First Baptist Church who have supported me for more than 15 years. They have patiently and lovingly listened to me preach and teach series on the same books of the Bible as many as three or four times, since they knew I was developing “Journey” studies. I believe God will give them a special place in heaven for kindly serving as guinea pigs for these studies. To everyone in our incredible church, I thank you for your support, encouragement, and love.

I am indebted to my wife Virginia, a former English teacher and editor-in-chief of Tommy Hagle Publishers, for spending many hours correcting my grammatical errors and vague sentences. A special thanks goes to the efficient staff of Tommy Hagle Publishers—Martha Greenwood, Carolyn Gordon, and Patti Donaldson, who do the collating, shipping, and hundreds of other things; Vickie King, customer service; Corey Speer, offset pressman; Ada Bess Hill, Pam Wilson, Sharon Hendrix, and my sister Becky Alvis, proofreaders; and Gerald Stone, an architect and artist, who always does a wonderful job with the drawings for our studies.

May the Lord use this study to help you find a better life in Christ.

*Tommy Hagle
Marietta, Oklahoma
February 1997*

SUGGESTIONS FOR YOUR JOURNEY

I. HELPFUL MATERIALS

1. A good study Bible and reliable Bible dictionary (Ask your pastor or teacher for help in this area.)
2. A lead pencil. Don't use ink because you may want to change your answers.

II. HINTS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

1. Pray for God's guidance before each session, that your mind and heart will be receptive to God's message for you.
2. Don't worry about scriptures you do not understand. Simply concentrate on what God reveals to you in His Word for now, and trust Him to make the vague things clearer as you continue to study.
3. Mark the Bible verses that really speak to you.
4. Read each lesson at least three times each week.

III. HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF YOUR CLASS TIME

1. Try to attend every class period.
2. Try to arrive at least 10 minutes early to look over the lesson, so you will have an idea of what will be covered during that session.
3. Write down things you want to remember, or you will probably forget them. You increase your retention by 300% if you take notes.
4. Pray for your teacher every day.

IV. HOW TO ANSWER THE QUESTIONS IN THE LESSONS

1. Look up the scripture reference in your Bible. Usually the answer is very simple and clear in that reference. However, sometimes there are questions that require thought, so you must meditate over the verse or passage in order to find its meaning. Answering the questions will become easier as the Bible comes to life to you during the study.
2. Don't simply quote the scripture. Write it in your own words as briefly as possible.
3. Whenever possible, personalize the scripture by using pronouns such as "I," "me," "my," "mine," etc.

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SPIRITUAL PREPARATION FOR YOUR JOURNEY

In order for you to get the most out of this “journey,” you must be spiritually prepared. The basic preparation is to know Jesus Christ as Lord (boss) and Savior, so He can be your spiritual Guide on the journey. If you have never received Him, or if you are not sure, there are four things you must understand . . .

1. God loves you and wants you to have eternal life.

The Bible says, *For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life* (John 3:16*). The Bible also says, *But God commendeth [proved] his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us* (Romans 5:8*).

2. You are sinful, and your sin separates you from God.

The Bible says, *For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God* (Romans 3:23*). Sin separates us from God, for the Bible says, *But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you . . .* (Isaiah 59:2*).

3. Only in Jesus Christ can forgiveness of sin and salvation be yours.

Jesus said, *I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me* (John 14:6*). God loved us so much that He sent His Son Jesus Christ to die on the cross to provide the way of salvation.

Right now you may be thinking, “I already believe these things.” Well, the Bible teaches it is not a matter of just believing, for *the devils also believe, and tremble* (James 2:19b*). Simply believing Adolf Hitler lived and died doesn’t make you a Nazi, and believing Jesus Christ lived and died doesn’t make you a Christian. You must act upon what you believe.

4. You must receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

It is not enough to agree that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that He died on the cross for your sins. You must receive Him as your personal Savior. The Bible says, *as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God . . .* (John 1:12*). You receive Him through prayer by simply inviting Him into your heart and life as Savior and Lord. Jesus said, *Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him . . .* (Revelation 3:20*). Right now Jesus is waiting at the door of your heart for you to invite Him in.

If there is the slightest tugging at your heart, that is the Holy Spirit drawing you to Christ. The Bible says, *To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts . . .* (Hebrews 3:15*). Every time you sense God drawing you to Himself and you resist, you harden your heart a little more. Because of this, the day may come when you cannot even sense God speaking to you because your heart is so hard. You cannot get right with God too soon because you do not know how soon may be too late. So, today if you hear God’s voice, do not harden your heart.

If you will pray the following prayer right now as your own, or pray in your own words asking forgiveness of your sins and inviting Jesus Christ into your heart, you can receive Him as Lord and Savior. The words you say are not as important as the attitude of your heart.

Dear Lord,
I know I have sinned, and right now I ask You to forgive me of all my sins. I open the door of my heart and receive You as my Lord and Savior. Take control of my life and help me become the person You want me to be. Thank You for dying on the cross so I could be forgiven. Amen.

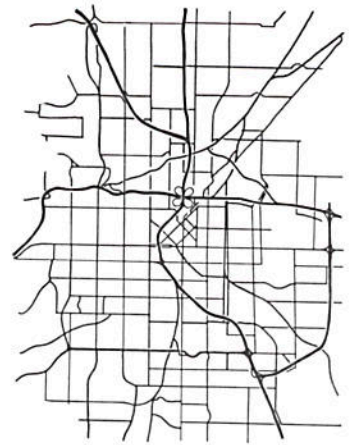
Now, share your decision with your pastor or teacher.

*Scriptures from KJV

Journey To A Better Life

LESSON 1 . . . Getting Started To A Better Life (Ephesians 1:1-6)

People today are looking for a better life. Politicians know this. In every presidential election, candidates declare how they will lead our country so we can all live better lives. The candidate who best persuades the majority that he or she can do that will win. However, the way to a better life is not found in politicians, money, success, or any temporal thing. The way to a better life is found only in Jesus Christ and in understanding who we are, what we have in Him, and how to acquire it.



Notes

It is not enough just to know we are Christians; therefore, God inspired Paul to write this epistle to motivate us to draw upon the resources we have in Christ so we can live better lives. In our “journey” we will discover the way to a better life in our church, our family, our work, our prayer life, etc. To get started toward a better life, we must understand three things:

First, in Christ I am a saint (1:1-3).

This epistle begins: *Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God . . .* (1:1a). In his pre-Christian life Paul thought the way to a better life was found only in Judaism. Therefore, he was a zealous Pharisee and a militant opponent of Christianity. But on the Damascus Road he met Christ, who is the only way to a better life. As a result of his conversion, Paul found what purpose for his life, as described in Acts 9:15?

After spending three years in Arabia, where he was taught by the Holy Spirit (Gal. 1:16-19), Paul became *an apostle* (APOSTOLOS, a-pos'-to-los), which means one who is personally commissioned by Christ. Thus, he spoke and wrote with divine authority. When we read Paul's words, they are not just the words of an ancient church leader; they are the inspired words of Almighty God.

Look at the chart of Paul's Christian life on page 12 and answer the following questions:

From where and in what year did Paul write *Ephesians*?

What other letters did Paul write during this period of his life?

During what era did he write most of his epistles?

Paul never ceased to be amazed at the good life he found in Christ. The Lord should have struck him dead on the Damascus Road, but it was on that road the great apostle found the way to a truly better life, which he shares with us in this letter.

Though this epistle was written to Christians like you and me, Paul writes: *To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus* (1:1b). The word *Ephesus* does not appear in the oldest Greek manuscripts, and in some manuscripts there is a blank instead. The reason is that it is a general, or circular letter, and various names were put in the blank. This is why there are no personal names in the closing verse, as there are in *Colossians*.

Paul calls those to whom this letter is written *saints*. The word *saints* translates a Greek word (HAGIOS, hawg'-ee-os) that means "separated." If you are a Christian who has separated yourself from sin and dedicated yourself to God, you are a saint to whom this epistle is written. The word *saints* implies availability and usability in God's service. Probably the greatest appeal for a saintly life is found in Romans 12:1. What is it?

All *saints* are *in Christ Jesus*, which suggests a spiritual union or inclusion in His spiritual body, the church. We may live in Dallas, New York, Sydney, or Hong Kong, but as believers we are all in the same place spiritually—in Christ.

You may say, "I don't feel holy; I don't feel worthy to be a saint." None of us is worthy, for at times we are all selfish and prone to sin. But we need to understand the phrase *in Christ Jesus*, which means God sees us only through Christ's righteousness. Believers are referred to as being *in Christ* more than 75 times in the NT. Fourteen of these references are in *Ephesians*. What wonderful assurance is given to those who are *in Christ* in Romans 8:1?

Being *in Christ* is cause for celebration. Thus, Paul says in Ephesians 1:2a, *Grace and peace to you Grace* (CHARIS, kar'-ess) is the common Greek greeting from which we get our English word "Karen." It refers to receiving something completely undeserved. *Peace* is the common Hebrew greeting and refers to enjoying inner tranquility, undisturbed by outward circumstances. How is this peace described in Philippians 4:7?

Paul explains these wonderful spiritual riches are *from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ* (Eph. 1:2b). The **Source** of our spiritual wealth is *God* and the **Bank** that dispenses them is *Jesus Christ*. In Christ we have a spiritual blank check signed by Jesus. *Grace* and *peace* are the beginning of a "journey to a better life," but there is more, as we shall see.

In response to the good life we have in Christ, Paul says, *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* (1:3). The key to a "journey to a better life" is understanding that it is not found in money, success, prestige, or anything temporal. It is found only in Jesus Christ, who will provide us *with every spiritual blessing*. In the OT, God's promised blessings were mostly material, such as the promised land, protection from enemies, etc. Likewise, in the NT, Jesus promises to take care of our physical needs with what declaration in Matthew 6:33?

In addition, we can have *every spiritual blessing* (Eph. 1:3). No blessing in heaven will God withhold from those who are in Christ. Why? We are the children of God *in Christ*, and *in Christ* the treasure chest of Heaven is open to us. A "journey to a better life" begins by understanding who we are in Christ and accepting the blessings that are ours in Him. First, as a believer I must realize **in Christ I am a saint** and . . .



Second, I am chosen by God (1:4a & 5).

As a believer I am in Christ, but why? Paul says, *For he chose us in him before the creation of the world . . . (1:4). In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will* (1:5).

Two phrases reveal the reason for our blessings in Christ: God *chose us* and God *predestined us*. These are references to what is called the doctrine of election. This doctrine is one of the greatest paradoxes in the NT. How can one believe in election, that God sovereignly selects individuals to be saved even *before the creation of the world*, and at the same time believe that a person has complete freedom of choice as far as his own salvation is concerned? This is one of the great mind-boggling questions of all time. What does the last sentence in 2 Peter 3:9 declare?

The Bible does teach that every person has a choice. If we didn't, we couldn't be held accountable for our decisions and actions. However, the Bible also teaches God is sovereign. The Bible teaches both: God is sovereign, and we have a real choice in salvation (see Matt.11:28, John 3:16, and Rom. 10:12-13). To deny one or the other would be to distort the teaching of the Bible. Then, how do we make sense out of this paradox? We begin by recognizing what principle found in Isaiah 55:9?

Our finite minds cannot understand everything God has written in the Bible. Some things we just have to accept without understanding. We do that every day with light. According to my encyclopedia, light is "electromagnetic radiation in the wavelength range from about 0.4u to about 0.7u." Do you understand that? I don't even know what the "u" means. But I make use of light every day. We must do the same with salvation—accept what we don't fully understand. However, one day we will understand, because of what truth found in 1 Corinthians 13:12?

To have a better life as a believer, I must realize **in Christ I am a saint, I am chosen by God**, and . . .

Third, I am chosen for a reason (1:4b&6).

Why did God choose us? He chose us *to be holy and blameless in his sight* (1:4b). The word *holy* is the same Greek word as the word translated

saints, only in the singular. It means set apart from the world and dedicated to God. The test of whether we are really Christians is if we try as best we can to live a holy life. How does 1 John 3:9 verify this fact?

The word *blameless* (AMOMOS, ahm'-o-mos) means "without blemish," or "without rebuke." It doesn't mean we never sin, but when we do, we take what appropriate action found in 1 John 1:9?

When we take the action regarding our sin specified in 1 John 1:9, God makes the heavenly record as though the sin never happened, and therefore we are *blameless* (see Jer. 31:34).

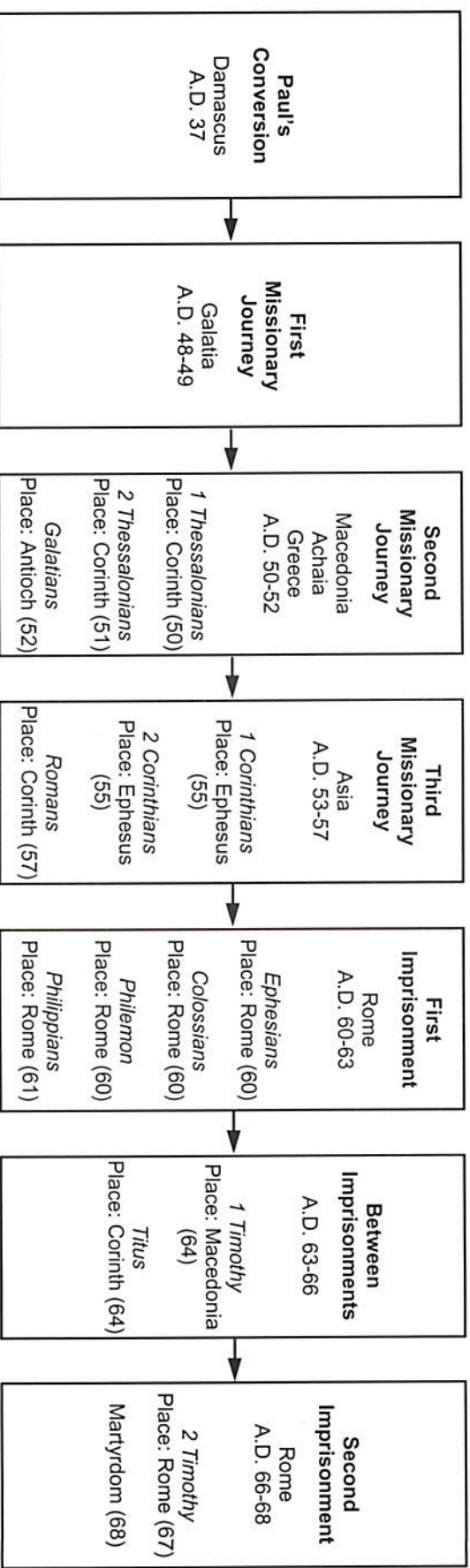
God also chose us *to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ* (Eph. 1:5). This compares to Roman adoption, in which an adopted child enjoyed the same status and privileges as a natural child. Also, in the eyes of Roman law, all debts and obligations connected with the previous family were canceled. This is what God has done for us in Christ. We were in the power of sin, but God took us out of that family and adopted us into His family, canceling all our debts.



Salvation, which is the beginning of a better life, is the result of God's *glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves* (1:6). Therefore, God deserves our *praise*. No amount of material riches or worldly achievement can give us what we have *in Christ*. Furthermore, what we have in Christ is not something we will receive in the future but is available to us right now. In Christ we can "journey to a better life" here and now.

For what blessing *in Christ* are you most grateful? _____

Paul's Christian Life



Journey To A Better Life

LESSON 2 . . . How To Change Your Life (Ephesians 1:7-23)

For seven years I lived 13 miles from the largest diamond mine in North America in Murfreesboro, Arkansas. I went there once to look for diamonds. I did not find any, but as I left, I saw the Park Ranger pointing to a diamond in someone else's pile of rocks. It didn't look valuable because diamonds in the rough aren't shiny or diamond-shaped. It just looked like a small dirty rock.

As believers we are like diamonds in the rough. Sometimes before God completes His work of chipping off the rough edges in our lives, we wonder how we could ever be valuable and lovable in God's sight. However, God sees us not as we are, but as we can be in Jesus Christ. To understand how Jesus Christ can take diamonds in the rough, like you and me, and transform us into beautiful gems, we must be aware of four things:

First, the Preparation for Change (1:7-10)

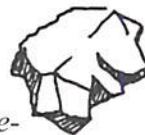
Real change in our lives begins only when *in him we have redemption through his blood . . .* (7a). The word translated *redemption* (APOLUTROSIS, op-o-loo'-tro-sis) literally means "a releasing for a payment." It was used in reference to buying slaves out of the slave market for the purpose of setting them free. So, *redemption* is the setting free of a person from a situation that requires a price he cannot pay himself. This is our predicament, because what did Jesus say in John 8:34?

The price of our redemption from the slave market of sin is *his blood*. Why does Hebrews 9:22 say it takes the *blood* of Jesus to set us free from sin?

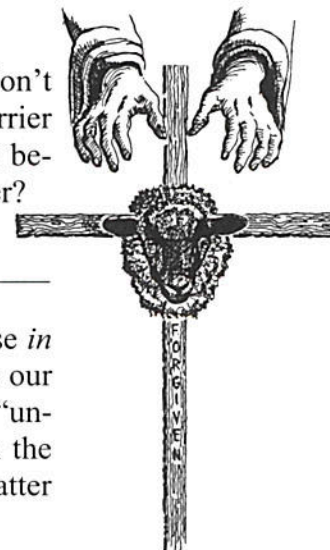
The OT sacrifices were continually offered since they were never enough, *because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins* (Heb. 10:4). However, the *blood* of Jesus provides *the forgiveness of sins*. The word *forgiveness* literally means "to send away." It suggests the barrier separating us from God is sent away. When we wrong someone or



Notes



someone wrongs us, an invisible barrier is immediately erected. We don't feel comfortable in their presence and vice versa. Although the barrier cannot be seen, it can be sensed. In the same way, there is a barrier between us and God, and according to Isaiah 59:2, what caused the barrier?



The extent of our *redemption* and *forgiveness* is expressed in the phrase *in accordance with the riches of God's grace* (Eph. 1:7c). This means our redemption is in proportion to God's unlimited grace, which is "unmerited favor." So, not only are we redeemed and forgiven through the blood of Jesus, but also we are made objects of God's favor. No matter how bad our sins, we cannot exhaust *the riches of God's grace*.

Redemption, forgiveness, and grace God has *lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding* (1:8). *Wisdom* (SOPHIA, sof-ee'-ah) means "knowledge to see to the heart of things." *Understanding* means insight that leads to the right action. Thus, in Christ we are equipped with the spiritual discernment to begin to make changes in our lives. In Christ, God takes away the effects of sin that corrupt and distort our minds and our behavior. He gives us the ability to understand His Word and apply it to our lives, resulting in change.

As we grow in Christ, God makes *known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ* (1:9). The *mystery* is explained in verse 10: *to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ*. How is this mystery described in Philippians 2:10-11?

Second, the Process of Change (1:11-17)

As mind-boggling as it is, God chose us to be changed before the foundation of the world so we can share in the glory that belongs to Christ. As Paul says, *In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory* (1:11-12). The key to this miracle is the phrase *in Christ*. How does 2 Corinthians 5:17 describe this phrase?

This means we are radically changed in Jesus Christ. The phrase *in Christ* refers to a dynamic, personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Relationships determine our character. Who you are a year from today will largely be determined by your relationships. The process of change requires a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. How does the last phrase of John 15:5 teach this truth?

Our redemption is the result of a positive response when we *heard the word of truth* (Eph. 1:13a) and trusted in Christ for forgiveness of our sins. This all sounds good, but will it last? Yes, since you believed *you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit* (1:13b). In Paul's day an official document was sealed with wax, and while the wax was still soft an impression was made in the wax with the official ring or seal of the king or another official. This unbroken seal indicated two things. It identified the document as genuine and guaranteed it would not be opened until it reached its destination. The Holy Spirit is the seal that identifies us as God's children and secures us for how long, according to Ephesians 4:30?

The Holy Spirit is also *a deposit* (Eph. 1:14). The word translated *deposit* (ARRHABON, ar-rah-bone') means "earnest-money deposited by the purchaser." It is the first installment and a sign that more is coming. The Holy Spirit is a *deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession* (1:14). The word *redemption* refers to the culmination of the process of salvation, which will be completed at the return of Christ when we get new bodies. At that time God will take from alien hands all that are His, which are identified by His seal, the Holy Spirit.

Because of what Paul has just written, he prays that the believers to whom he is writing will come to understand and appreciate their spiritual riches in Christ. News had come to Paul in Rome about the continuing *faith and love* of his readers, and he writes, *For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers* (1:15-16).

For continued change to take place, the average believer needs encouragement, and few things can encourage like praise. We should emulate Paul's practice of encouraging other believers through genuine praise and obey what command found in 1 Thessalonians 5:11?

For his readers Paul says, *I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation*, (Eph. 1:17a). The word *revelation* (APOCALYPSIS) means "to uncover

or unveil.” It doesn’t refer to new revelation but to understanding or uncovering what already has been revealed, so that we *may know him* (Christ) and understand the Scriptures (1:17b).

Besides being aware of the **preparation for change** and the **process of change**, we need to know . . .

Third, the Provocation for Change (1:18)

Paul reveals our motivation for change by writing, *I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you* (1:18a). Paul wants us to have a better understanding of our *hope* in Christ. How is this hope described in Colossians 3:4?

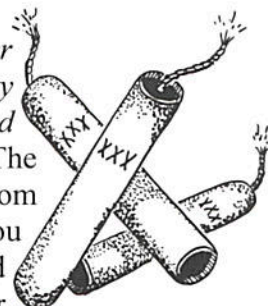
Imagine in heaven seeing a marquee that says: “Appearing tonight in person . . . Jesus Christ, along with _____ (put your name in the blank).” In heaven we are going to share in the glory of Christ; that is our hope.

Paul also prays that we *may know . . . the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints* (Eph. 1:18b). This does not refer to our inheritance in Christ, but that God considers us a part of His great wealth and prosperity. Paul is praying we will appreciate the value God places upon us. God’s *riches* are not stocks, bonds, diamonds, or land. One day all of those things will go up in smoke. What determines the value of anything is what must be paid for it, and what was the cost of our redemption (see 1 Peter 1:19)?

For us to change, we must know about the **preparation for change**, the **process of change**, the **provocation for change**, and . . .

Fourth, the Power To Change (1:19-23)

Finally, Paul prays that we *may know . . . his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms* (1:19-20). The word *power* (DUNAMIS, doo’-na-mis) translates the Greek word from which we get our word “dynamite.” So, Paul is saying, “God wants you to know that the same power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead 2,000 years ago is available to you right now to help you conquer your



weaknesses, change your personalities, and chip away your rough edges.” Paul describes it as *his incomparably great power*, which means words do not have the ability to explain the awesome power of God. How does Philippians 2:13 describe how God’s power works in our lives?

This power of God has also placed Christ *far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come* (Eph. 1:21). The power of God has exalted Christ above every conceivable power and position for all eternity. Jesus is the absolute, sovereign Ruler of the universe, because *God placed all things under his feet* (1:22a). This is mind-boggling, but even more so is that God also *appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body. . .* (1:22b-23a). The word *church* (EKKLESIA, ek-klay-see'-ah) means “an assembly” or “the called out.” The church, believers “called out” of the world, is the body through which Christ functions and accomplishes His purposes on earth. The church is not a building or institution, but a living organism made up of believers.

The church is also *the fullness of him who fills everything in every way* (1:23b). This means Christ gives us His fullness in every way. In other words, everything Christ wants to be, He wants to be through you and me.

As a believer, you are a diamond in the rough. What are the two most important changes that have taken place in your life since you became a Christian?

1. _____

2. _____

Journey To A Better Life

LESSON 4 . . . Your New Family (Ephesians 2:11-22)

In this lonely and sometimes hostile world, everyone needs something of which they feel a part, can make a meaningful contribution, and are encouraged and loved. In this passage, the Holy Spirit inspires Paul to discuss the new spiritual family God has designed to meet these needs in our lives.

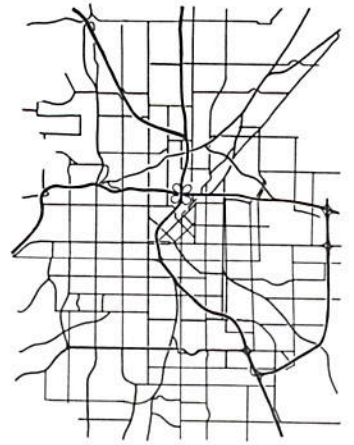
God is in the process of building this family called the church. To accomplish this, He has to do two things: bring to life people who were spiritually dead and bring together people who were separate and even hostile. God never intended we have the social and racial prejudice that exists today. However, there was even more hostile bigotry in Paul's day, that of Jews and Gentiles. How does Galatians 3:28 declare God's purpose in Christ?

To understand this section, we must realize there are no racial, social, or political differences today greater than the hostility between Jews and Gentiles of Paul's day. The Gospel transformed people so that Jew and Gentile were truly one in Christ. This is the greatest evidence of the power of the Gospel in the first century and in our day as well. Our new life in Christ compels us to love all people, regardless of race, social status, etc.

This section begins with the word *therefore*, indicating it is based upon what Christ has done for us as described in 2:1-10. Paul shares three things to help us better understand our new family, beginning with . . .

The Alienation (2:11-12)

Paul writes in verse 11: *Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision."* The Jews were descendants of Abraham, and the sign of their acceptance as God's covenant people was the rite of circumcision. The Jews contemptuously nicknamed Gentiles *uncircumcised*. How did David use this as a derogatory term in 1 Samuel 17:26?



Notes

The Jews were chosen as God's people to bless all nations (Gen. 12:3b). But the Jews, who were epitomized in Jonah, did not want to share the message of salvation with non-Jews. Instead, they used the covenant to spread prejudice and hate. Circumcision was instituted by God (Gen. 17:10-14) as an external sign of His covenant with Abraham and symbolized what had happened to Abraham internally in his journey of faith. However, it became a sign of the difference between Jew and Gentile rather than one's relationship to God. Circumcision was never intended to be merely outward and physical. How does Paul describe the true sign of a Jew in Romans 2:29a?

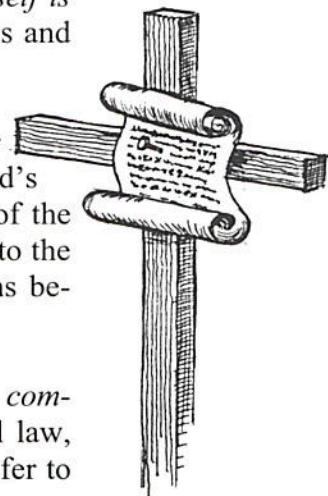
As Gentiles, we need to *remember that we were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world* (Eph. 2:12). We were Christless, spiritually homeless, hopeless, and godless. The word that best sums up our condition without Christ is "alienation." This alienation from God produces hate, racism, and the diabolical results of such attitudes. It is the reason for the bloodshed in Ireland, Africa, and even in the United States, as seen in the Los Angeles riot of 1992. However, the **alienation** is abolished because of . . .

The Reconciliation (2:13-18)

With the words *but now*, Paul moves from the past to the present and writes in verse 13: *But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.* The *blood of Christ* makes it possible for those alienated from God to be *brought near* to Him. How does the *blood of Christ* make this possible? Because *he himself is our peace* (2:14a), which means Jesus is the Peacemaker between us and God.

As our Peacemaker, He *has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility* (2:14). This refers to Herod's Temple in Jerusalem, where there was a wall separating the Court of the Gentiles from the Court of Israel. The penalty for a Gentile going into the Court of Israel was death. In Christ there are no more distinctions between Gentile and Jew because Christ *has made the two one*.

Christ accomplished this *by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations* (2:15a). This refers only to ceremonial law, such as rituals, washings, and sacrifices Christ fulfilled. It doesn't refer to



God's moral law that never changes, because what did Jesus say in Matthew 5:17?

Christ died on the cross because *His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace* (Eph. 2:15b). The word *new* (KAINOS, ki-nos') translates a Greek word that does not mean new in time, or recent, but new in form or different in nature. This means when Jew and Gentile come together in Christ, they are not a hybrid but a totally new creation. By His death on the cross, Christ created *this one body*, which is the church, *to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility* (2:16). Jesus put an end to the *hostility* between Jews and Gentiles. In hearts and churches today where He truly reigns, there is no racism, prejudice, or hatred. In John 13:35 how does Jesus declare His true disciples can be clearly recognized?



As Francis Schaeffer said, "When Jesus said that, He gave the world the right to judge us by our love." Christ came to earth and *preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near* (Eph. 2:17). This peace between Jews and Gentiles is also between both groups and God. This is why Isaiah predicted He would be called the *Prince of Peace* (Isaiah 9:6). How is the peace found in Christ described in Romans 5:1?

It is exclusively *through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit* (Eph. 2:18). The word translated *access* (PROSAGOGÉ, pros-og-o-gay') referred in ancient times to the introduction of visitors to a royal court. In the OT, only the high priest could enter the Holy of Holies and have access to God, but now Christ gives us direct access to God.

Our *access* involves the Trinity, for it is *through him* (Christ), *by one Spirit* (the Holy Spirit), that *we have access to the Father*. The Bible teaches the Trinity is involved in all God does for us. To appreciate our new family more fully, Paul writes about the **alienation**, the **reconciliation**, and now . . .

The Illustration (2:19-22)

The word *Consequently* refers back to all that was stated in verses 11-18. With this in mind, Paul uses a nation, a family, and a building to illustrate

what he has said. First, Paul writes: *you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people* (2:19a). From traveling in many foreign countries, I have discovered as a citizen of the United States I am separate and distinct from citizens of other countries. As believers in Christ we give up citizenship in the kingdom of Satan and become *citizens with God's people*, with full rights of citizenship.

But we are more than just citizens in God's kingdom; we are *members of God's household*, or family (2:19b). This pictures a much more intimate relationship that Jesus said gave us the right to address God as what in Matthew 6:9?



that's
me!

FAMILY PORTRAIT

As members of God's family, how does God's Word tell us to treat the following members of the church in 1 Timothy 5:1-2?

Older men _____ Younger men _____

Older women _____ Younger women _____

The church isn't an organization or social club; it is a family with the relationships, privileges, and responsibilities of a family. A family is a place where you can be yourself because you are loved and accepted no matter what color your skin, your background, or your social status.

Finally, Paul moves to the illustration of a building or temple, which has three elements: a foundation, a cornerstone, and the building. Therefore, Paul says we are *built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets* (Eph. 2:20a). This means the *apostles and prophets* laid the foundation through their preaching and teaching.

The spiritual temple God is building has *Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone* (2:20b). The cornerstone is laid first, and the walls are laid by it to be square and plumb. All the other stones have to fall in line with it.

Next, Paul writes of the building and reveals the purpose of the *cornerstone* in verse 21: *In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord*. The phrase *joined together* translates a Greek word (SUNARMOLOGEO, soon-ar-mol-o-geh'-o) that refers to a masonry project in which stones are snugly joined together. This means God has created each of us with the talents, gifts, experiences, and personality to fit perfectly into a needed place in the church. How is this fact described in Ephesians 2:10?

The verb translated *joined together* is present tense, which means the work is continuous and progressive. God adds stones to His spiritual superstructure each time someone is saved, and therefore the project is not yet finished. When the building is complete, Christ will return.

The purpose of this spiritual superstructure is . . . *to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit* (2:22). This building, the church, is to be a people in whom God lives *by His Spirit*. Gentiles, who were once excluded from the temple in Jerusalem, can now be God's actual dwelling place. How does 1 Corinthians 6:19 remind us of this truth?

Just as God took up residence in the tabernacle in the wilderness and later Solomon's temple in Jerusalem, in the person of the Holy Spirit, He takes up residence in you and me when we trust in Christ. The purpose of the temple in the OT was to honor God and reflect His glory. Though His dwelling place has changed, the purpose of His dwelling place has not, because we are given what command in the last sentence of 1 Corinthians 6:20?

A "journey to a better life" requires we understand God is in us and we are in Christ, which is the mystery of the church. How should an awareness of these facts affect your life this week?

Journey To A Better Life

LESSON 5 . . . The Mystery of the Ages (Ephesians 3:1-13)

Now Paul is going to let us in on the greatest mystery of all time. It is a secret that for millenniums has been known only to God. It was hidden from the patriarchs, priests, and prophets. The mystery is there was to be a new creation, a living temple in which God would live to carry out His message of salvation to the world.



Notes

As Paul begins to write about the mystery of the ages, he says: *For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus . . .* (3:1a). Paul did not consider himself a prisoner of Nero, the Roman emperor, for he knew his prison experience was a part of God's will for his life—for the sake of you Gentiles (3:1b). Had Paul not been in prison, he might never have written the prison epistles (see page 12). When we, like Paul, have problems, we must remember our suffering may be for the benefit of someone else. With this introduction, Paul explains the great mystery of the ages, beginning with . . .

The Revelation of the Mystery (3:2-6)

Led by the Holy Spirit, Paul writes: *Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you* (3:2). The key word in this verse is *administration* (OIKONOMIA, oy-kon-o-mee'-ah), which means "house manager." It is the management of the property and affairs of others and therefore refers to stewardship. A house manager, like Joseph in the OT, was trusted with managing the household servants, the crops, the finances, etc. How does Romans 15:16 explain the *administration* given to Paul?

Paul was chosen to preach to the Gentiles, as well as to Israel. What does 1 Corinthians 4:1-2 teach that God requires of all of us to whom He has entrusted the knowledge of the message of salvation?

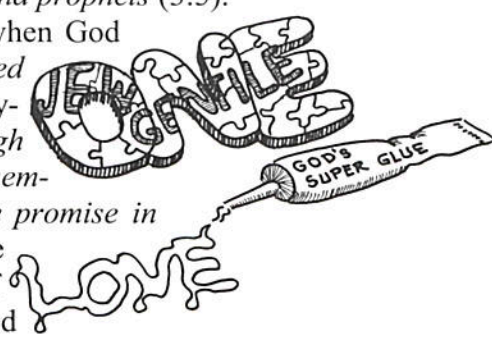
Paul's understanding of the mystery entrusted to him did not come through the instruction of others, but Paul writes: *the mystery made known to me by*

revelation (Eph. 3:3). The word *revelation* (APOKALUPSIS, ap-ok-all'-oop-sis) means "unveiling" or "the communication of the knowledge of God to the soul." After his conversion on the Damascus road, he immediately went to Arabia for three years. During this time how did Paul receive the Gospel, according to Galatians 1:12?

The *mystery* to which Paul refers translates a Greek word (MUSTERION, moos-tay'-ree-on), which refers to something that cannot be understood or discerned by natural knowledge but is revealed only by divine revelation. The mystery is that Jew and Gentile believers would become equal in one body, the church. The phrase *as I have already written briefly* (Eph. 3:3b) may refer to what he wrote in Galatians 1:11-20.

Paul continues: *In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ* (Eph. 3:4). The word *insight* (SUNESIS, soon'-es-is) means "to bring together." It is the idea of taking the scrambled pieces of a puzzle and putting them together to make a picture. Paul is putting together pieces of spiritual truth that are the mystery of God, so we can understand it.

The *mystery was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets* (3:5). Although the mystery was hinted at in Genesis 12:3, when God said to Abraham *all peoples on earth will be blessed through you*, it was not proclaimed or understood by anyone in the Old Testament. But the *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* (3:6). In other words, Gentiles have the same spiritual rights and spiritual status as the seed of Abraham. How does Galatians 3:29 explain how God makes this possible?



The mystery of the ages is that in Christ Gentiles are spiritually equal with Jews. In Christ, all differences are eliminated because we are all one in Him, a part of the same body with the same promises and spiritual status.

This spiritual unity is the mystery of the church. Because of His concern for this unity, for what did Jesus pray in the last sentence of John 17:11?

We must never forget we are one in Christ and are therefore responsible for helping and encouraging one another and always promoting unity among true believers, who are those who revere and live by the written Word of God. After explaining **the revelation of the mystery**, Paul writes about . . .

The Declaration of the Mystery (3:7-9)

Paul was called to declare the mystery of the ages and in verse 7 writes, *I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me. . . .* The word translated *servant* (DIAKONOS, dee-ak'-on-os) is the word from which we get the English word "deacon," which means a servant rendering free menial work. Each of us has a responsibility to serve and to make known the mystery of God in Christ. It may be helping in Sunday school, distributing bulletins, being a greeter, taking the offering, or inviting someone to worship services. When we get involved, we will discover our spiritual gifts and the place of service most rewarding and fruitful for us. There is no such thing as little or insignificant ministers, only faithful or unfaithful ones.

Paul was only able to declare the mystery of the ages because of *the working of his power* (7b). The word translated *working* (ENERGEIA, en-erg'-ee-ah) is the word from which we get the English word "energy." In other words, God energizes us to do His will. The word translated *power* (DUNAMIS, doo'-nam-is) is the word from which we get our word "dynamite." It does mean power, but here it refers to "ability." When there is something God wants us to do, He gives us the energy and the ability to do it. Therefore, we can never exalt or glorify ourselves.

Instead of boasting of all he had done, Paul demonstrates the attitude of a true servant in verse 8 by writing: *Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me.* The word translated *less than the least* (ELACHISTOTEROS, el-ak-is-tot'-er-os) literally means "leastest," if there were such a word. It was not enough for Paul to call himself the least, he wanted to place himself even lower than that. How does 1 Corinthians 15:9 reveal why Paul felt this way?

Paul was called to *preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ* (3:8b). The word translated *preach* means "to announce good news" and

is the word from which we get our English word “evangelize.” True biblical preaching always has evangelization in mind. If we are not trying to evangelize, we are not declaring the mystery entrusted to us.

Paul was also called *to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things* (3:9). The phrase *make plain* translates a Greek word (PHOTIZO, pho-tid’-zo) from which we get our English word “photo.” In other words, the OT is the “darkroom” in which the “photograph” is developed and then is brought out into the light in the NT so we can see the mystery of the church.

After writing about the **revelation** and **declaration of the mystery**, Paul writes about . . .

The Motivation for the Mystery (3:10-13)

The purpose for the mystery is . . . *that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known . . .* (3:10a). The word translated *manifold* (POLUPOIKILOS, pol-oo-poy’-kil-os) means “much varied” or “many colored.” It was used to refer to multicolored cloth and suggests the variety of the wisdom of God revealed in the mystery of the church, as one might see in an intricately embroidered pattern of a tapestry. The OT saints looked at the backside of God’s tapestry, while in the NT we can see the other side, which is the beautiful picture of the Gospel that is the mystery of the ages.

The phrase *rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms* (3:10b) refers to angels who did not know what God planned for the church age. What does Luke 15:10 say is the angels’ response when they see people accept the proclamation of God’s mystery of redemption.

Angels praise God for the mystery of salvation in the church, because what did Jesus say they will have to do in Matthew 13:41-42?

All this is *according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord* (Eph. 3:11). This is why Christ is *the chief cornerstone* of the church (2:20).

Also, in understanding the mystery of the ages we can understand: *In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence* (3:12). It is only in Christ *through faith* that we have the privilege of entering God's presence. This is an incredible truth for the church because in the OT only the High Priest could enter into God's presence one day a year, and then only in fear. No one could come into God's presence with *freedom and confidence* of acceptance. The mystery of the ages is that God has always intended for Jesus Christ to be our High Priest, and because He is, how does Hebrews 4:16 explain one of our privileges as believers?

Paul ends this section by writing: *I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory* (Eph. 3:13). Paul did not want his readers to lose heart because of his incarceration. His suffering should make his readers feel honored, because if Paul had not been preaching the mystery of the ages, he would not be in prison. The fact God has let Paul and many others suffer so the message of salvation could reach us and the entire world should make us feel honored. Others have suffered and sacrificed that we might reap the benefits.

You may not be an apostle, preacher, evangelist, or teacher, but God will give you the opportunity to tell others about the mystery of the ages. It may be directly or indirectly, such as inviting people to Sunday school, worship services, or a special church event. When you try to expose people to the Gospel, God will give you the courage and ability to do it. If you are not faithful in sharing the mystery of the ages, you betray a sacred trust.



Because of the awesome privilege of being entrusted with the knowledge of the mystery of the ages, what responsibilities do you have, and how should they affect you this week?

Journey To A Better Life

LESSON 6 . . . How To Experience God's Power (Ephesians 3:14-21)

Have you ever wished you had more power in your Christian life? Have you ever wished God would work in your life like He did in the lives of great people in the Bible? If so, this passage is tailor-made for you, because it is about how to experience God's power.

Paul began a prayer in 3:1 and then wrote about the mystery of the church in verses 2-13. Before he continues his prayer, he writes in verses 14-15: *For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name.* In saying *I kneel*, Paul is not suggesting this should always be our posture in prayer. The Bible records great saints praying in different positions. Abraham prayed for Sodom and Gomorrah *standing before the Lord* (Gen. 18:22). Twice the Bible records David praying as he *sat before the Lord* (2 Sam. 7:18 & 1 Chron. 17:16). However, when the Bible records people bowing before the Lord, it is during times of great passion or crisis. How did Jesus pray in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before He was crucified (Matt. 26:39)?

Paul felt compelled to *kneel before the Father* (Eph. 3:14) because of his great concern for his readers. As believers we need to pray for neighbors, employers, employees, Sunday school teachers, and our pastor with the same passion as when we pray in a personal crisis. *Father* is the name Jesus always used in prayer and the name He taught His disciples to use. Because God is our loving heavenly Father, we do not come to Him in fear and trembling but as to a Father waiting to hear from His beloved children.

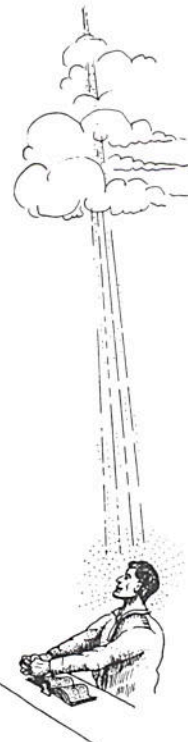
Paul's prayer reveals four things we need in our lives to experience God's power.

First, we need spiritual strength (3:16).

Paul first prays according to God's *glorious riches* (3:16a). It does no good to pray to a weak or poor God, no matter how passionate our prayers. When we pray we need to remember what fact about God found in Isaiah 40:26b?



Notes



Sometimes we pray as though God is either weak, poor, or miserly. But that's not how Paul prays. He prays that God will strengthen his readers *out of his glorious riches* (Eph. 3:16a).

Paul is not only bold but also specific, for he prays that God *may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being* (3:16b). This is not self-discipline, positive thinking, or physical strength. It is spiritual strength that can only be given by the Holy Spirit. How does 2 Corinthians 4:16b describe His spiritual strengthening of our *inner being*?

Our spirits are renewed and grow stronger, even while the process of age weakens our physical bodies. What will be the result of having the Holy Spirit strengthen our *inner being*, according to the following?

Galatians 5:16 _____

2 Timothy 1:7 _____

Spiritual strength will be seen in the decreasing frequency of sin in our lives, because of self-discipline and an increasing amount of love. We need to pray for ourselves and fellow believers to have ***inner spiritual strength***.

Second, we need spiritual stability (3:17).

Paul uses three verbs to graphically convey his prayer for spiritual stability in his readers. First, he prays *so that Christ may dwell in your hearts* (3:17a). The verb translated *dwell* (KATOIKEO, kah-toy-keh'-o) means "to inhabit as one's home." Thus, Paul prays that Christ will feel at home in the hearts of his readers.

In his classic booklet, "My Heart Christ's Home," Robert Munger compares the Christian life to a house through which Christ goes from room to room. In the library or study He finds books and magazines His eyes are too pure to look at and replaces them with the Scriptures. In the dining room He finds appetites and desires for things like fame and fortune and replaces them with a desire to do the will of God. In the closet He finds things left over from the old life, things not right to have in a Christian's life. Only when He has cleaned every room and closet does He settle

down and feel at home. If Jesus came to the house of your heart right now, would He feel comfortable in every room? To keep the house of our hearts clean for Christ to dwell in, we should remember what truth found in Job 34:21?

Christ dwells in our heart *through faith* (Eph. 3:17b). Faith is believing what God has said and acting accordingly. If we have x-rays made of our hearts, we won't see Christ anywhere. We can't see Him or touch Him; therefore, we must remember what fact found in 2 Corinthians 5:7?

Paul also prays that his readers are *being rooted and established in love* (Eph. 3:17c). The word *rooted* (RHIZOO, rid-zo'-o) is an agricultural term that means "firmly planted" and *established* is an architectural term referring to the foundation of a building. Plants without deep roots and buildings without good foundations do not endure. God greatly desires that we endure in love and that we love even those who act like jerks.

The absence of love in our hearts for any person leaves a vacuum that will be filled with sinful attitudes and feelings. If we don't love our neighbors, even the ones who are jerks, our hearts will be uncomfortable places for Christ to dwell, and we will lack spiritual strength and stability in our lives.

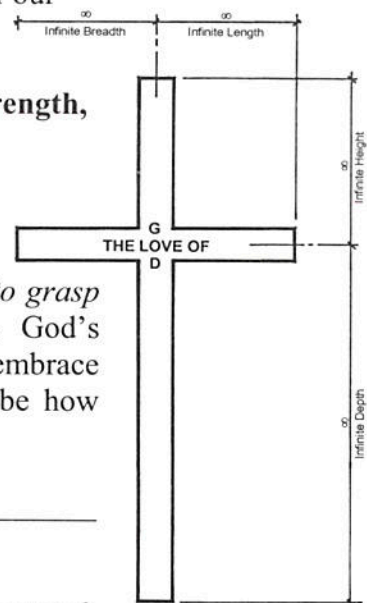
To experience God's power in our lives requires **spiritual strength**, **spiritual stability**, and . . .

Third, we need spiritual savvy (3:18-19).

Paul prays that we *may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ* (3:18). God's love is beyond human comprehension, but it is *wide* enough to embrace the whole world (John 3:16). How does Jeremiah 31:3b describe how *long* God will love us?

God's love is *high* enough to take us to heaven and *deep* enough to reach down to the lowest sinner, like Paul, and transform him into a saint.

Paul also prays his readers *know this love that surpasses knowledge* (Eph. 3:19a). The word translated *know* often refers to experiential knowledge.



Though we cannot mentally comprehend God's love, we can experience it. It is possible to know something we cannot understand. For example, I wrote this lesson on a new, state-of-the-art computer that has mind-boggling memory, capabilities, and processing speed. It has a Bible program that can find any verse in the Bible, in four versions at once, in less than two seconds. I don't understand and can't explain my computer, but I know what it can do because I have personally experienced its power and speed. It is the same with God's love. I don't understand it and I can't explain it because it *surpasses knowledge*, but I *know this love* from experience.

Paul prays that his readers experience God's love so we *may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God* (3:19b). The word *filled* (PLEROO, play-ro'-o) means to be controlled or dominated by. In the Bible, people are referred to as being filled with anger or filled with wickedness. To be *filled to the measure of all the fullness of God* means we are controlled by our knowledge of Him. The *fullness of God* refers to all of God's attributes, such as love, power, mercy, forgiveness, patience, etc. How does Colossians 2:9 say God revealed all His *fullness*?

So, Paul is praying that our character and conduct be like that of Jesus Christ.

To experience God's power in our lives we must have **spiritual strength**, **spiritual stability**, **spiritual savvy**, and . . .

Fourth, we need spiritual service (3:20-21).

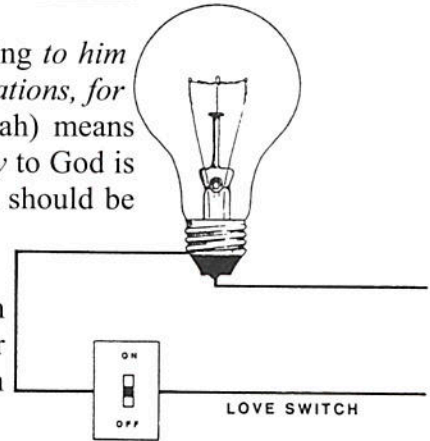
Paul knows God can do powerful things through his readers, because he knows . . . *him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine* (3:20a). This means we can never ask or even think of anything that will tax the power of God. God is more than able to do anything we ask. We can ask for boldness in our witness, for Him to use us to do His will, and regardless of our limited abilities, He is more than able to do it all. That's why Jesus declared what truth about God in Matthew 19:26?

However, this promise is conditional. The degree to which God's power can work is *according to his power that is at work within us* (Eph. 3:20b). This means the extent to which we let God *work within us* is the only thing

that limits His power on earth. What God does on this earth He does exclusively in and through believers who faithfully serve Him. Only our lack of faith and service can limit God's power in our lives and in our world. We will only have God's power in our lives when we let Him use us to do His will. Then we can experience what truth found in Philippians 4:13?

Paul ends his prayer and the first section of *Ephesians* by writing *to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen* (3:21). The word *glory* (DOXA, doax'-ah) means "honor resulting from a good opinion." The way we bring *glory* to God is doing things that give the world a good opinion of Him. This should be our motivation in all we do.

Every believer is a living billboard, advertising God. Through each of us who claim to be His children He is either glorified or vandalized. That's why Jesus gave us what commandment in Matthew 5:16?



What can you do this week to allow God to demonstrate His power through you?

Journey To A Better Life

LESSON 7 . . . Living a Worthy Life (Ephesians 4:1-10)

The first verse of chapter four is the turning point in this epistle because Paul switches from the theological to the practical, from doctrine to duty. Paul has made it clear in the first three chapters that all believers are recipients of the unsearchable riches of Christ. Therefore, we read in verse one: *As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.* The word translated *worthy* (AXIOS, ox-ee'-oce) means "of equal weight." It is the idea of one thing being equal to another. Paul is saying we should try to live a life equal to the great blessings we have in Christ. This is essential if we are to have a "journey to a better life."

How do we live a worthy life? The remainder of the book of Ephesians tells us, beginning with . . .

The Characteristics of a Worthy Life (4:2-3)

A worthy life has at least three characteristics, none of which comes naturally to us. Therefore, we must be motivated by all God has done for us in Christ, which was described in the first three chapters. If we are living worthy of all that Christ has done for us, we will first *be completely humble* (4:2a). This is the opposite of pride and conceit. As someone has said, "Humility is that grace that, when you know you have it, you have lost it." Humility was a derogatory term in Paul's day because it was a slave-like quality. However, it has been redeemed by the Gospel and represents a Christian virtue that is the opposite of arrogance and pride. What does Proverbs 11:2 tell us about pride and humility?

Humility doesn't mean we see ourselves as worthless but that we see ourselves as God sees us, having immense value, but no more than anyone else. It means we are willing to accept God as our authority in life rather than being our own boss.

Humility will cause us to be *gentle* (Eph. 4:2). The word translated *gentle* refers to the breaking or domestication of a wild animal so it can do useful work. The animal has to learn to accept control by its master and will therefore behave properly. *Gentle* means "power under control."



Notes

To live a life worthy of our calling in Christ we must be *humble, gentle*, and third, we must *be patient, bearing with one another in love* (4:2). This is the opposite of being short-tempered. It is the attitude that bears insults, criticism, envy, etc. It means we will love people in spite of their mistakes and weaknesses because we realize we are all a little peculiar.

The reason God wants us to have these virtues is *to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace* (4:3). The absence of the preceding characteristics in our lives will jeopardize the *unity* of the church. Nothing prevents the church from fulfilling her purpose of glorifying God as does fussing, fighting, and lack of unity. After receiving reports of little unity in the Corinthian church, what did Paul appeal to them to do in 1 Corinthians 1:10?

If we are *to live a life worthy of the calling* we have received, we must be *humble. . . gentle. . . and patient, bearing with one another in love* (Eph. 4:1-2). Not only will these virtues glorify God, but also they will be like a magnet, drawing people to Christ. People are drawn to our church not because of our beliefs but because of our behavior. Not only do we need to know the **characteristics**, but also . . .

The Basis for a Worthy Life (4:4-6)

The basis for our unity is *there is one body and one Spirit* (4:4a). There is only *one Spirit*, the Holy Spirit, and what does He do for us, according to 1 Corinthians 12:13a?

Because we are all baptized by the same Holy Spirit into one body, the church, we should all have the same purpose. Just as the physical body has many different parts that function for the betterment of the whole, so the body of Christ is made up of many individual parts, all of which should function for the betterment of the whole body. It is important that we not just see ourselves as individual believers but as a part of the body of Christ.

Not only is there *one body and one Spirit* but *you were called to one hope when you were called* (Eph. 4:4). We are all called to one hope, which



ultimately is heaven. In other words, we are all going to the same place. However, this hope involves more than being in a place called “heaven.” What else is a part of this *one hope*, according to 1 John 3:2-3?

We will be like Christ in that we will have glorified bodies not affected by time or physical limitations. There is also *one Lord* (Eph. 4:5a), a fact the first-century believers guarded with their lives. Many of them died rather than confess “Caesar is Lord,” which was required yearly by Roman law. The first Christian confession of faith resulted from defiance of this law. Instead of confessing “Caesar is Lord,” believers would say “Jesus is Lord,” for which they would be put to death.

There is also only *one faith* (4:5b), which refers to a personal commitment to Christ, but it goes beyond that to denote the entire Gospel as revealed in the Word of God. There is just one faith that will get us to heaven, because what did Jesus say in John 14:6?

This *one faith* leads to *one baptism* (Eph. 4:5c). Since Paul has been discussing spiritual oneness, it is only logical this is a reference to the baptism of the Spirit that makes believers a part of the body of Christ.

There is also *one God and Father of all, who is over all* (4:6a), which means God has never had and never will have an equal. He is supreme over all creation, and it is *through all* (4:6b), Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and the church, that His plan of the ages is being executed. The phrase *in all* (4:6c) means God is present in everything, controlling and sustaining all things. He is not detached from His creation or His children. There is one God, yet in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. These three are one in person and in purpose. They work together to bring to fruition the mystery of the ages—the church. In order for that goal to be reached, there must be spiritual oneness in the church as there is in the trinity. Now that we have considered the **characteristics** and **basis** for a worthy life, let’s find out how we get . . .

The Ability To Live a Worthy Life (4:7-10)

While there is unity in the body of Christ, the church, there is also diversity. So, Paul writes: *But to each one of us grace has been given* (4:7a). The word *grace* (CHARIS, kar’-ess) refers to a grace gift or spiritual gift,



which is the special ability God has given us to serve Him. It is not based on any merit of our own but *as Christ apportioned it* (4:7b). Therefore, we cannot be envious of those whose gifts may put them in the spotlight, or look down on those whose gifts may seem, in the world's view, less important than ours.

Our gifts have a spectacular origin. *This is why it says: "When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train . . ."* (4:8). This is a quote of Psalm 68:18 and is a prophetic reference to Christ's return to glory.

Words simply do not have the power to describe the triumphal entrance of our Lord into glory after His death and resurrection. Can you imagine the thousands and thousands of angels and the stir in heaven with the victorious return of Christ as *he led captives in his train*? After a king won a victory he would bring home the spoils and enemy prisoners as evidence of the victory, parading them before his people. Over what enemy did Jesus win an eternal victory, according to 1 Corinthians 15:55-57?

Satan and his evil forces wanted to keep Jesus from becoming our Savior. He tried to kill Him at His birth in Bethlehem, and he tried to kill Him at His hometown in Nazareth (Luke 4:28-29). Finally, Satan had Him nailed to a cross in an effort to stop God's plan of the ages, but how does Colossians 2:15 describe the result of Christ's death?

He made a *spectacle* of his enemies by rising from the dead. The phrase, *he made a public spectacle*, is one word in the original language. It is the same root word used in Matthew 1:19, when Joseph was planning to marry the Virgin Mary. Why did Joseph consider quietly divorcing Mary, according to Matthew 1:18-19?

Therefore, the phrase *he made a public spectacle of them* in Colossians 2:15 means Christ disgraced Satan and all the powers of evil publicly in front of all heaven when He rose from the dead and ascended into heaven.

Upon arriving in heaven, Jesus *gave gifts to men* (Eph. 4:8b). Like a triumphant conqueror distributing the spoils of war to his subjects, Christ takes the powers He has won and distributes them through His kingdom—

the church. Why did the distribution of spiritual gifts have to wait until Jesus ascended, according to John 16:7b?

The mention of Jesus ascending into heaven leads Paul to ask parenthetically, *What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions* (Eph. 4:9). The phrase *descended to the lower, earthly regions* could mean that between His death and ascension Jesus descended from heaven to earth, or He descended into Hades, the realm of the dead, to announce His victory. Either interpretation is possible.

Paul continues in verse 10, *He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe*. Christ has ascended into heaven to *fill the whole universe* with His presence and power.

Living a worthy life requires we know the **characteristics of a worthy life, the basis for a worthy life**, and that we have the **ability to live a worthy life**. How can you know if you are living a *life worthy of the calling you have received* in Christ Jesus (see Eph. 4:2-3)?

Journey To A Better Life

LESSON 8 . . . How To Grow Spiritually (Ephesians 4:11-24)

We learned in the last lesson that when Christ triumphantly ascended back to heaven as Victor over our greatest enemies, death and the grave, He *gave gifts to men* (4:8). These enabling graces, or spiritual gifts, are given to us with great expectation on Christ's part. He expects us to use them to build up His church. When we do not discover, develop, and use our gifts, the church is like a human body with missing parts. For the church to be complete and to function as Christ intends, each one of us must mature by discovering and using our spiritual gifts.

There are 19 spiritual gifts mentioned in the NT (Eph. 4:11, 1 Cor. 12:8-10, Rom. 12:6-8, and 1 Peter 4:9-11), and each believer has at least one. In the text for this lesson, Paul focuses on the four gifts that are the foundation for spiritual growth. Here we find at least three things that are necessary to grow spiritually, beginning with . . .

Instruction (4:11-12)

Paul writes, *It was he* (Christ) *who gave some* . . . (4:11a). Christ is the One who sovereignly gives the gift, and it is the Holy Spirit who energizes the gift. How did Christ indicate this in Acts 1:8a?

The first gift mentioned, *apostles*, translates a Greek word (APOSTOLOS), which means "one sent with a message." It is the idea of proclaiming a message in new areas. Missionary and apostle can in a practical sense be one and the same. The gift of apostle, not the office that was limited to the original twelve, then involves being able to serve the Lord in new areas and often cross-culturally.

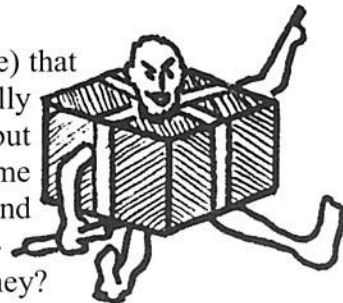
Most of us will not be called to be a missionary in a new culture, but we are called to be missionaries in our communities and at our workplace. Every day when we go to work we need to remember what fact found in 2 Corinthians 5:20a?



Notes

You represent Jesus where you work. God has placed you where you are to represent Him. Work takes on a new meaning when you understand, “I am here as a missionary, to be a light in the darkness.”

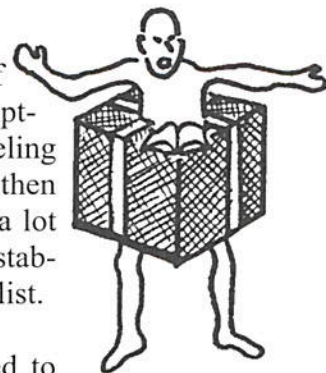
Prophets (4:11) translates a Greek word (PROPHETES, pro-play’-tase) that means “a proclaimer of a divine message.” A prophet is literally God’s spokesman. The prophets in the OT did some foretelling, but that was not their primary function. They spent most of their time preaching against Israel’s sin and exhorting the people to repent and turn back to God. First Corinthians 14:3 describes the three functions of the gift of prophecy in the NT and for us today. What are they?



1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Anytime we use the Word of God for *strengthening, encouragement, and comfort*, we are exhibiting the gift of prophecy.

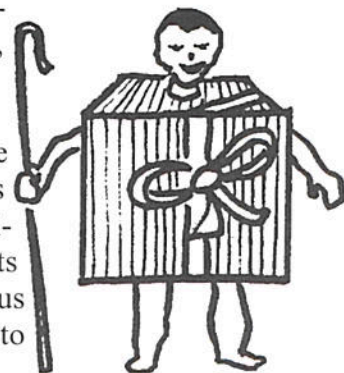
The word *evangelists* means “bearers of good news.” It is the gift of sharing the Gospel in ways that cause people to respond in faith, accepting Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Evangelists are itinerant, traveling extensively to proclaim the Gospel and win people to Christ, and then moving to another location. Unlike missionaries, they do not spend a lot of time in one location teaching and training so that churches are established. Billy Graham is the best-known modern example of an evangelist.



Not everyone has the gift of evangelism, but we are all commanded to share the good news of Christ. How does 1 Peter 3:15b make this clear?

Next, Paul writes that Christ gifted some to be *pastors and teachers* (Eph. 4:11). The fact that *some* is not repeated before the word *teachers* indicates this is the same gift with two functions. The word *pastor* (POIMEN, poy-mane’) means “shepherd,” indicating the local church is the flock.

The pastor has a God-given “staff” he is to use to guide and lead the flock. That staff is the Word of God—the Bible. Therefore, pastors have another function. They are to be *teachers*. A pastor/teacher is dedicated to a particular flock or church. Apostles, prophets, and evangelists are more itinerant in nature. However, all are gifted by God to instruct us in the way of salvation and maturity in Christ. The first thing we need to grow spiritually is **instruction** from gifted leaders, and the second is . . .



Involvement (4:12-15a)

The result of pastors' fulfilling their spiritual gifts will be *to prepare God's people for works of service . . .* (4:12a). Some Christians have the mistaken idea they hire the pastor to do the ministry of the church. But the Bible says a good pastor prepares or equips God's people, the congregation, to do the *works of service*, or ministry, *so that the body of Christ may be built up* or matured (4:12b). No church can be what God wants it to be unless the pastor equips or trains the members to do the ministry of the church.

Every believer should be involved in some kind of ministry that builds the church. On the front of our church bulletin is a section with the heading, "Our Ministers." Then it reads: "Every member is a minister. The following have been called by our church to serve as equippers in our ministry." Then, our paid ministers are listed. This is the biblical pattern for ministry.



There is a longstanding view that ministry is to be done by paid, professional clergy. This view believes the laity are to be beneficiaries of ministry through preaching, counseling, visiting, consoling, and other things the church does. But the reason God gives gifts to church leaders is to equip the church for ministry so she will be a mature, mobilized army.

A biblical church in which the pastor equips by helping members discover, develop, and use their spiritual gifts will cause that church to *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* (4:13). When each of us uses his or her spiritual gift, there will be maturity in the church. The ultimate goal of spiritual maturity is found in Romans 8:29. What is it?

When we are mature, *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 men in their deceitful scheming* (Eph. 4:14). Here Paul describes the church as a ship on stormy seas with the pastor/teacher keeping a steady hand on the church's rudder, the Bible, to hold it steady and keep her on course.

Leading people to maturity should always be done by *speaking the truth in love* (4:15a). How do you know if you are speaking the truth in love? You must ask yourself, "For whose benefit am I saying this? Is it for my benefit so I can appear smarter, more spiritual, or put someone down in some way? Is it so I can get something off my chest? Or am I speaking for the other person's benefit?" *Speaking the truth in love* means using

carefully thought-out words at the proper time to attack the problem, not the person. What caution do we find in Proverbs 12:18?

When we speak the truth, we have a choice; we can hurt or help. We can build people up or tear them down. To grow spiritually we need **instruction, involvement**, and . . .

Empowerment (4:15b-24)

The power for growth and ministry does not come from gifted leaders, but *we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work* (4:15b-16). When each individual member uses his or her gift, the entire body grows and matures *in love*.

When we become Christians, we must remember our sinful nature is not eradicated, but we receive the spiritual power to break its hold on us. Therefore, Paul writes *that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts* (4:17-18). The word *Gentiles* refers to those who do not know God. The word *futility* (MATAIOTES, ma-tah-yot'-ace) means vanity or empty. It refers to a life with no real meaning or purpose. *Darkened in their understanding and ignorance* refers to people who are morally blind and who have no absolute right and wrong as moral guides. It is a lifestyle that is totally self-centered and thinks only of appeasing its carnal desires. According to 2 Corinthians 4:4, why is a person's mind *darkened* apart from God?

From darkness of mind, people go to *hardening of their hearts* (Eph. 4:18). The Greek word translated *hardening* (POROSIS, po'-ro-sis) denotes a hardening of the skin or the creating of a callous by constant contact with a foreign substance. The influence of the world causes hearts to become calloused or insensitive to God's truth.

The result of darkness of mind and hardness of heart is recklessness of behavior, so they lose *all sensitivity*, and give *themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more* (4:19). The word translated *sensuality* (ASELGEIA, ah-sel'-ay-ah) means vice that knows no restraint and flaunts itself. In America there is a rapid

move toward *sensuality* and *every kind of impurity*, and the result is pornography, premarital sex, homosexuality, AIDS, abortion, drugs, and crime. In the midst of all this, there are those who want to rid our government, schools, and culture of every vestige of Christian influence. However, as Christians we need to remember what truth found in Proverbs 14:34?

This means the prosperity and power of a nation depend on its righteousness. The verb *exalts* (Hebrew, RUM) means the people's condition is elevated. On the other hand, sin will bring disgrace to a nation. Many of our problems as a nation are results of a culture that condones *sensuality* and *impurity*. As believers we can become so calloused by our exposure to sin in magazines, movies, and the media that we no longer recognize it as evil.

In contrast to nonbelievers, Paul writes: *You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus* (Eph. 4:20-21). The point is that we are no longer guided by a mind that is darkened, a heart that is hardened, and a lifestyle that is reckless. How does 1 John 5:20 express *the truth that is in Jesus*?

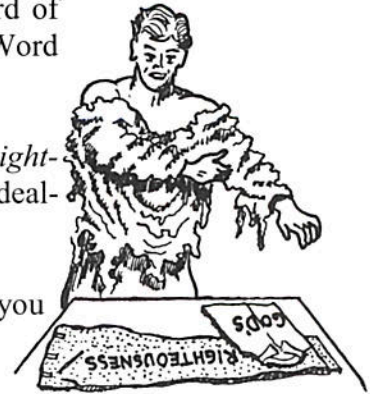
To grow spiritually Paul says to *put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires* (Eph. 4:22). This means we must completely discard our old way of life. The phrase *put off* pictures taking off old clothes. Can you imagine someone going into a fine clothing store and asking to try on a new suit, but refusing to take off the old clothes he has on? The new suit would never fit, and the same is true in the Christian life. If we don't *put off* the old way of life, Christ just won't fit.

This requires us *to be made new in the attitude of your minds* (4:23). The verb *be made* is present tense, indicating continuous action. This echoes what command found in Romans 12:2?

This renewing of attitudes is done by reading and studying the Word of God and by asking the Holy Spirit to empower us to live it. The Word tells us how to live and the Holy Spirit empowers us to do it.

Finally, we are *to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness* (Ephesians 4:24). *Righteousness* refers to our dealings with people and *holiness* refers to our lifestyle before God.

What things in your life do you need to put off, and what things do you need to put on to grow spiritually? When will you begin?



Journey To A Better Life

LESSON 9 . . . The New You (Ephesians 4:25-32)

When we let Christ be our Lord, or boss, a “journey to a better life” begins with some very definite changes in our lives. Old values, attitudes, and habits are replaced by new ones. As new creations in Christ we no longer live like the Gentiles, or nonbelievers, but our lives change in four definite areas: truth, temper, toil, and talk.



Notes

First, Truth (4:25)

Paul writes, *Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor* (4:25). This would definitely make us different from the world, because according to research data in the best-selling book, *The Day Americans Told the Truth*, Americans lie. The research revealed 91% of Americans lie regularly. One in five Americans lies every day. Fifty percent admit to calling in sick when they are not sick. Two out of three Americans say there is nothing wrong with telling a lie.

When we become Christians, we leave a world of lying and dishonesty and enter the realm of truth. According to the second sentence in John 8:44, why is lying such a terrible sin?

Jesus is *the truth* (John 14:6a), and we as His body, the church, must reflect that truth. Moreover, what do we find about God in Titus 1:2?

We must tell the truth because *we are all members of one body* (Eph. 4:25b). The spiritual body of Christ can only function in a context of truth. For example, what would happen if your eyes decided to deceive your foot by telling it that a red light is green? Or what would happen if you started to walk and your right foot told you it was your left foot? We cannot bear each other's burdens, teach each other, or encourage one another unless we always speak the truth.

When it comes to telling the truth, some say, “I don’t lie, I just don’t tell all the truth.” Well, as someone has said, “Half a truth is a whole lie.” Other people say, “I only tell little white lies.” But if you tell white lies, eventually you will go color blind.

Second, Temper (4:26-27)

As Christians we are commanded, "*In your anger do not sin*" (4:26a). This is a quote from Psalm 4:4 and indicates there is a good anger. How do we see righteous anger in the life of Christ in John 2:15-16?

A Christian can only be angry at sin and injustice. Even then we are to love the sinner. Any anger directed toward another human being is sinful. The distinction between good anger and sinful anger has been called "righteous indignation," which means we get angry at whatever makes God angry.

Also, God inspired Paul to write, *Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry* (Eph. 4:26b). Anger can be legitimate, but it must also be controlled because of what warning found in Proverbs 29:22?



This means your temper can lead you into sin. The Bible also says in Proverbs 14:17a that *a quick-tempered man does foolish things*. This means your temper causes you to do dumb things. As someone has said, "Speak when you're angry and you'll deliver the best speech you'll ever regret." We should always keep our words soft and sweet because tomorrow we may have to eat them.

Some say, "I can't control my anger," and then justify it by saying, "I just have a short fuse," or "I'm just like my father," or worse, "That's just the way God made me." None of these statements are true. Have you ever been in a fight with your wife or husband, using loud, sharp words, and then the telephone rings? You pick up the telephone, and your sharp, loud voice becomes a sweet, kind voice that says, "Hello." You CAN control your anger, so admit it and do it. God never commands us to do anything we cannot do with His help. What does the Bible say about a person who controls his temper in Proverbs 16:32?

If we don't control our anger, we will *give the devil a foothold* (Eph. 4:27). The word *foothold* (TOPOS, top'-ose) means "opportunity" or "place." Prolonged anger leads to resentment, bitterness, and hate—all of which are sins. If we become angry, even with a righteous anger, whatever triggered the anger is to be settled before we go to bed. Anger left unchecked gives place to the devil and leads us into sin.

When we become Christians, our behavior changes in the areas of **truth**, **temper**, and . . .

Third, Toil (4:28)

Clearly, there were first-century believers who were stealing until they were commanded by God's Word: *He who has been stealing must steal no longer . . .* (4:28a). The word *stealing* (KLEPTO) is the Greek word from which we get our English word "kleptomania."

There is a tremendous misconception about what it means to steal, even among Christians. For example, there is tax theft. Omission of hidden income, improper deductions, and other types of cheating are epidemic in America. However, as Christians we must remember what command of Jesus in Matthew 22:21?

Also, there is debt theft. Every year thousands of small businesses in this country must go out of business or suffer critical losses because customers will not pay what they owe. One advertising executive, who publishes Christian card decks, told me he was shocked to discover Christians are no better at paying their bills than the lost world. That is a terrible witness! What does the Bible say on this matter in Psalm 37:21a?

God says not paying what we owe is wickedness. It is estimated that chain stores lose eight billion dollars a year to theft and 60% of that is stolen by employees. This means employees steal 16 million dollars a day in goods from their employers, and shamefully many of these thieves claim to be Christians.

Instead of stealing, the Bible says a Christian . . . *must work, doing something useful with his own hands . . .* (Eph. 4:28b). While the world makes money through schemes, lies, and stealing, we must make our money through honest work and investments. But, even honest labor can become sinful if we are selfish, so the Bible says *that he may have something to*

share with those in need (4:28c). However, how does the last sentence in 2 Thessalonians 3:10 say we should be selective in the people we help?

Being a Christian cannot be compartmentalized. We must be totally honest in every area of our lives—taxes, work, and paying our bills. Not only does being a Christian change our attitudes and actions about **truth**, **temper**, and **toil**, but also . . .

Fourth, Talk (4:29-32)

The Bible says, *Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths*, (4:29a). The word translated *unwholesome* (SAPROS, sop-ros') means "rotten" or "filthy." It could be translated "filthy mouthed." For some reason, many people today think it is manly or liberated to use vulgar humor, dirty talk, or filthy jokes. This kind of talk has no place in the life of a believer, for what did Jesus say in Matthew 15:18?

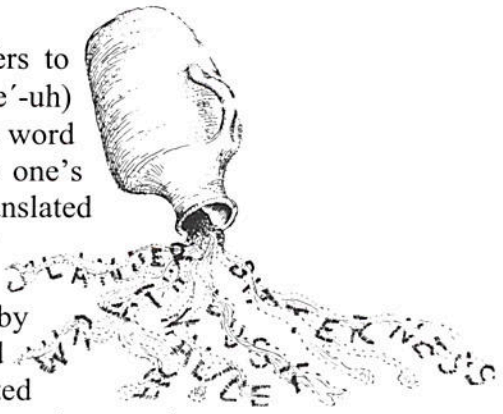
Instead, we are to speak . . . *only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen* (Eph. 4:29b). This is how we can know if we are speaking the truth in love. If we are saying something for their benefit, it will be *helpful* and *according to their needs*.

To motivate us to live as commanded, Paul writes, *And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God . . .* (4:30a). The Holy Spirit works in our lives to produce what is good and decent, and when we pollute our lives with deceit, anger, dishonesty, and dirty language, we grieve Him. The word translated *grieve* (LUPEO, loo-peh'-o) means "to cause pain or grief." The Holy Spirit, who indwells every believer, is deeply hurt when the evil vices mentioned in verses 25-29 show up in our lives. This reveals the Holy Spirit is a Person, not just a power or force in our lives, because only a person can be grieved. The phrase, *sealed for the day of redemption* (4:30b), repeats Ephesians 1:13 (see comment on page 15).

To keep from grieving the Holy Spirit, we must *get rid of all bitterness* (4:31a), which means resentfulness, or vengefulness, and is the opposite of kindness, which is the fruit of the Holy Spirit. *Rage* (THUMOS, thoo-mos') means out- bursts of uncontrolled passion and frustration, while *anger* (ORGE, or-gay') refers to an abiding condition of the mind that leads to



hate and revenge. *Brawling* (KRAUGE, krow-gay') refers to shouting or yelling. *Slander* (BLASPHEMIA, blas-fay-me'-uh) translates the Greek word from which we get our English word "blasphemy." It means to say something damaging to one's character or reputation. The Greek word translated "devil" (DIABOLOS) means slanderer, so when we say damaging things about any human being we are being led by the devil, not the Holy Spirit. The list concludes by forbidding *every form of malice* (4:31). The Greek word translated *malice* (KAKIA, kah-kee'-uh) is also translated *wickedness* (Acts 8:22). It refers to evil intent or the desire to harm or hurt another.



All of these are attitudes and actions of our pre-Christian life, and we should get every trace of such behavior out of our lives. This will create a vacuum that must be filled with being *kind* (4:32a). The word translated *kind* (CHRESTOS, krayse-tos') means good, pleasant, gracious, and helpful.

We are also to be *compassionate to one another*, which means we do not take advantage of people, lie to them, steal from them, or hurt them with malice or slander. Instead, we go out of our way to help them, a stark contrast to our pre-Christian behavior.

The phrase *forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you* is reminiscent of what words of Jesus in Matthew 6:15?

The Bible teaches that God forgives us in the same way we forgive others. If you refuse to forgive, you had better hope you never sin, because if you refuse to forgive those who hurt you, God will not forgive your sins. Not only are we to forgive those who wrong and hurt us, but what four things does Jesus say we are to do in Luke 6:27-28?

1. _____ 2. _____
3. _____ 4. _____

Love means we meet their needs, *do good* means we help them with a problem, and *bless* means we say only good things about them. To say good things, you have to look for the good things in their lives and quit focusing on their faults. That will change your attitude and make it easier to forgive them. Finally, Jesus says we are to *pray* for them. We cannot pray for someone and hate them at the same time. When we obey Christ's command in Luke 6:27-28, we don't just resist bad feelings; we replace

them. We replace those negative, resentful feelings with positive attitudes that make forgiveness much easier. One of Jesus' greatest qualities was His willingness to forgive, and if we are going to become like Him, we must learn to forgive.

You might say, "You just don't know how I have been hurt. I just can't forgive them." If you are a Christian, you can because of what declaration in Philippians 4:13?

In what area—**truth**, **temper**, **toil**, or **talk**—do you have the most difficulty in your new life in Christ, and what should motivate you to work on replacing your bad attitudes and actions with truth, kindness, compassion, and forgiveness this week?

Journey To A Better Life

LESSON 10 . . . Knowing Real Love (Ephesians 5:1-17)

The book of Ephesians was written to Christians who had come from a notoriously immoral and sinful culture. For example, Ephesus was a wicked metropolis, whose main religion was the worship of the multi-breasted goddess Diana. Hundreds of temple prostitutes served as worshipers in rituals of sexual immorality. Ephesus' worship of sex is no different from Dallas, Tokyo, Moscow, Manila, or Hong Kong.



Notes

Nothing has impacted sexual morality and the word *love* like the New Testament. There are three things in this passage to help us understand real love.

First, the Character of Real Love (5:1-2)

Paul writes: *Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children* (5:1). If we are *imitators of God* we will be *kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other* (4:32) because according to 1 John 4:16, what is God?

To imitate God, we must . . . *live a life of love, just as Christ loved us . . .* (Eph. 5:2a). The word *love* causes most people to think of "romantic" love. To the world, love is raging hormones and infatuation. As Jerry Lee Lewis sang, "You shake my nerves and rattle my brain. Too much love drives a man insane. You broke my will; Oh, what a thrill! Goodness, gracious, great balls of fire!" But the word translated *love* (AGAPE) in the NT is not berserk emotions; it is a selfless love that loves the unlovely.

AGAPE love is sacrificial, and we know Christ loved us because *he gave himself up for us* (5:2b). If someone wants you to compromise your sexual morals, that isn't love; it is raging hormones. People who love you will always seek to raise your moral standards, not lower them.

AGAPE love loves the unlovely and always seeks the welfare of others, even at great personal expense. How does Romans 5:8 describe this kind of love?



Describing Christ's death *as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God* (Eph. 5:2b) shows it was for our benefit. Real love always wants to give, not

take. Not only do we need to know the **character of real love**, but . . .

Second, the Counterfeit of Real Love (5:3-7)

Satan always offers a counterfeit to pervert what is good and holy. To make sure we don't confuse real love with Satan's counterfeit, the Bible says: *But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality* (5:3a). The word translated *sexual immorality* (PORNEIA, por-nay'-ah), also translated "fornication," is the word from which we get our English word "pornography." It means "illicit sexual intercourse" or any sex outside the marriage of a man and a woman committed to each other for life. The Gentile world of Paul's day saw nothing wrong with prostitution, infidelity in marriage, or homosexuality, but what ominous warning does the Bible give us in 1 Corinthians 10:8?

Though the movies and media glamorize and sensationalize sexual immorality, it is a serious sin because it perverts God's purpose for sex. God is not against sex. He thought it all up for our enjoyment, fulfillment, and bringing children into the world to have a home where they will be loved and considered gifts from God. Satan's counterfeit results in venereal disease, AIDS, unwanted children, abortion, and young girls and boys with damaged lives.

We are to abstain from *any kind of impurity* (AKATHARSIA, ak-ath-ar-see'-ah) (5:3b), which refers to dirty thoughts, desires, and deeds. This includes dirty movies or magazines and can refer to nudity, orgies, and the viewing of such things. *Greed* (PLEONEXIA, play-on-ex-ee'-ah) in this context refers to a desire to gratify lust, regardless of the damage it does to others. This kind of conduct is *improper for God's holy people* (5:3).

Divinely inspired, Paul continues, *Nor should there be obscenity* (5:4), which means indecent talk and includes dirty stories, jokes, and gestures. Our culture makes such talk socially acceptable by making it funny. One of the most accurate tests of our character is what makes us laugh. God is not against humor, for what does He tell us in Proverbs 17:22a?

Studies have shown that laughter produces endorphins in your brain to make you feel good. It also reduces stress and strengthens your immune system. Laughter is God's gift for good health. God has a sense of humor or He wouldn't have made you!

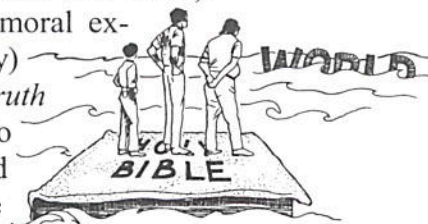
Foolish talk (MOROLOGIA, mo-rol-og-ee'-ah) (Eph. 5:4) refers to stupid chatter, like that of a drunk. This often leads to *coarse joking* (EUTRAPELIA, yoo-trop-el-ee'-ah), which means "an easy turn of speech" and refers to the person who is able to turn a decent, clean conversation into something obscene and vulgar. It is dirty wit. These things *are out of place* for Christians because instead of having behavior that insults God and His Holy Word, we should lead lives of *thanksgiving* (5:4).

Verses 5-7 are sobering words for those who persistently commit these sins: *For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. Therefore do not be partners with them.* Unrepentant people who have an idolatrous obsession with sex and who pervert God's design for sex will not be in heaven. How does God's Word reiterate this truth in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10?

We need to know the **character of real love**, the **counterfeit of real love**, and . . .

Third, the Contrast Between Real and Counterfeit Love (5:8-17)

Contrasting our past and present, Paul writes: *For you were once darkness* (5:8a). Formerly, all of us were not only living in *darkness*, we were a part of it, *but now, we are light in the Lord* (5:8b). We have a tremendous responsibility to the world to *live as children of light* (5:8c). How do we do that? The Bible tells us in a parenthetical statement in verse 9: *(for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth)*. *Goodness* (AGATHOSUNE, ag-ath-o-soo'-nay) signifies moral excellence, *righteousness* (DIKAIOSUNE, dik-ah-yo-soo'-nay) is the quality of being right or just in our actions, and *truth* (ALETHEUO, al-ayth-yoo'-o) means genuine as opposed to artificial or hypocritical. Being the children of light and producing the *fruit of the light—truth*—means we live by the Bible. Why, according to Jesus in John 17:17?



As believers we are to *find out what pleases the Lord* (Eph. 5:10), and that is why God gave us the Bible, which is His Word in written form.

As Christians we are to *have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them* (5:11). The *deeds* are to be shunned, not the doers. This is becoming more difficult because, if we as Christians make moral judgments and condemn sexual immorality, we are said to be intolerant, bigots, gay-bashers, or suffering from homophobia. As Christians we should never be guilty of gay-bashing, nor should we be guilty of not *speaking the truth in love* (4:15). It is love, not hate, that tells someone when their actions are harmful to their spiritual health or destiny. How does James 5:20 express this truth?



The problem is, we can't please God and fail to *expose* what His Word declares is sin. When we do and are labeled moral dinosaurs, intolerant, or bigots, we need to remember what promise of Jesus in Matthew 5:11-12?

Ephesians 5:12 makes it clear the exposure of *the fruitless deeds of darkness* is not to be verbal, *for it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret*. How then are we to expose them? Verses 13-14 tell us: *But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said: "Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."* The world of *darkness* doesn't need to hear about the *light*; they need to see it.

In order to do this, Paul writes, *Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise* (5:15). The word *careful* (AKRIBOS, ak-ree-bos') is translated "circumspectly" in the KJV and means carefully or accurately. It is the idea of looking around, giving attention to all circumstances to avoid sin. I grew up on a small farm outside Caddo, Oklahoma, where in the winter I helped feed cattle. Walking among those cattle was how I first learned to walk "circumspectly."

We are to let our lights shine, *making the most of every opportunity* (5:16a). We must make *the most of every opportunity* at home, work, school, civic functions, etc. to let our lights shine, *because the days are evil* (PONEROS, pon-ay-ros') (5:16b), or wicked in a moral sense. If we don't let our light shine, Satan will drag unsuspecting victims farther into his moral darkness to their eternal ruin.

The command, *do not be foolish* (5:17a), tells us to do things that are productive and helpful, not counter productive and harmful. We can only do this if we *understand what the Lord's will is* (5:17b). How can we *understand* God's will? By realizing His moral will is revealed in the Bible in the form of commands. What example of this do we find in 1 Thessalonians 4:3?

As we are faithful to God's clear commands in the Bible, He will reveal more of His will to us through circumstances, the counsel of other believers, and spiritual impressions. As someone has said, "The way to see far ahead in the will of God is to go as far ahead as you can see."

Obedying God's Word in the area of sexual behavior is essential, if one is to have a "journey to a better life." This is also the only way to experience God's real love and let it flow through our lives.

How can you know the difference between real love and counterfeit love in your heart this week?

Journey To A Better Life

LESSON 11 . . . Living the Spirit-filled Life (Ephesians 5:18-33)

A man who had never owned a car bought a new luxury automobile. It had leather seats, a CD player, a button in the glove box to open the trunk lid, plush carpet, etc. He would show the car to his friends, let them sit in the fancy seats, show them the CD player, and pop the trunk lid. He would point out all the luxuries of this automobile.

However, the man pushed the car everywhere he went because he didn't know it had an engine. The automobile that was supposed to bless him became a burden. Finally, the car stopped being a burden when a friend showed him how to start the engine and drive the car.

You might think no one could be that dumb, and that's true, unless it is the Christian who does not understand the Holy Spirit is the engine of the Christian life. Without Him, the Christian life is a burden. There are at least two things we should know about **living the spirit-filled life**.

First, the Reason for Being Filled with the Holy Spirit (5:18)

The Bible says: *Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit* (5:18). I usually don't get into much grammar, but it is critically important here. The phrase *be filled* is present tense, passive voice, and imperative mood. Present tense means continuous action, or uninterrupted filling. It is not a one-time experience. Every day we should be filled with the Spirit. Passive voice means God has to do it for us; we cannot do it ourselves. Imperative mood means it is a command for all Christians and is not optional.

The word *filled* (PLEROO, play-row'-o) means "to fill to the full," which in this context means controlled by the Holy Spirit. According to Acts 4:31b, what happens when believers are filled with or controlled by the Holy Spirit?

Why does God say, *Do not get drunk on wine* (Eph. 5:18)? Because drunkenness is the devil's counterfeit for being filled with the Spirit. Drunkenness *leads to debauchery* (ASOTIA, os-o-tee'-ah), which is wild living, the extravagant squandering of money and promiscuity. The reason we should be filled with the Spirit is that it is the command of God and to disobey this command is sin. Not only do we need to know **the reason** but . . .



Notes

Second, the Results of Being Filled with the Holy Spirit (5:19-33)

When we are filled with the Holy Spirit, it will be obvious in two areas of our lives, beginning with our **worship life**, for we will *“speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs”* (5:19). The word translated *psalms* (PSALMOS, soll-moss’) literally means “a striking or twitching with fingers on musical strings.” It is singing to instrumental music. With what musical instruments are we commanded to *Praise the Lord* in Psalm 150:3-5?



Hymns (HUMNOS, hoom’-nos) were purely vocal, or a capella, music sung by a group. One of the best illustrations of this is what Jesus and the disciples did after the Lord’s Supper in Matthew 26:30. What did they do?

Spiritual songs indicate songs of personal testimony, for the Greek word translated *songs* (OIDE, o-day’) is the word from which we get the English word “ode,” which means “a poem written to be sung.” The phrase *make music in your heart* means our hearts are in harmony with our lips. Singing that is inspired by the Holy Spirit will have a balance of these three kinds of music.

I am what is called a “prisoner-singer”—a person who is always behind a few bars and can’t find the right key. But, it doesn’t matter how beautiful your voice, or how well you can play an instrument. If you are not doing it to praise God, it’s bad. However, if you sing as poorly as I do, but in your heart you are praising God, it sounds more beautiful to God than a Perry Como or a Michael Bolton. During the dedication of Solomon’s temple how does 2 Chronicles 5:13 describe the purpose of music in worship?

Our music is a way of *always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ* (Eph. 5:20). We are not to thank God “sometimes,” but *always*, at all times. To give thanks during bereavement, illness, divorce, or financial reversal seems unnatural. But when we give thanks, we thank God that He is great enough to see us through the most heartbreaking problems of life.

Not only does being filled with the spirit affect our **worship life**, but also our **wedded life**. This section begins: *Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ* (5:21). This verse teaches mutual submission in marriage

and then gives special commands to wives and husbands. Submission is not a synonym for doormat or slave. It refers to equal people who submit to one another voluntarily out of obedience to God's Holy Word.

Verse 21 introduces the next verse: *Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord* (5:22). Wives, you are to be submissive to *your* own husband, not someone else's husband. This does not imply that women are inferior to men or that women should be subject to men. Wives submit to their husbands *as to the Lord*, which means voluntarily and gladly as an equal. It is really the idea of respect, which is the word Paul uses in verse 33 to sum up the duty of a wife toward her husband.

The husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior (5:23). The word *head* (KEPHALE, kef-ah-lay') means authority or leader and declares the husband is to be the spiritual leader of the family as Christ is of the church. This doesn't imply male dominance or lordship; it is leadership like that of Christ. How did Christ describe His leadership style in Mark 10:45?



The example of this submission is . . . *as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything* (Eph. 5:24). This means the wife is supportive of her husband's spiritual leadership. This does not imply spiritual inequality or inferiority, simply differing roles. The phrase *in everything* means everything consistent with the character of Christ. A woman is not to follow her husband into sin. Nor, is she to endanger her life or her children's by living with a dangerous husband. God gave each of us a brain and expects us to use it. The submission of a wife to her husband is not absolute. If a husband should ask his wife to do something that goes against her conscience or violates the teaching of Scripture, what is not only her right but also her duty, according to Acts 5:29?

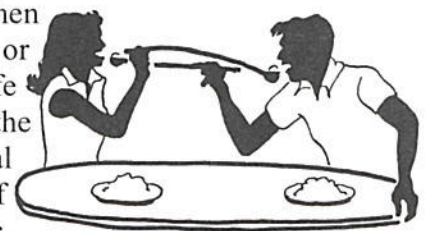
By their nature, men are leaders and if not encouraged to lead in what is good, they will lead in what is bad. For example, 99% of those on death row in the United States are men, and 95% of the rest of prison inmates are men. Of drunken drivers who kill and maim, 91% are men. Of those responsible for child and spousal abuse, more than 90% are men (*The Hidden Value of a Man*, Smalley & Trent, pg. 32). Men will either lead us to ruin or revival. Research has revealed the greatest need in the inner city is a good male role model. Therefore, it is essential that men be encouraged to be spiritual leaders in the home and in church.

A wife's submission is in response to her husband's obedience to this command: *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her* (5:25). This command is harder to obey than the command to women. The word translated *love* (AGAPE) does not refer to romantic love. It is a love that would cause one to give up anything for the well-being of the one loved. This means a husband is to love his wife so much he will die for her, and he proves it by the way he lives for her. Few women would have any difficulty submitting to a husband who loves her as Christ loves the church. If a husband loves his wife with AGAPE love, according to the first sentence in 1 Corinthians 13:4, how will he act toward her?

Nothing reveals the spirituality of a man like the way he treats his wife. The first thing I am interested in when I meet a Christian man is how he treats his wife. That is the "tell-all" of spirituality. If a man is rude, unkind, and acts superior to his wife, he is not filled with the Holy Spirit and is sinning because he is disobeying the command in Ephesians 5:25.

Paul explains the purpose of Christ giving *himself up for her*, the church: *to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless* (Eph. 5:26-27). Paul is referring to the cleansing power of *the word*, the Bible. As a husband obeys the Word of God, it will have a positive effect on his wife. The real question for husbands is: "Is my wife more *holy and blameless* because she is married to me?"

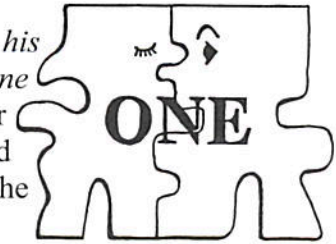
Paul continues, *In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself* (5:28). When our bodies have needs, such as exercise, eating the right foods, or adequate rest, we meet those needs. Because the husband and wife become one in marriage, the needs of a wife should be met as the needs of a husband's own body. Dr. Willard F. Harley, a clinical psychologist and marriage therapist, has found in his 25 years of experience that a woman has five basic needs in marriage: affection, conversation, honesty and openness, financial support, and family commitment (*His Needs, Her Needs*, page 13). It is the God-given responsibility for husbands to see that these needs are met in their wives. How does 1 Timothy 5:8 describe a husband failing to provide for the needs of his wife or other immediate family members?



To be the husband God commands, a man must be sensitive to the needs of his wife because *no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares*

for it, just as Christ does the church—for we are members of his body (Eph. 5:29-30).

Quoting Genesis 2:24, Paul writes: “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh” (5:31) When we marry, we “leave and cleave.” This means our spouse takes precedence over every other human relationship. The word translated *united* means “to glue or cement.” How did Jesus express the permanence of marriage in the second sentence of Matthew 19:6?



Some might say, “I am the guilty party in a divorce. Is this an unforgivable sin?” No, Jesus said . . . *every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven* (Matt. 12:31). *Blasphemy against the Spirit*, which means to reject the conviction of the Holy Spirit and refuse to receive Christ is the only unforgivable sin. For all other sins we can take advantage of what promise in 1 John 1:9?

The truth of husbands and wives becoming one caused Paul to exclaim: *This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church* (Eph. 5:32). This profound truth is beyond human comprehension. The spiritual reality is seen in Christ and the church, and the husband-wife relationship illustrates it.

Paul sums up everything he has to say about the husband-wife relationship in verse 33: *However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.* The two words that describe a spirit-filled marriage are *love* and *respect*.

How can you know you are **living the Spirit-filled life** at church and in your home?

Journey To A Better Life

LESSON 12 . . . Improving Family and Work Life (Ephesians 6:1-9)

After dealing with the roles of wives and husbands, Paul continues with the principle of mutual submission. This is responsiveness to leadership, authority, and needs. The Holy Spirit inspires Paul to write a word to four areas of life, beginning with . . .



Notes

God's Word to Children (6:1-3)

Paul writes, *Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right* (6:1). The word *obey* (HUPAKOUO, hoop-ak-oo'-o) implies listening with the intent of doing. This obedience is to be *in the Lord*, which means those things consistent with the Word of God. This assumes the parents have taught their children to reverence the Lord.

In verses 2 and 3, Paul quotes the fifth commandment: "*Honor your father and mother*"—*which is the first commandment with a promise*. This goes against the grain of our culture, which considers any restraint on children an assault on individual freedom or mindless conformity.

The reason for obeying parents is *that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth*. Many of us would not be here today if we had been allowed to disobey our parents by running out into the street, playing with matches, swimming in deep water, etc. A child who obeys his parents will *enjoy a long life* because he or she is far more likely to develop healthy traits and habits that contribute to a better life.

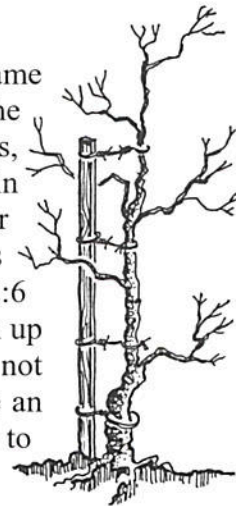
God's Word to Parents (6:4)

Paul writes, *Fathers, do not exasperate your children* (6:4a). The word *fathers* (PATER, pah-tair') can also mean "parents" (see Heb.11:23). God's word to parents is we should *not exasperate* our children. The word *exasperate* means to provoke or cause resentment through unreasonable demands or over correcting. This requires we know how to motivate our children. The number one complaint kids have about their parents is: "My parents don't understand me." Parents need to heed what principle found in Proverbs 24:3?

Understanding our children is essential for not exasperating them. We need to study our kids because every child has a unique temperament. I have three wonderful children: Monta, Jeremy, and Holly. They all take different types of motivation and have different strengths and weaknesses. Our children are different, so we shouldn't try to fit them into the same mold. God didn't make them the same, and we shouldn't try to remake them. What great advice for raising children does God give us in Proverbs 22:6?

Unfortunately, this verse is often misunderstood by parents who think it means, "Have family devotions, take your children to Sunday school and church, and when they grow up they will not depart from the faith."

The key to understanding this verse is the word *way*, which is the same Hebrew word translated "bend" several times in *Psalms*, referring to the bending of a bow. Today, with our precision fiberglass compound bows, almost all bows with the same pounds of pull shoot the same. But in biblical times, all bows were made of wood and had a different bend or pull. An archer had to know his own bow and be very familiar with its bend if he was to be accurate. The word *way* or "bend" in Proverbs 22:6 refers to personality and temperament. This could be translated: "Train up a child according to his own personality, and when he is old he will not depart from it." So if a child hates math, don't try to force him to be an accountant. If your daughter is not talented at sports, don't force her to play.

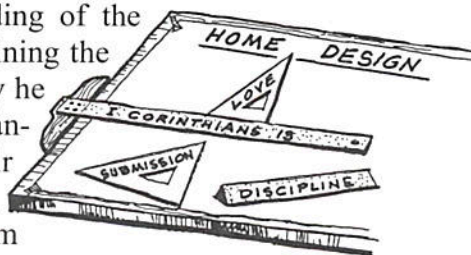


Rather than exasperating our children, *instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord* (Eph. 6:4b). The word *training* (ΠΑΙΔΕΙΑ, pahee-day'-ah) refers to discipline. There is a big difference between discipline and punishment. God does not punish His children; He disciplines them. What is the difference between punishment and discipline? The purpose of punishment is to inflict pain. The purpose of discipline is to promote change and growth. The focus of punishment is the past, but the focus of discipline is the future. The motivation behind punishment is anger, but the motivation behind discipline is love. What admonition does God give parents in Proverbs 13:24?

This is one of the most misunderstood verses in the Bible. The word *rod* refers to the shepherd's rod, which was used almost exclusively for guiding sheep, not beating them. The shepherds would gently but firmly steer

the sheep by simply holding the rod to block them from going in the wrong direction.

Anyone can spank a child as the primary way of discipline, but that takes no sensitivity, no judgment, no wisdom, no understanding of the child, and no talent as a parent. Biblical discipline is training the child in the way he should go, not beating him in the way he should go. Spankings are often used by parents who are angry and don't want to take the time to properly train their children. Children should never be spanked in anger. One of the best ways I found is not to tell them how I am going to discipline them and let them "sweat it out." It's a lot of fun.



One way to know if you are punishing in anger or disciplining in love is to ask, "Is my child afraid of me?" This will tell all because of what truth found in the first two sentences of 1 John 4:18?

I never have to be afraid of God because He never punishes me; He only disciplines me. The number one reason Christian kids grow up and reject their parents' faith is they were punished, not disciplined. They were punished in anger, not disciplined in love.

Training refers to teaching through discipline, and *instruction* (NOU-THESIA, noo-thes-ee'-ah) refers to training by word and example based on the Word of God.

God's Word to Employees (6:5-8)

It is estimated there were 60 million slaves in the Roman Empire, which was about one third of the population. The Romans were above hard work, and even doctors and teachers were slaves. Though Paul does not outright condemn slavery, which would have led to rebellion and mass bloodshed, he did lay the ground work that would lead to its destruction. However, it should not be overlooked that in 1 Timothy 1:10 Paul put *slave traders* in the same category with what other types of people?

The modern equivalent to a *slave* would be an employee, and God's word to us is . . . *obey your earthly masters with respect and fear* (Eph. 6:5a). This doesn't mean we should "shake in our boots," but we must respect authority. It refers to an eagerness to do a good job. Shoddy workmanship is a poor testimony. Christians are called to excellence and should set the standard at work.

One way we show *respect* is by not whining. Some people's motto is "rise and whine." But what does God tell us in Philippians 2:14?

You will stand out at work if you are not a gripe or a gossip. Go the "second mile" when needed, and you will shine like a star in darkness (Phil. 2:15).

The phrase *with sincerity of heart* (Eph. 6:5) means without hypocrisy, pretending to do a better job than we really do. We should not try to hide our mistakes or to work only when the boss is watching. The Bible says to obey your employer *just as you would obey Christ*. How does Colossians 3:23 give us the highest motive for good work and *sincerity of heart*?

The phrase *with all your heart* in Colossians 3:23 means to be enthusiastic about your work because you work not for men but for the Lord. Many Christians have to work where their efforts are not appreciated, and they are abused and exploited on the job. As a result, many are tempted to goof-off or sabotage products when they are mistreated. But we must remember God is just and righteous. We cannot work for God and not get just pay. How does Colossians 3:24 verify this fact?

As believers we are told: *Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men* (Eph. 6:6-7). This means we go about doing our jobs with cheerfulness and pleasantness for the glory of God, not whining and complaining. If we do, . . . *the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free* (6:8). This has staggering implications because the average worker works 86,000 hours in a lifetime. This means the 86,000 hours we spend on the job can count for eternity as service for Christ.

God originally gave these commands to slaves who had no rights, no insurance, no paid vacations, no worker's compensation, and no salary. So, think how much more binding they are to believers today who by comparison live in a worker's paradise. We have looked at **God's Word to children, to parents, and to employees**. Now let's consider . . .

God's Word to Employers (6:9)

God's first word to employers is: *And masters, treat your slaves in the same way* (6:9a). This refers to mutual submission, considering the needs of employees. God says employers are to treat employees the way they want to be treated—with respect and sincerity. If an employer wants his employees to do their best for him, he must do the best he can for them in the way of working conditions, salary, and benefits.

The command, *Do not threaten them*, means they are not to be threatened with salary cuts, firings, or any form of intimidation. The reason: *since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven . . .* (6:9b). This means employers must never forget they are accountable to their Master *in heaven*. Because God is the judge of all, *and there is no favoritism with him*, employers will be judged just like employees. Employers should also be concerned about their employees' marriages and children, proving it with a work week that leaves time for family and God. In James 5:4, what does God's Word say to employers who are exploiting their workers?

A "journey to a better life" requires we be the children, parents, employees, and employers that God's Holy Word teaches we should be. Which of these areas needs attention in your life, and what will you do this week to begin making the biblical changes?

Journey To A Better Life

LESSON 13 . . . Spiritual Warfare (Ephesians 6:10-24)

Up to this point, Paul has been promoting unity and mutual submission. But now he describes our conflict with the devil, which we call spiritual warfare. As believers in Christ we are engaged in a spiritual battle against the forces of evil. The Evil One is far more powerful and intelligent than we are. Unless we know about his tactics and the weaponry available to us, we are doomed to defeat. There are three things about our spiritual warfare of which we all need to be aware, beginning with . . .



Notes

Our Adversary (6:10-13)

Because we are in a spiritual battle, Paul writes: *Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power* (6:10). The verb translated *be strong* is present tense, meaning we daily need the Lord's strength. Since our strength is not enough, what warning does the Bible give us in 1 Corinthians 10:12?

Therefore, the Holy Spirit inspires Paul to write: *Put on the full armor of God* (Eph. 6:11a). This begins an analogy of a Roman foot soldier who is fully equipped for battle. A soldier would be foolish to go into battle without every piece of his armor in place. The same is true for you and me. We need the *full armor of God*, not just part of it. If we omit just one piece, some area of our lives will be exposed.

All the armor is essential *so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes* (6:11b). The word translated *schemes* (METHODEIA, meth-od-ay'-ah) is the Greek word from which we get our English word "method." It implies craftiness, schemes, and deception.

The word *devil* (DIABOLOS, dee-ab'-ol-os) means "slanderer," which reveals his primary tactic—to slander God and God's people. The devil is not a man in a red suit with horns, a pitch fork, a pointed tail, and smoke ascending around him. He is an intelligent, invisible, powerful spiritual being, who is out to destroy you and everything holy. We are not to attack the devil but *to stand*. This is consistent with what command in James 4:7b?

The devil is our spiritual enemy: *For our struggle is not against flesh and blood* (Eph. 6:12a). The word *struggle* (PALE, pall-ay') means "wrestle," and it is the idea of hand-to-hand combat. We are personally and continually wrestling the devil in a moral battle as he entices us to sin.

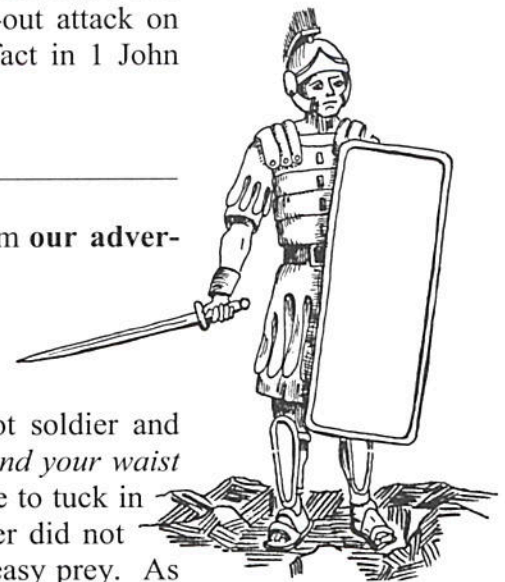
Our spiritual battle is *against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms* (6:12b). The words *rulers, authorities, and spiritual forces* indicate a highly organized hierarchy that influences world governments. The word translated *rulers* (KOSMOKRATOR, kos-mo-krat'-ore) literally means "cosmocrats," and many scholars believe it may refer to high ranking fallen angels, such as the one that hindered the angel sent to Daniel (Daniel 10:10-13). Satan clearly has a highly organized chain of command.

Satan is not omnipresent like God, so he has myriads of his cosmocratic cronies strategically positioned in our world to influence individuals and governments. We can see their influence today in the all-out attack on biblical morality. Therefore, we must never forget what fact in 1 John 5:19b?

Paul repeats verse 11 in Ephesians 6:13 and then moves from **our adversary** to . . .

Our Armor (6:14-17)

Paul now lists six pieces of armor worn by a Roman foot soldier and writes: *Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist* (6:14a). The Roman soldier had a thick leather belt he wore to tuck in his tunic and attach the sheath for his sword. If the soldier did not tuck in his tunic, he would trip or get tangled in it and be easy prey. As believers, we need *the belt of truth*, which holds our spiritual armor in place and keeps us from deadly entanglements. This is why Jesus made what proclamation in John 8:32?



The truth of God's Word will keep us from being entangled in the lies, deceit, and distortion of Satan.

Second, we must put on *the breastplate of righteousness* (Eph. 6:14b). The breastplate was made of metal scales and covered the torso on the front and back. It gave protection to the vital organs, such as the heart and

lungs. The word *righteousness* means the “quality of being right or just.” It refers to conformity to the principles of God’s infallible Word, the Bible.

Satan is just looking for an opening to exploit but with the *breastplate of righteousness* intact, we are not susceptible to the slander of the devil. Thus, we must obey what command in 1 Thessalonians 5:22?

Third, a Roman soldier wore shoes studded with nails so he could hold his ground and make quick moves without slipping or falling. With this in mind, Paul writes *and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace* (Eph. 6:15). We should always be prepared to share *the gospel*, which is reminiscent of what command in 1 Peter 3:15?

If we are good soldiers of Jesus Christ, when an opportunity arises to share the Gospel, we will not slip and fail to rise to the occasion. Instead, we will be ready to give a clear, concise presentation of the Gospel, such as the “Roman Road.” What a victory for our adversary when we have an opportunity to win someone to Christ and are unprepared! If we put on *the full armor of God*, we will include the *belt of truth*, the *breastplate of righteousness*, and our feet will be *fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace*.

There is a fourth piece of armor needed to be victorious in spiritual warfare. It is . . . *the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one* (6:16). The Roman foot soldier’s shield was about four feet tall by two feet wide and was covered with treated leather to quench the ignited arrows shot by the enemy. The *flaming arrows* are symbolic of burning anger and greed, as well as hot passions and blazing desires. But the *shield of faith* means we believe God’s Word and comply with it. Therefore, we will obey commands such as what one found in 1 Thessalonians 4:4?

The devil says, “It’s fun and exciting. Go ahead and enjoy yourself.” However, if we hold up the *shield of faith* and trust in God’s Word, the *flaming arrows* of the Evil One will be deflected and fall harmlessly to the ground.

The fifth piece of armor is *the helmet of salvation* (Eph. 6:17a), which was made of bronze with leather attachments to protect the head—the center of the thought process. A head wound is very serious because the rest of the body depends upon the head. This is why football players and motorcyclists wear helmets and construction workers wear hard hats.

The phrase *helmet of salvation* refers to our security and assurance in Christ. A helmet gives us a sense of confidence and protection in dangerous circumstances. No matter how fierce the attack, Satan can never destroy our hope because of what truth in Philippians 1:6?

The sixth and final piece of armor is *the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God* (Eph. 6:17b). The Bible originated with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and is therefore *the sword of the Spirit*. There are two Greek words for the “word” of God in the Bible. One (LOGOS, lo'-gos) refers to the expression of thought as a whole, which is the written Word of God, the Bible. The other Greek word (RHEMA, ray'-mah) refers to specific verses that are spoken. The word here is RHEMA and implies we quote the Bible to Satan as a deadly spiritual weapon. What did Jesus consistently do in Matthew 4:1-11 when tempted by the devil?



For every temptation there is a perfectly matched verse of Scripture that will slash it to pieces. This is why we need to memorize God's Word. We have looked at **our adversary** and **our armor**. Now we come to . . .

Our Ally (6:18-24)

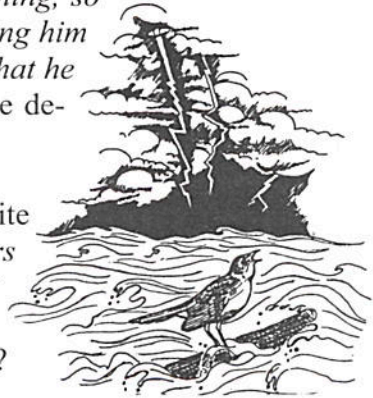
If we are to be victorious in our spiritual warfare, we must be in contact with our spiritual ally. Therefore, Paul writes: *And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests* (6:18a). When we pray in the Spirit, we let the Holy Spirit lay on our hearts what we ought to pray. Also, in those times of distress when we do not know what to pray, what promise do we have in Romans 8:26b?

With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints (Eph. 6:18b). Every time God brings a believer to our minds we should say a short prayer for them.

Paul requests of his readers: *Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should* (6:19-20). Paul was writing these words from prison. If I had been Paul, I would have asked these Christians to pray for my release. However, Paul was always more concerned with proclaiming the Gospel than his personal comfort. Prayers in the Spirit are never selfish.

Knowing his readers were worried about him, Paul writes: *Tychicus, the dear brother and faithful servant in the Lord, will tell you everything, so that you also may know how I am and what I am doing. I am sending him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage you* (6:21-22). Tychicus would inform them of the details of Paul's ministry.

The last two verses of this epistle each begin with Paul's two favorite words: *peace* and *grace*. First he says, *Peace to the brothers* (6:23a). The *peace* to which Paul refers is not just the absence of conflict, but an inner tranquility not disturbed by external events. How does Numbers 6:24-26 beautifully describe this kind of peace?



The *love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ* (Eph. 6:23b) refers to the love of God that operates in a person who lives by faith. Biblical faith always operates in the context of love because God is love.

Then, Paul concludes his epistle, beginning with his other favorite word: *Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love* (6:24). There are two kinds of *grace* (CHARIS, kar'-ess) in the Bible. First is the saving grace or unmerited favor we receive from God at conversion. The second is spiritual strength or power to live for God. So, Paul prays for spiritual strength for those *who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love* (6:24b), which means a love that is not a fad or an infatuation, but is enduring and abiding.

As a believer, you will be involved in spiritual warfare this week. Which part of this lesson did God especially speak to you through and remind you of the need to be prepared?

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