

Paul's Letter to the Ephesians (An Introduction)

We begin a new Bible study today. We will be looking at Paul's letter to the Ephesian Christians. Each study will be put into a short, devotional format. I encourage you to even go beyond our study and as always, please feel free to ask questions along the way.

I would recommend you take a few moments within this first week or two to read the entire letter (only 6 chapters). This helps to get the whole teaching in our heads toward the beginning of the study.

Let's take a look at the first couple of verses as a way of introduction.

"Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph. 1:1-2)

Maybe we should begin by looking at Paul's relationship with this church. The best place with the most information is Acts 19. Let me give you a quick run-down of the history between these two.

- The book of Acts records three missionary journeys of Paul: #1(13:1-14:28), #2(15:36-18:22), and #3(18:23-21:16)
- Paul briefly visited Ephesus at the end of his second missionary trip. He taught a few Saturdays at the Jewish church (synagogue), declined an invitation to stay longer, and left two people who traveled with him in Ephesus to teach about Christ (Acts 18:18-21).
- Paul returned to Ephesus a short time later, probably around the year 52 A.D. He inquired and found 12 guys in the city who loved the Lord but had only heard about John the Baptist's ministry of repentance. He spent time with them and taught them about Christ and the deeper things of God. (Acts 19:1-7)
- God opened up an opportunity for Paul to teach each week at the Jewish church for 3 months. When the Jews at the synagogue opposed his teaching, he started a church down the street at a local lecture hall. Paul taught at the church for two years. People from all over the country heard the gospel through that church. (Acts 19:8-10)
- Because of the spiritual darkness of the city, God worked unusual miracles through Paul. People were healed of diseases and evil spirits were cast out of individuals. The unusual part was that handkerchiefs

and aprons were touched by Paul and taken to the sick and they were healed instead of the people in need seeing Paul in person. (Acts 19:11-12)

- Counterfeit ministries sprang up. God used their weaknesses and lack of spiritual power to show the city the true power of God. It created awe and respect for the things of God. (Acts 19:13-17)
- Many people who became believers began to show their faith publicly. Those who were being saved confessed their evil deeds publicly. For instance, those who were into sorcery burned their witchcraft books in public, denouncing their sins and confessing Jesus as Lord. (Acts 19:18-20)
- After making sure the church could continue in the power of the Spirit, Paul left Ephesus to continue his ministry in other places. (Acts 19:21)

Wow, what a cool beginning for a church. Well...that is how Paul got acquainted with the people of Ephesus and how the church began there.

WHAT CAN WE DO WITH THIS TRUTH TODAY?

1. Notice how God builds His Kingdom. He builds His Kingdom through human relationships. Paul found a dozen men who had an interest in the things of God, spent time with them, and taught them the deeper things of God. From that small group of men, God opened opportunities for Paul and these men to cultivate the Gospel in Ephesus and a church was conceived. Out of this church, God reached several countries.

2. What relationships do you have already that God could deepen, focus, organize and use to reach others for Christ? How about a handful of people in your church or workplace? What could God do with those friendships if you and they would come together, seek God's will, and be willing to obey Him no matter what? What relationships do you not already have that God could establish and then use for His glory? Is there someone you could meet today or tomorrow...next week...that God might have sent your way in order to establish a friendship through which he can do mighty things? Keep your eyes open. Be faithful with your relationships.

Father, I am yours...not part of me but all of me. I see that you use human relationships upon which to build your work and accomplish your will. Help me to examine my friendships and acquaintances to see whether or not you would have me be part of a team of believers who could come together to serve you. Help me not be a loner. Help me to see others and their God-given role in my life. Do in me whatever you want. I love you. Amen!

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I would like to continue our introduction to Paul's letter one more day. It will be helpful to us to understand a few more things about the letter and about Paul's circumstances when he wrote it.

When Paul wrote this letter he was serving a prison term in Rome (3:1, 4:1, 6:20). A couple of years earlier, the Jews had brought civil charges against Paul in Jerusalem. Jewish leaders stirred religious crowds up by claiming Paul was being unfaithful to Judaism, the religion of the Jews. Knowing the Romans would not see Paul's Christian teaching as dangerous, the Jewish leaders continued to stir the crowds up so that the mob became dangerous and there was civil unrest. Because of the uncontrolled nature of the mob, the Romans took Paul into custody.

After a failed assassination attempt by the Jews and several local trials that lasted more than two years, Paul was about to be released. Because he knew he would be in danger if released and because of a deep desire to minister to the church in Rome, he appealed to Caesar using his Roman citizenship as leverage. This eventually led to his being transported to Rome, Italy (Acts 21:27 through 26:32).

It was there God arranged for him to be under house arrest but have significant freedom at times. It was during this time Paul wrote his letters to the Ephesians, the Colossians, the Philippians, and to Philemon. He also had the opportunity to more closely minister to the Roman Church for which he longed to do for some time (Romans 1:11-12).

A QUICK VIEW OF THE LETTER:

The letter to the Ephesians is divided into two parts. In the first three chapters Paul deals with doctrinal issues...the facts of what God has provided for us through His Son Jesus. In the last three chapters Paul encourages Christians to live in the full power of God's provision. He explores the great power available to every believer who loves Jesus. In fact, his favorite expression is the phrase "in Christ" which he uses 35 times. He touches on many areas of our lives such as our spiritual lives, our marriages, parenting, friendships, and how we can be victorious against Satan's personal attacks.

WHAT CAN WE DO WITH THIS TRUTH TODAY?

1. One of the most amazing things for me about God's leadership in our lives is that God will often put us in and use us in the oddest of circumstances. Think about where Paul was when he was writing this letter. He was a prisoner of Rome, living in a rented house, awaiting a formal hearing from the Emperor Caesar.

From a worldly viewpoint, many would think being under arrest would not be a good place out which to minister to others. Most would be too busy feeling sorry for themselves. Want to see something cool? Notice how he ended his letter to the Philippians. He said, **"All the saints (from Rome) greet you, but especially those who are of Caesar's household."** (Phil. 4:22) Did you catch that? While Paul was in Rome...under arrest...he witnessed to people who were relatives and/or employees in Caesar's house. Some came to Christ and fellowshiped with Paul to the point that when Paul wrote the Philippian church, these Christians told Paul to give the Philippian Christians a Christian greeting from them.

Paul saw any circumstance he was placed in as an opportunity to share the Gospel of Jesus. He knew that **"all things work for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose."** (Romans 8:28). He didn't feel sorry for himself. He trusted God. He partnered with God. How would God reach those who lived and/or worked in Caesar's home? Easy! He would send someone inside Caesar's system...someone, who by the nature of his circumstances, would have need to meet people inside Caesar's administration. God could trust Paul with that job.

How about you? Can God trust you with the tough assignments? He may not ask you to go to prison but he may allow you to experience sickness in order to share with a medical professional. He may allow you to experience a car repair in order to show God's love to the mechanic. He may allow you to lose a job in order to place you in another work environment in which he needs you to care for others. He may allow you to misplace your keys so you have to ask a neighbor for help so you can learn his need and pray for him. Sound crazy? It isn't! Each of these things happened to me.

How do you respond to the uncomfortable things in life? Do you moan and groan...complain and whine to God...or worse yet, pout and refuse to talk to him because you are mad? If so, you are living way below your potential...no-where near his design for you. God is completely trustworthy. If he allows something in your life, you should embrace it and use it to glorify him. Are you going through anything right now that could be an opportunity to serve him in?

Oh Father, I love you today. Forgive me for not trusting you...for getting mad at you when life ceases to be smooth. Grow my faith, enlarge my heart, and mature me until I think of you and your kingdom before I think of my own comfort and my own will. Cleanse me from a self-centered approach to life and fill me with your Spirit. Amen!

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Hi everyone! By now you have noticed that we are on our 3rd day of study and we are not out of the first verse yet. Don't worry. In this study we won't be going at a snail's pace all the time. We will cover more ground at a time...most of the time. But there is something I want you to see.

Have you ever wondered how to find out just what God wants you to be doing? This is an important issue for us, isn't it? As Christians we know God has created us and called us to do good works (Eph. 2:10). We know that he has put within each of us a spiritual gift that is to be used to help others discover and live within God's grace (1 Cor. 12:7). But how do you know what it is that you are supposed to be doing?

Notice what Paul said to the Ephesians. He said he was *"an apostle"*. His role (apostle) was not a decision made by a man or a group of people (Galatians 1:1). The role Paul filled was an invitation by God himself, *"by the will of God"*. Now before any of us lets our imaginations run too far and think that Paul was a rebel who did not see the benefit of church leadership or accountability to the church, let's balance this statement with a few other passages.

How about when Paul first came to Christ (Acts 9:19-20) *"Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God."* And then how about after Paul had ministered for a while (Acts 9:26-28) *"When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus. So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord."*

One more! What about when he had been in ministry for years. Some accused him of teaching wrong doctrine to the church in Antioch. Paul came to Jerusalem to meet with the apostles and elders to work out this problem (Acts 15:1-2, 4) *"Some men came down from Judea...and were teaching the brothers: 'Unless you are circumcised, according the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.' This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question. When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed*

by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them..." By the way...the apostles and elders sided with Paul.

In those verses we see that Paul enjoyed a good relationship with the church and its leaders. In fact, Paul sought them out, learned from them, and respected their affirming authority in his ministry. Paul spent his life starting local churches but it was God who called him to his ministry. Ok, let's boil it down to some basic truths.

- God calls all of us to be a part of his ministry.
- He calls us (invites us) to serve him but he allows the church (other Christians) to affirm that call in us.

When we feel God calling us to do something in ministry, we share that with other believers. Those believers, who are walking on the journey with us, will sense (or not) God's call on our lives. If so, they will encourage us, train us and open doors of opportunity for us. And we, being part of the community of faith, will do the same for them.

WHAT CAN WE DO WITH THIS TRUTH TODAY?

Before you seek a ministry position, you should seek the Lord's calling. What is God calling you to do? What did he create you to be?...to do? Want some help in figuring that out? Yes? OK.

Pay attention to how he has created you. How God designs us is closely related to what God wants us to do. He creates us certain ways in order that we might serve him in certain ways. Rick Warren (a famous pastor in CA) uses an acronym to help people discover these things. I've used this for years and I find it very effective in helping people. The acronym is the word S. H. A. P. E. What is your SHAPE? How has God SHAPED you? When you discover this, you will more clearly see what he is calling you to do.

S is for spiritual gift. This is a God-given special enablement upon a natural skill or ability that brings about spiritual growth in others. **H is for heart.** This is your passion...what delights you. **A is for abilities.** These are things you are naturally good at. **P is for personality.** This explores personality qualities like if we are introverted or extroverted? Do we understand things by facts or intuition? Do we make decisions out of our heads or out of our heart? Are we planned/predictable or open ended about our future? **E is for experiences.** All our experiences shape us...our education, our spiritual journeys, our painful experiences and our regular life experiences. Experiences build character and maturity.

Ok, enough to think about for one day. I encourage you to evaluate yourself. Write the acronym down and write some things about yourself beside each letter. Begin to discover your SHAPE. See what you and God come up with ☺

Lord Jesus! I affirm my love for you today. Help me understand the uniqueness with which you have created me. Teach me about me. Then allow me to understand what you are calling me to do. Lead me. I'll do anything you say. I'll go anywhere you lead. Amen!

Paul's Letter to the Ephesians

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Please, just one more day in verse 1 ☺. I hope your day is going well. Any day with Jesus in the lead can be a great day. Enjoy him and relax under his leadership. He's got your back!

Do you think that God has any expectations of us? That may sound like a crazy question but the more I talk with people the more I wonder if they believe that God expects anything from them after they are saved. I've heard a variety of answers to that question...everything from "No, it doesn't matter what I do in life after I'm saved..." to "Yes, I have to be perfect or God will be angry with me..."

Let me get off mark for just a moment. No matter how long we have walked with Christ, all of us need his grace and peace (notice verse 2). None of us could have ever approached God without his grace and none of us can live for him without his constant grace being poured out in our lives. However, I challenge you to expand your idea of grace. Grace, as taught by God, is not unmerited favor given to us so that we can continue to live ungodly and carnal lives. On the contrary, Paul said in Romans 6:1-2, "...*Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?*" Later in the chapter he said in verse 14, "*For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.*" So we learn that grace should never be used as an excuse to keep on doing what we know is wrong. Grace is a powerful enablement of the Spirit that enables us to say no to sin and yes to holiness.

This being said, notice who Paul is writing this letter to..."*to the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus.*" In this sentence Paul does several things for us. **First** he reminds us that we are reading someone else's mail. This letter wasn't written to us. So the goal of our study will be to understand what Paul meant for the original readers to understand...then we will bring that truth into the 21st century for application. **Second**, he helps us understand that God expects us to be saints. **Third**, he defines "*saints*" for us as those who are "*faithful in Christ Jesus.*"

For Paul, the word "*saint*" (hagioi) means someone who is "set apart for holiness" or "holy one". Paul isn't referring to our position in Christ but to the condition of our lives because of our position in Christ..."*faithful in Christ Jesus.*" There are a lot of people who think of themselves as Christians but who are not following Christ and their lives do not reflect faithfulness. What

they mean is that they had a religious experience one day in the past. Perhaps they unburdened themselves and they felt better after praying. This is quite different from repenting of sin and committing our lives to follow Christ.

God calls us to be saints...to consecrate ourselves for holy living. Does this mean our lives are perfect? No! However, it does mean that we have given our lives to Christ and the persistent characteristic of our lives in faithfulness. We will make mistakes and misjudgments. Sometimes, we, in a weak moment, may disobey...choosing to do what we know God forbids. If this happens, our hearts should respond in repentance, we should apologize to God (and man if we offended someone else), and then begin to walk in obedience again. God loves us and is patient with us. He extends mercy and grace to those who love him. Let's always use his grace as a power to help us get better at walking in faithfulness.

WHAT CAN WE DO WITH THIS TRUTH TODAY?

Are you OK with the idea that God expects something from you in return for the salvation he has given you? Are you OK with the idea that it is not OK if you choose to not give him anything in return? Salvation is a free gift. You didn't have to buy it or earn it. Just because it is free doesn't mean salvation is without commitment and obligation. Paul tells us in Romans 8: 11-14, *"...And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you...brothers, we have an obligation- but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it..."*

Inventory time! I'm going to ask a hard question. *Is there an area of your life that you are struggling with obeying God in?* Why do you suppose you are struggling with obeying God in that area? What is it that is hindering you from trusting God all the way? Is it a sin that you feel you can't live without? Has this sin become such a habit in your life that it is almost automatic every day? Is the sin so intertwined with a friendship or family member that to stop it would affect the relationship? I understand that it can be hard to do the right thing. But if you are going to follow Christ, you have to decide to do the right thing. Hebrews 12:1 says, *"...since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders, and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us."* Verses 2-4 are worth reading too.

God calls us to be saints. He calls us to live holy lives so that how we live proves the power of his Gospel. He provided a salvation so powerful that if you let it, it can break the power of sin in your life. God would never call you to something that his salvation could not accomplish in you. Take a stand for righteousness. Let those in your church walk with you and encourage you in your journey. Because of Christ, you can do this!

Father, forgive me for not allowing your Gospel to do its full work in me. I am yours. You bought me with a price...your life. Help me treat the shedding of your blood with great respect. Help me live in a way that constantly shows respect and appreciation for your sacrifice and in a way that is worthy of your Name. Amen!

Paul's Letter to the Ephesians

"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." (Eph. 1:3)

We are not certain of the specific reason Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus. In many of his letters he identified a particular problem he wanted to correct. Not so with this letter. Most scholars believe at the time Paul wrote this letter the Ephesian church was about 8-10 years old. Given what he includes in the letter, it appears that his purpose was to encourage...to invigorate...to bring a sense of revival to this church. Maybe they let their excitement for Christ cool off under the pressures of everyday life. Maybe they allowed the normal ebb and flow of life to cause them to think casually about their walk with God and their lives with other people. Perhaps they needed to be reminded of the incredible salvation Christ had provided them and the great power with which they could live their lives in Him.

Our next section is powerful. In fact, verses 3-14 are all one sentence in the original language (Greek). It represents one continuous thought in the mind of God. It is deep...so I want to go slow through this to make sure we understand each concept.

Let's start by looking at the main idea in verse 3. Please read the bolded words only. "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.***" Did you catch that? Our Heavenly Father has established blessings for us. He blesses us with spiritual blessings. He gives every spiritual blessing, not just some of them. He gives these through His Son, Jesus Christ.

So let me get this straight! In order for us to receive the spiritual blessings the Father has made available to us, we must come to Him through His Son, Jesus. Got it! Did you get that? You might have to read that again 😊.

The thing that stands out to me today is the phrase "***in Christ.***" If the Father's blessings come through Christ...then it means His blessings don't come through others. Why? Why not any ancient religious person? Why not Mohammed or Buddha or Confucius or Gandhi? Simply put, Christ is not like them. They were only men. Christ is more than a man. Listen to how Paul explained Christ in his letter to the Colossians, "***He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible...all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him...***" (Col. 1:15-17, 19).

Wow! Great credentials! Jesus is not just one more ancient teacher in a long line of religious leaders. He is the divine Son of God. John the apostle would say it this way, *"And the Word (Jesus) became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth"* (John 1:14). Did you catch that word *"only"*. The Father has not provided an additional way. There is not a "second" son of God out there somewhere who has been given permission to provide "another" way. There is not another prophet of God who would legitimately speak on God's behalf and lead people in a different direction. All religious roads do not lead to God. Jesus said of himself, *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"* (John 14:6). Well...that last one nails the door shut, doesn't it?

WHAT CAN WE DO WITH THIS TRUTH TODAY?

I have two questions. Number one; do you believe this great Truth of God? Yes? Good. I thought so. Number two; do you live like you believe this great Truth of God? Huh? Simply put, even though you believe this Truth in your mind, do you sometimes go to other sources to receive spiritual blessings?

Have you ever looked to the horoscope section of the newspaper to get your spiritual mojo on? Have you ever consulted someone from the psychic hotline to gain wisdom for a situation in your life? Ever done yoga, dabbled in new age meditation, embraced a superstition like a 4 leaf clover or hanging a religious emblem in your car for protection? *"O come on Will. Those are too far out there."* OK...OK!

How about seeking out the newest power of positive thinking seminar or book to get your life back on track or sending a little money to a TV preacher to get a blessing in return or depending on nature to "re-align" you spiritually or looking to materialism (making more money or getting more stuff) to help you feel better about yourself? God says that every spiritual blessing is found in Christ. Whatever our spirits need, God has amply and abundantly provided through Christ. Here it is in mathematical form:

- Christ = Every Spiritual Blessing.
- Christ + Anything Else = 0 (Paul argued this in Gal. 5:1-2)

"Jesus, why do I look in other places for what I can only find in you? Why do I believe the world's voice when it tells me I need these other things? When I look in other places I am really saying that you are not enough...that you are really not who you say you are. I'm sorry. Forgive me. Teach me. Break me from this unfruitful habit. Cleanse me from a heart that thinks it can find its own way. Help me come to you for everything. Amen."

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OK! We've got the main idea of this verse. However, there is a phrase in it that we should understand before we move on. Paul told the Ephesians that the Father had blessed them with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms. Notice the phrase *"in the heavenly realms"*.

It is important to note that this phrase is used only in Ephesians (5 times) and is not found anywhere else in the New Testament. Let's take a quick look at all the ways Paul uses it. Please read them in the Bible and then consider this summary.

- (1:3)- it is the place where the Father's spiritual blessings are given
- (1:20)- it is the place where Christ sits at the right hand of the Father
- (2:6)- it is the place where we sit with Christ in fellowship
- (3:10)- it is the place where spiritual rulers and authorities see the wisdom of God exhibited through the church
- (6:12)- it is the place where the fully armed Christian wrestles against spiritual wickedness.

Did you get your mind around that? Yes, I know...it is a little difficult. Perhaps this will help. There are two worlds existing simultaneously; the spiritual world and the physical world. God is Spirit (John 4:24). While living and ruling in the spiritual world God created the physical world (Genesis 1). Part of that physical creation is a planet we call Earth and our home.

The spiritual realm seems to be a foundation for the physical realm. God desires for the spiritual realm to impact what happens in the physical realm (Matthew 6:10). He wants the physical realm to reflect the foundational, creative reality of the spiritual realm.

The spiritual world is invisible to those in the physical world unless we are given glimpses into that world (2 Kings 6:17; Acts 7:55-56; 2 Cor. 12:2-4; Revelation 4:1-2). If you want more of a study on this, go to www.northeastcommunitychurch.com, look under sermons, and choose May 10, 2009.

The spiritual world existed first. The physical world seems to be a copy or shadow of the spiritual world (Heb. 8:1-5; Revelation 4:6-7; 21:10-11, 15, 18-21; 22:1-2). When sight was given into the spiritual realm, John saw creatures like our lions, oxen, eagles, and man himself. He also saw mountains, precious jewels, walls, gates, rivers and trees. When Elisha and

his servant were given a look into the spiritual realm (2 Kings 6) they saw horses and riders. Since the spiritual realm existed first, perhaps we have these things in the physical realm because the spiritual realm had them first. Perhaps we have them in the physical realm to remind us of the reality of the spiritual realm, the original realm...the foundational realm.

Mankind is made up of both a body and a spirit (Genesis 2:7). God equipped us to be able to relate to both worlds. With our physical eyes we don't see the spiritual realm but with our spirits we can sense it and fellowship with Christ in it. When we are saved and our spirits (our bodies also) are redeemed by Christ, it affects the spiritual realm much like someone moving into a cul-de-sac affects the cul-de-sac. When we are saved we are participating in the spiritual realm just like the one who moves in to the cul-de-sac now participates in that neighborhood.

Be patient with this next illustration ☺. It is like God creates a spiritual account when we come to Christ and puts spiritual blessings (not access to material wealth as some teach) in that account. Because of our relationship with Christ we can spiritually access that account and draw from that account. We are strengthened by what we receive.

Our spirits are supposed to rule over our physical bodies; morally and intellectually guiding us. However, our mental/physical actions can affect the quality of our spiritual lives. For example, disobedience brings spiritual disconnect. So if our spirits are receiving God's blessings in the heavenly realm, it will powerfully affect the way we live life in the physical realm. This was Paul's overarching point in his letter, as we will see in our study.

OK. Does your head hurt yet? Mine too. Let's try to understand how to apply what we have talked about today.

WHAT CAN WE DO WITH THIS TRUTH TODAY?

We have blessings available to us from the Father, given to us through the Son. Through our spiritual lives in Christ we can access those blessings. When we are saved, much happens. It not only impacts us but it impacts the spiritual realm. We begin to participate in life at another level...in another dimension. It makes you think, doesn't it? It brings to mind that passage in Hebrews 12:1 we looked at on Day 4. It says, "**Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.**" Who are the "great cloud of witnesses"? The spiritual realm of course! Our words and actions are witnessed by a lot more than we think. May this understanding of the spiritual realm spur us on to careful and deliberate living.

"Father, there is a lot more to this world than is observed through my eyes. I trust You that this world is as You say and not only as I see it. Help me not live by my eyes but by faith in You and Your Word. Help me live successfully in both worlds. Help me bring honor to Your name and live a life worthy of Your sacrifice for me. Amen."

Paul's Letter to the Ephesians

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves." (Eph. 1:3-6)

Good morning! Let's start with a quick review. In our last study we learned that our Heavenly Father has blessed us with every spiritual blessing through His Son and our Savior Jesus. We also learned that our spiritual lives are foundations for our physical lives. What happens in our spirits is reflected in the lives we live...our thoughts, attitudes, motives, and actions. So...spiritual blessings are the foundation for God's blessings in the whole of our lives.

In our passage for today, we have the beginning thoughts of an 11-verse burst of praise. From verse 4 through verse 14, while not trying to mention every possible spiritual blessing, Paul praises our Father for 9 different spiritual blessings. And remember, those 9 spiritual blessings will have remarkable affects upon our personal lives.

In our passage for today, Paul mentioned 4 such "spiritual blessings". Let me lay them out for us.

- Our Father chose us to know Christ
- Our Father chose us to be holy and blameless in his sight
- Our Father predestined us to be adopted as his sons and daughters
- Our Father has freely given us his glorious grace through Christ

These are the first four of the "spiritual blessings" Paul would mention. Remember, we determined the reason Paul wrote to the Ephesian Church was to encourage...to revitalize them...to bring a spirit of revival to them. It appears they had grown somewhat cold in their spiritual walk with the Lord. Paul began his efforts by reminding them what God had actually given them through Christ.

Our verses for today, and at least two more days, bring to our attention a great Biblical doctrine...but sadly, a doctrine that is grossly misunderstood. This great doctrine is the doctrine of election and predestination. It is imperative that we get a Biblical understanding of these ideas, before we go any further. In Christianity, there are two distinct schools of thought on this subject.

One "school of thought" says that the salvation of an individual has absolutely nothing to do with the individual...his beliefs and choices. This idea says that God elected him and predestined him to be saved and there is nothing he can do about it. He has no part in his own salvation and could never refuse God's

grace. This idea also states that the opposite is true. There are some who are predestined to damnation and are kept from embracing the grace of God. I have studied the Scriptures as a pastor for 24 years and have never been able to see the legitimacy of this way of thinking.

A second "school of thought" says that the salvation Christ purchased on the cross is for *"whoever believes in him"* (John 3:16). It says that it is God's will that all come to Christ in repentance (2 Peter 3:9). In fact, Peter said that Christ is being patient with His return to earth because he doesn't want anyone to perish. That doesn't sound like the eternal fate of individuals is already decided, does it? Why wait if it has already been decided?

God initiates all movement toward humanity (John 15:16). That movement is founded upon the grace and mercy of God and not on any good we have done (Eph. 2:9). All are invited but only those who meet God's grace with believing faith will be saved and adopted into the family of God (Matthew 22:14). We are not saved by grace alone. We are saved by grace, *"through faith"*. Even this *"faith"* is a gift from God but it is a gift people can refuse to open and employ. (Eph. 2:8).

For some to be chosen and predestined does not necessitate that others were not offered God's grace, as well. It does mean, however, that God, in his divine foreknowledge, knows our choices regarding his grace. This is how Paul could say, *"...he chose us in him before the creation of the world and predestined us to be adopted as his sons..."* Our "chosen-ness" and our predestination were acknowledged by God because God, in his infinite knowledge, knew we would meet his grace with believing faith. However, no-where in the Scriptures have I ever been able to find a passage that teaches that God's foreknowledge, in any way, causes people to reject God's grace. In other words, his foreknowledge of our choices does not make the choice for us.

WHAT CAN WE DO WITH THIS TRUTH TODAY?

As humans, we have free-will. We may choose to follow God or choose to reject God. Our choices have an incredible impact. They impact our lives. Our choices impact the earth and its well being. They impact the lives of others. Our choices impact our own eternity. If this is not true, then God only pretended to give us choices and influence. It was all just a big, sick, cosmic game. God was only playing mind-games with us...making us think we actually were given the job of stewarding the earth (Gen. 1:26-28). If our choices have no real impact and all the decisions were already made before we came to be, then it is just a cruel illusion. Thank God the Bible teaches the opposite. Free-will means something and it calls for complete responsibility.

"Father, if I have come to know your Son that means you have chosen me and I am your child. Wow! Grow and mature my faith so that I might continue to meet your grace with believing faith to the end of my life, for I cannot please you without faith (Heb. 11:6). Amen!"

Paul's Letter to the Ephesians

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves." (Eph. 1:3-6)

Good morning! Grab a cup of coffee and your Bible and let's study for a while together.

A quick reminder: If you wish to respond to ideas we are studying or have further questions you would like me or anyone else in our study to respond to, you are always welcome to do that. Just hit "reply to all" and get a discussion started. We can all learn from each other. If you don't want to be part of additional discussions, just delete those emails 😊.

Let's pick up where we left off last time. Paul, in a doxology of praise, listed out 9 different "spiritual blessings" that Christians have in Christ. Our passage today lists 4 of those blessings. They are:

- Our Father chose us to know Christ
- Our Father chose us to be holy and blameless in his sight
- Our Father predestined us to be adopted as his sons and daughters
- Our Father has freely given us his glorious grace through Christ

First, notice that God loves us so much that he chose us to know Christ. I suppose one doesn't really understand the value of this idea unless he/she has ever been "not" chosen. For instance, to be the last one chosen for a pick-up ball game would be painful and humiliating. To "not" be chosen is translated, "I am not wanted."

Remember Jesus' words set against the parable of the Wedding Banquet in Matthew 22:14 when he said, *"For many are invited, but few are chosen."* The truth is...God wants all of us. He extends his grace and his gospel to us in the form of an invitation. If we meet his invitation with believing faith, he says, 'I choose you to be on my team...in my family.' In other words, God invites all to the ballgame. He wants to choose everyone (2 Peter 3:9). However, they have to want to play ball (believe and follow Christ). If they show up and want to play ball, they are chosen for the team.

Secondly, notice that God loves us so much that he chose us to be holy and blameless in his sight. The word *"holy"* (hagios) means to be set apart; to be

different. God chooses the believer to be *"holy"* ...to be different than other people...to be set apart for His will and purpose.

Paul also said that God chooses us to be *"blameless"* (amomos). This word is taken from the OT sacrificial system in which the sacrifices were expected to be without blemish (Lev. 1:3, 10). This word points to the whole life of a person and the whole person as an offering to God.

Our Father has decided that those who have believed and are his chosen ones will live lives with a holy innocence toward willful sin. Paul said it again to the Ephesians in chapter 5:25-27, *"Husbands, love your wives, just like Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless."*

WHAT CAN WE DO WITH THIS TRUTH TODAY?

Where are you today in all of this? If you are human then you are invited to partake of Christ's sacrifice and his life. You are an "invitee".

Have you met Christ's invitation with believing faith...trusting him for the forgiveness of sins...to be spiritually born anew? No? What's Up? Did you read the invitation? Do you realize Who sent it to you? Do you see the overwhelming love and grace behind the invitation? Do you understand the blessings he wants to give to you?

Is your answer "Yes"? Wonderful! That is the best choice you will ever make. You are chosen to be in Christ and chosen to live different from other men and women. You are chosen to walk blameless before your God. Wow! Think about that for a moment. You were invited to the field and wanted to play ball (you had faith). Our Father chose you to live your life with his Son and to live a life set apart for his will and purpose.

What a privilege you have! What a blessing you have been given! You get to live in a relationship with the Heavenly Father, his Son, and his Spirit. You get to know your creator. You get to do his work on the earth. Life doesn't get any better than that!

"Jesus, thank you for the new life you offer me through your sacrifice and resurrection. Thank you I am chosen to live my life with you and for you. Thank you I am chosen to live differently than those who don't want you. Thank you I am chosen to live blamelessly before you. Thank you for extending your love and grace...your invitation...to me in the first place. Amen!"

Paul's Letter to the Ephesians

"In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves." (Eph. 1:5-6)

Good morning! Grab something hot to drink, get your Bible, and let's study together for a few minutes.

Let me quickly update us. In verses 4-14, Paul gave a doxology of praise where he listed out 9 different "spiritual blessings" that Christians have in Christ. We are working on the first four. They are:

- Our Father chose us to know Christ
- Our Father chose us to be holy and blameless in his sight
- Our Father predestined us to be adopted as his sons and daughters
- Our Father has freely given us his glorious grace through Christ

Last time we finished the first two and today we will tackle number three.

A third spiritual blessing we have in Christ is that the Father has loved us so much that he has adopted us as his children. When the Bible speaks of our belonging to the family of God, it speaks of it in two ways.

First, we become children of God through our new birth. Jesus spoke of it in John 3:3 when he said to Nicodemus, *"I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless He is born again."* John would again write about it in 1 John 3:9-10 when he said, *"No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God. This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother."* Peter would word it this way, *"Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires."*

In other words, when we become a child of God, God's very nature lives in us and we are changed. We begin to live with another nature...God's nature...living in us and transforming our nature. So we become children of God because we *"participate in"* God's nature. He (and his nature) and we (and his nature) are related because we share his nature. My son Jon and I are related because he shares in my nature. This makes him my son and not someone else's. We are God's children because we share in his nature.

This is why John would argue that a Christian cannot continue a life of disobedience (sin) to God after having been born of God, because God's

nature (God's seed) is living in him and his nature would not be at peace with it.

Secondly, the Scripture speaks of our becoming the children of God through "*adoption*", as Paul mentioned to the Ephesians. The word for "adopted" (uiothesia) is only used by Paul in the New Testament. He used the term a total of five times: Romans 8:15, 23; 9:4; Galatians 4:5; and here in Ephesians 1:5. It literally means "placed as a son".

In short, adoption is the legal transference of a child from one family to another family. To adopt a child means to love the child, accept the child, choose the child...to purposefully bring the child into your own family, who by nature does not belong to it, and give him the full rights, privileges, and responsibilities of sonship, just like the children of natural birth have.

What a glorious truth for us to ponder! Paul uses this particular word picture of entering God's family to highlight God's grace, which we will look at more in-depth next time.

WHAT CAN WE DO WITH THIS TRUTH TODAY?

We, who were foreigners by nature have been loved, accepted, chosen, and adopted into God's glorious family. This is all because of his love and grace and according to his pleasure and his will. This wonderful gift is offered to us out of the goodness and graciousness of God's heart and not because we have done anything to deserve it.

Are you getting a clearer picture of this thing we call Christianity? It isn't, as some suppose, a simple choice we make in order to gain a better emotional life...or financial life. It isn't even a thoughtful decision we make in a low, private moment of meditation that promises to improve our mood and bring us better luck.

Becoming a Christian means we have personally encountered the living God and embraced, through faith, the love and grace he offers. It means we are invited and chosen and adopted to be part of his family and to share in his nature. Think about how much God has invested to make that encounter possible. Think about how much Christ went through to enable the power of that encounter to last a life time...an eternity.

Now compare those thoughts with how well you represent God's family name in your daily life.

"Father, you have invested so much to adopt me and make me your own. You have sacrificed so much so that I might be your son and share in your nature. Knowing this is true, how can I ever again touch the things your enemy offers me? How could I ever trample the sacrifice of your Son under foot and consider the blood He shed as a common thing? How could I show such contempt for the Spirit of grace (Heb.10:26-31)? Oh Lord, help me live a life worthy of the calling I have in Christ Jesus (Eph.4:1). Amen!"

Paul's Letter to the Ephesians

"In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves." (Eph. 1:5-6)

Good morning everyone! I hope your week is going well.

Paul has been reminding us of the wonderful spiritual blessings we have through our relationship with Christ. We are invited to know Christ and are chosen because we responded to his invitation in faith. We are enabled to be holy and blameless in our walk with Christ. Our Father has adopted us into his family and given us the full rights, privileges, and responsibilities of those who are related to him.

Today, Paul adds to our list that we should praise our Father for his *"glorious grace"* which he has *"freely given us"* through the son he loves; Jesus Christ. So...the fourth spiritual blessing God gives us is the blessing of his grace. I would like to spend a few days on this great topic. Grace is so important to us but is often under-defined and therefore, misunderstood.

First of all, let's be careful not to think of grace as a New Testament concept only. While Paul's immediate motive was to remind the Ephesian Christians of the Father's blessing of grace in the lives of those who love his son, he does not mean to say that the concept of grace is a new concept to God that began when Christ came. Grace has been a characteristic of God's nature revealed to us from the beginning pages of the Bible.

Would you like a few examples? You got it. Take a look at Genesis, chapters 3 and 4. In chapter three we see the fall of Adam and Eve into sin (1-7). We also see God forcing Adam and Eve to face the consequences for their disobedience (8-19). Notice something else? God's grace was extended to Adam and Eve (21-24). Through his grace he covered their shame (21) and prevented them from eating from the tree of life. Had they done that they would have had to live forever in their fallen state (22-24). In chapter four we see the Lord blessing them with a child (1) and providing an atoning system through which they could be forgiven and live in fellowship with him (3-5).

How about one more? If you were to read every letter from the prophets in the Old Testament you would find, in each one, God's love and grace. The very objective of the prophets' ministries was to warn of God's wrath but to also preach hope through God's grace.

Look at the prophet Jonah for example. God called him to go to Nineveh (chapter 1), a wicked city and an enemy of Israel. He was to tell the city of God's impending judgment and punishment.

Initially, Jonah ran from God, was swallowed by a whale, but was given another chance to obey God (chapter 2...received grace). Jonah went to Nineveh and preached what God told him to say. The people of Nineveh believed, repented of their sin and were spared God's judgment and punishment (chapter 3). They received God's grace. Then something amazing happened. Jonah became angry at God because he forgave the people. Listen to his own words, *"That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity."* (4:2)

There is no difference between the Old Testament's and the New Testament's description of God. God is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow (Heb. 13:8). God has always been a God of grace, is right now a God of grace, and will always be a God of grace. He is, by nature, a gracious and compassionate God.

I've heard some say that as Christians we are under the dispensation of grace and those who lived in the Old Testament were under the dispensation of the law. This is a false statement, usually used by those who are trying to justify their right to keep sinning and get away with it. Fallen humanity has always had to approach God under the banner of his grace...from Genesis chapter 3 to the present day.

WHAT CAN WE DO WITH THIS TRUTH TODAY?

Our Heavenly Father has freely given us his glorious grace! From the depths of his holy nature and his great love for us he gives us grace. This means that he treats us with tender patience and astonishing compassion.

Within our relationship with him, we do not have to live in fear of him. His nature is solid and consistent. We don't have to worry that he will suddenly change his attitude toward us. He won't wake up tomorrow and feel differently about us. His grace creates a safe environment in which we can love him and deal honestly with our weaknesses.

"Heavenly Father, thank you for blessing me with your grace. Thank you that you know me completely and still love me. Thank you that I can be fully honest with you without fear of rejection. I love you and will never leave you. Amen."

Paul's Letter to the Ephesians

"In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves." (Eph. 1:5-6)

Hi everyone! Please know I pray for you each week, asking God to bless, strengthen, and deepen your walk with Him. I hope this simple study through Ephesians is of some help on your journey.

Last time we began to study verse 6 and the subject of God's grace. In working with people over the years I have found that the topic of God's grace is one in which many are not well-learned. In fact, for the majority of people I've spoken with, they under-define this powerful doctrine.

Most would define grace as "the unmerited favor of God" in our lives. To be satisfied with this definition of grace would be like being satisfied with defining the Titanic as "just a boat." While, technically the Titanic was a boat and grace is the unmerited favor of God, neither description adequately tells enough for us to understand what we need to know. If I under-define the Titanic, I've lost nothing. But if I do not understand how God views and moves among mankind, I could be severely disadvantaged. Because of this, I would like to continue looking at this great Bible doctrine for a few more days.

Last time we learned that the concept of grace is not a New Testament concept...it is a God concept. God is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. He has always been a God of grace and mercy. Mankind has always had to approach God based on His grace. We have never been able to have a relationship with God based upon our own works.

Our verse for today tells us that God's "*glorious grace*" has been "*freely given us*" in Christ Jesus. While God's grace comes from God's holy, gracious, and compassionate nature, it comes to each of us at different places in our spiritual journey. It comes so that our lives can produce spiritual fruit.

For example, let's consider God's grace shown to us before we were saved. This is commonly called "prevenient grace" because it deals with the many ways in which God "favors" us prior to our conversion. It describes the heart of God reaching out to us first, declaring his love for us, even when we didn't love him. John said it this way in 1John 4:19, when he said, "*We love (God) because he first loved us.*" Jesus described this application of God's grace when he said, "*No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him...*" (John 6:44). Prevenient grace is extended to us to inform us of God's love and redemption plan. He applies grace in this way to "*draw*" us to himself.

God also extends his grace to us in order that we might believe and be saved. Paul described that application of grace when he wrote in Ephesians 2:8, *"For it is by grace you have been saved, though faith-and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-..."* His grace is given to our lives so that we may be fully converted (saved) and brought into a personal relationship with Jesus.

Our Father also extends grace to the saved person if he/she has sinned and disobeyed him. A great example of this application of grace is found in Peter's life. In Matthew 26:69-75 we read about Peter's public denial of Jesus the night before Christ died. Peter did this because he was afraid. A few days later, the morning of the resurrection, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome brought spices to Jesus' tomb to anoint his body for burial (Mark 16:1). After discovering that his body was not there, an angel spoke with them and said, *"But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you' "* (Mark 16:7). Did you notice the *"and Peter"*? This is the grace of God inviting Peter to fellowship with Jesus, even after he denied him. Then, some days later, Jesus and Peter came face to face. During that encounter Jesus restored Peter to the ministry he had called Peter to originally (John 21:15-18). What beautiful grace is given to mankind!

One more quick one! God also gives grace when he equips us to serve him and his people. Look at Ephesians 4:7-13. Paul taught that grace was given to each one of us in the form of spiritual gifts (7-8), given as Christ apportioned them, in order to serve his church and prepare His people for works of service, unity, knowledge, and maturity in the faith (11-13).

WHAT CAN WE DO WITH THIS TRUTH TODAY?

The love and gracious compassion of our Father is applied to us at different places in our spiritual journey to bring about different spiritual fruit in our lives.

Take a few moments to think back over your spiritual journey and identify (write down) how God has extended his grace to you at different points of your experience. Doing this will strengthen your faith and put gratitude in your heart. Let's pray.

"Father, it is hard to put into words a response to your grace. I can't come up with an adequate way to express my deep, heart-felt appreciation for your treatment of me...for treating me far better than I deserve to be treated. My only response can be 'Thank You', 'I love You', and 'I am Yours.' Amen."

Paul's Letter to the Ephesians

"In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves." (Eph. 1:5-6)

Good morning everyone! Let's continue looking at the topic of God's grace today. Our text (verse 6) reminds us that God's grace is *"freely given (to) us"*. Question: If God's grace is freely (*not earned*) given to us, would that also mean that his grace is irresistible (*we are unable to resist God*) and unlimited (*God won't ever stop applying it to our lives*)?

Do you see what I meant when I said a few days ago that the "unmerited favor of God" definition does not answer the important questions we must have answers to, if we are going to live in peace with God? In fact, if we only consider that definition, we may be tempted to follow a "logical" pathway and assume things about God's grace that are not true.

In fact, some very sincere Christian theologians have done just that. They began with the idea that God's grace is free (unearned). This is true. Next, they "logically" deduce that since humans didn't have anything to do with earning God's grace, humans are also unable to resist it and God will never refuse to give it.

Practically speaking, this concept reduces us to human robots... pre-programmed to respond to certain stimuli...namely the grace of God. This would also mean that we have no active part in our own salvation or in the eternal direction in which our lives move. According to this way of thinking, every aspect of our lives has already been determined before the world ever began. Human will and responsibility are not real things and have no real significance. Is this true? Let's go to the Scriptures to answer that question.

Scripture is filled with examples of people resisting God's saving grace. We can read of Cain as he resisted the saving grace of God by offering to God an offensive sacrifice and then killing his brother who obeyed God (Genesis 4:3-12). We also read of God, who by his love and grace rescued the Hebrews out of the slavery of Egypt (Exodus 3-14) and established a covenant with them (Exodus 19-24). We read how many of them resisted his covenant grace by worshiping an idol (golden calf) at the foot of Mt. Sinai and were destroyed (Exodus 32).

Even in the New Testament we read where Paul told those considering the claims of the Gospel to *"continue in the grace of God"* as opposed to resisting his grace and rejecting his Gospel (Acts 13:43). Paul also told the Galatians, who once came to Christ through grace, that they had *"fallen away from grace"*

because they had begun to trust in the teachings of Judaism to help them be in relationship with God (Galatians 5:4).

In Hebrews 10:29 we are taught that a believer who maintains a lifestyle of sin after he knows the truth has, *"trampled the Son of God under foot...treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and...has insulted the Spirit of grace."* Later in Hebrews 12:15-25 we are told that people can *"miss the grace of God"* if they refuse Him. It is clear that we can say "no" to God's grace.

Scripture is also filled with examples of God limiting his grace to individuals due to their response to his grace. Let's go back to Exodus 32. Some of those who experienced God's grace by being freed from Egyptian slavery lost their lives and souls because they were unfaithful to God's covenant.

Even in the New Testament we read Jesus' words in Matthew 18:23-35 when he told of a man who had great debt and was given forgiving grace from his king. This same man would not extend grace to another citizen who owed him a small amount of money. The man who was originally forgiven was given his old debt back because he had insulted the king who had given him grace to begin with. Jesus then said, *"This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart."* Grace is given and grace can be stopped.

One more example: Hebrews 10:26-27 teaches, *"If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God."* This writer clearly tells us that if a believer deliberately keeps setting his heart on disobeying God, God could stop applying the sacrifice of his Son to that person's life because he *"has insulted the Spirit of grace"* (29). Grace is given and grace can be stopped if God so chooses.

WHAT CAN WE DO WITH THIS TRUTH TODAY?

I'm sorry if I seem to be going on and on but as you can see by the Scriptures today, if someone believes that grace is irresistible or unlimited, that person can get himself into some real spiritual trouble. Many times we are tempted to use the concept of grace to relax about sin and our responsibility to avoid it (Romans 6:1-2, 14-15). This is NEVER God's intention. However, I do want to be careful not to give the impression that God is quick to stop the flow of grace. While that is completely up to God, his Word clearly shows us that he is incredibly patient and desires that all of us make heaven our home.

The fact remains, in order for us to live at peace with God we must interact with his grace according to his design and purpose in giving it to us.

"Father, help me not be confused about your grace. Just because I haven't earned it doesn't mean I have no responsibility to it. Help me live in partnership with your grace. Help me allow it to work its work in me according to your desires. Amen!"

Paul's Letter to the Ephesians

"...to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves." (Eph. 1:6)

Good morning everyone! I know we have spent several days in verse 6, specifically on the topic of God's grace. There is one more concept of His grace I want to cover before we move on.

So far, we've discovered that God's grace is not a New Testament concept but a God concept. God has always been a God of grace and has always extended his grace to mankind freely. We've discovered that God applies his grace to our lives at different places on our spiritual journeys to bring about different spiritual fruit in our lives. We've also discovered that people can say "no" to God's grace and God can withdraw His grace from an individual if He so chooses.

Question: If a believer sins and God applies grace to that believer's life, does that act of God enable that believer to keep on sinning and get away with it? In other words, does grace mean that God lets us off the hook when we make bad decisions? Let me put this idea in a story form that may be more familiar to us.

A mom and a dad have a teenage son and tell him to clean his room by Monday night. On Monday night they discover that he has not done what he was told to do. They are good-hearted parents and decide to show grace and not punish him for disobeying. Instead, they tell him that disobeying is wrong and to clean his room by Tuesday night. Tuesday night arrives and the room is not clean. Perhaps the volume of their voices rise but they once again give grace and set another time frame in which he must complete the job. The newest deadline comes and goes revealing no clean room. More grace is given. A week goes by and the room is still not clean. In the end, they don't deal with his disobedience and he (teenager) experiences no consequences for his wrong doing.

Does that story describe how you believe God treats his children? Can you see from the story that the "grace" given the son accomplished nothing. In fact, it actually enabled the teen to continue disobeying. It didn't take long for that teenager to understand that "grace" means he gets off the hook and he doesn't have to learn obedience.

While the parents in this story are "good-hearted", they are practicing bad parenting skills. They would defend their actions by telling us it is because they love their teenager so much that they show this type of grace. But look where this "love" and "grace" lead to. Their teenager does not learn to respect authority and to obey those whom God has placed over him. If this episode represents the entire way they guide their son, what kind of an adult

do you think this kid will become? What chances of being successful does he really have with this outlook on life? Have these parents really done the best thing? Haven't they, in fact, in the name of "love" and "grace", allowed a very negative pattern in the life of their son to develop?

Is God this kind of Father to us? Can His actions actually enable us to keep disobeying Him, refuse to learn respect for Him, and never learn obedience? In Paul's day, Christians in Rome seemed to take this view of God's grace. Paul tried to help them understand their error when he wrote, *"What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?...What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!"* (Romans 6:1-2, 15). Do we keep on disobeying so that God has to keep on giving us grace so that we can keep on disobeying so that God will keep on giving us grace...? Paul indicated a strong *"By no means!"* which the King James Version translated, *"God forbid."* From these verses we learn that we are never to use *"grace"* as a justification to keep on doing what we know is wrong.

WHAT CAN WE DO WITH THIS TRUTH TODAY?

I am concerned that many believers get their definition of God's grace from their own life experiences rather than from God's Word. They may actually, for example, look at their own parenting practices and assume God "Father's" them the same way they parent their own kids. This is a grave mistake. God reminded mankind of this fact when he said, *"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," says the Lord. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts."* (Isaiah 55:8-9 NKJV)

When God applies grace to a believer who has sinned, His purpose for doing so is two-fold. (1) He wants the believer to not have to eternally pay for his sin. (2) He wants to teach the believer how to be free from the slavery to that sin (Read all of Romans 6).

How are you responding to the grace that God extends to you? In your mind is He letting you off the hook? Are there no consequences? Are you treating grace as if it was a "free pass" to live the way you want and still be in good standing with God? I hope not. Because, if that is true, what you think is happening in the mind of God toward your sin...is not!

I encourage you to see God's grace as an opportunity to get it right the next time. I urge you to see God's grace as a strong foundation upon which to spiritually stand and learn how to be victorious over the schemes of our enemy. May we all learn to cooperate with God's purpose for His grace!

"Heavenly Father, help me see your grace as strength, motivation, and power to overcome the devil. Help me see it as a sign that you love me, that you believe in me, and that you are investing in my eternal future. Amen!"



PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

By Will Mackey - Day 14

"...to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves." (Ephesians 1:6)

In our last devotional we were leery of parents who set up a system of "grace" in which their teenage son learned to be *more* disobedient. We surmised that particular definition of "grace" as unhealthy and unwise. We also concluded our God does not "Father" us with "that" type of grace.

We learned when God applies grace to a believer who has sinned, His purpose for doing so is two-fold. (1) He wants the believer to not have to eternally pay for his sin. (2) He wants to teach the believer how to be free from the slavery to that sin. So...what happens if we disobey God? Grace is certainly offered but does that mean we are "off the hook"? Do we interpret when God does not "blast us into oblivion" for committing a sin that we have escaped all consequences for the sin?

While trying to prepare Israel to enter the Promised Land after their 40 year wilderness experience, Moses reminded the people of the "mixture" of God's grace and discipline. He reminded them of how God, even after their disobedience, led them and provided for them. He also reminded them that their 40 year journey to a place that should have only taken them 40 days to reach was an act of discipline on the part of God. He said, *"Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the Lord your God disciplines you."* (Deut. 8:5)

The Scriptures tell us that sometimes while showing grace God can discipline us very strongly, *"The Lord has chastened me severely, but he has not given me over to death."* (Ps. 118:18) The Bible also tells us the reason God disciplines us is to teach us his ways. It also says we are blessed if we receive discipline from God, *"Blessed is the man you discipline, O Lord, the man you teach from your law."* (Ps. 94:12) In addition, we learn that we are to submit to his discipline without resentment because his discipline proves his love for us, *"My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline and do not resent his rebuke, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in."* (Proverbs 3:11-12)

Less one is tempted to say, "That is the Old Testament. God deals differently with those who come to him through Christ", let's look at the New Testament. Paul wrote to the Corinthian church to help them straighten out some problems they were having. One problem he addressed was their misunderstanding and misuse of The Lord's Supper or Communion.

Listen to what Paul taught them about the Lord's discipline, *"Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning*

against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord, eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment. When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world.” (1 Cor. 11:27-32)

Did you catch that? God judges our intentions and our actions. If found lacking, he disciplines us so that we won't eventually wind up being judged with the unsaved. Did you also notice some of the ways the Lord disciplined the people of Corinth? They were *"weak"* (astheneo) meaning feeble, without strength to do anything effective and *"sick"* (arrhostos) meaning actually having an illness and *"asleep"* (koimesis) meaning reclined or a polite way to say someone has died. God's grace is implied in His reason for disciplining. It is so those being disciplined *"will not be condemned with the world."* Do you see the mixture of grace and discipline? True grace is not without discipline. Both come from God's love. If you want further study on this subject look at Hebrews 12:4-13 and Revelation 3:14-22.

Grace means God is willing to show mercy and not give us the full extent of what our sin deserves. Grace, however, does not mean we receive no punishment or discipline for the sin. If there were no consequences for disobedience, God would be like the unwise parents described on Tuesday.

What Can We Do With This Truth Today?

Grace and discipline go together. God's love provides both. We are used to seeing God's grace but do we know how to recognize God's discipline?

For Adam and Eve God took away Eden and caused them to work harder for what they had. For Cain it was the loss of his family identity. For Abraham it was shame and a bad name in Egypt. Later discipline came in the shape of deep sorrow for his confused and broken family. For Jacob it was a physical ailment (bad hip). For Moses God took away his privilege of entering the Promised Land. For Israel it was an extended time of suffering in the wilderness. Hundreds of years later God allowed their enemies to take them captive for 70 years for their disobedience. For David it was the loss of his newborn son. For Solomon God raised up a mighty adversary and eventually took the kingdom away from his family, except for one tribe. For the Corinthians it was personal weakness, sickness and even death. For many others God's discipline came through other hardships (Heb. 12:7).

Are there areas of your life that you consistently disobey God in? If so, God will be disciplining you. Could you be experiencing a form of God's discipline now? If your answer is yes, what are you going to do about it? Here is what God wants...repent of the sin, stop doing the sin, and obey Him in all things.

"Father, help me respond to your grace and discipline properly. Forgive, cleanse, teach, strengthen, and re-establish me on the solid ground of obedience. Amen!"



PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

By Will Mackey - Day 15

"In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ."
(Ephesians 1:7-10)

Good morning. Grab your Bible, a cup of java and let's study God's Word for a few moments today. Our passage for today is powerful. Before we dive in, let me briefly remind us of what Paul is doing in chapter 1. Remember Paul had begun an 11-verse burst of praise. From verse 4 through verse 14 Paul praised our Father for 9 different spiritual blessings. Also remember Paul was writing to the Ephesians to encourage them and to bring a spirit of revival to them. The first part of his plan was to remind them of what God had actually given them through Christ. He hoped that if they would review these great truths, they would once again be excited about their walk with Christ. We have already looked at 4 of the 9 spiritual blessings.

- Our Father chose us to know Christ.
- Our Father chose us to be holy and blameless in his sight.
- Our Father predestined us to be adopted as his sons and daughters.
- Our Father has freely given us his glorious grace through Christ.

Today's study looks at the 5th, 6th, and 7th spiritual blessings. Let me lay them out for you.

- Our Father redeemed us through Christ's blood.
- Our Father forgives us through Christ's blood.
- Our Father lavishes on us wisdom and understanding. Paul gave an example of such wisdom when he said God has made known to us a mystery of His will – that He will bring everything in existence under the leadership of Jesus Christ one day.

Paul said that "*redemption*" (apolutrosis) is a blessing the Father gives us. It literally means to purchase and set free by paying a price. "*...through his blood*" means Jesus' blood was the price paid (1 Peter 1:18). Mankind was a slave to the regulatory system of the law (Gal. 5:1), a slave to sin (Rom. 6), a slave to the power of Satan (Col.1:13-14), and a slave to the influence of a fallen world (Gal. 1:4). Because of Christ's sacrifice, when we believe, repent, and ask for God's redemption we are set free from these bondages.

Paul also said that "*forgiveness*" (aphesis) is a blessing our Father gives us in Christ. This word literally means to remiss or let go of. When we believe,

repent, and ask for Christ to be our Savior, God associates our sin, guilt, and punishment due with the death of Jesus, who took our sin upon himself and paid the debt we owed (Rom. 5:8-9; 8:3; 1Peter 2:24). Because Christ paid the debt for our sins, the Father can rightly and justifiably let go of the guilt of the penitent soul and the rightful punishment his sins merited.

The third spiritual blessing in our text today is actually described with two distinct words. However, these two ideas always go together much like two sides of the same coin. They are "*wisdom*" (sophia) and "*understanding*" (phronesis). Wisdom literally means knowledge or insight. Understanding means to know how to apply the knowledge/insight given in a practical way. In other words, God gives His children the ability to know His purposes and the understanding to know how to apply His will in every area of their lives.

Paul gave one example of wisdom. He said that God has revealed to His children information regarding His full purpose for sending Jesus to earth. Through the cross and resurrection of Jesus, when all things are ready, God plans to bring everything in existence underneath the leadership of Jesus Christ. When mankind fell into sin (Gen. 3-4), life began to fall apart. Mankind distanced himself from God, from himself, from other people, from the animals, and from the earth itself. Sin began a destructive process. Christ will one day gather up all that was scattered in the conflict with the forces of evil. He will one day restore unity and harmony to God's creation. He will return what was created to its intended original purpose/function (Rev. 21).

What Can We Do With This Truth Today?

The application is so obvious today, isn't it? We have been set free. Live in freedom. Don't let yourself be taken captive again. Stay away from the enemies' camp. Don't fellowship with those who would tempt you to return to bondage.

Enjoy forgiveness. Celebrate daily that God let go of the guilt and punishment you deserved. Understand the high price that was paid for your forgiveness. Think about it every day. Be so thankful for this act that you don't deliberately disrespect it by choosing sin.

God's plan is bigger than just your salvation. You are part of a bigger move of God. Rejoice that you have been included...that you are a significant piece of the larger puzzle. Enjoy the leadership of Jesus Christ, here and now and prepare to enjoy it in eternity.

"Father, thank You for the blessings You give me through Jesus. Thank You for setting me free. Thank You for forgiving my sins and setting aside my punishment. Thank You for Your wisdom and the understanding to put it to use. Thank you that I am Your child, living under Your authority and leadership. Amen!"



PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

By Will Mackey - Day 16

"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. And you also, were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory." (Ephesians 1:11-14)

Good morning. Are you ready to study God's Word for a little while ☺?
Great! Let's do it.

Our passage for today is a powerful one. Paul, trying to revive the quality of the Christians' walk with Christ in Ephesus, laid out for them 9 spiritual blessings they have through their relationship with Jesus. We will work with #8 today.

In verses 11 and 12 Paul talked about the fact that he and those who believed in Christ first (probably the Apostles and Jewish Christians) were chosen, were fulfilling God's will, and were a testimony of praise for God's glory. In verse 13 he turns his attention back to the Ephesian Christians. He said they were included in Christ when they *"heard the word of truth, the gospel..."* and they *"believed"*. Now comes the 8th spiritual blessing.

Paul taught them when they believed, they were *"marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit..."* The word *"seal"* is (sphragizo from sphragis). In that day, official papers were fastened together with a blob of hot wax (sorry no staples/paper clips yet). Before the wax cooled off, the signer of the document pressed his identification (usually a signet ring) into the wax, thus putting his authentic mark on the document. Paul told the Ephesians that the Holy Spirit was God's authentic identification mark in the life of the believer. There is an important clarification to be made here. Paul uses (sphragizo) as a noun not a verb. The Scripture does not say the believer is sealed (verb) but is marked with an identification seal (noun).

When we believe and are filled with the Holy Spirit, God puts his identification mark on us (in us). Because of that mark (the Holy Spirit), others will know who we belonged to...whose family we are part of. This brings a whole new understanding to the *"fruit of the Spirit"* (Gal. 5:22-23), doesn't it? The fruit of the Spirit are really the characteristics of the Spirit. When Spirit-like characteristics come out of our lives, they mark our lives or identify our lives as owned and led by our Father.

Notice the next phrase... *"...who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance..."* The coming of the Holy Spirit into our lives is our *"mark"*, God's identification *"seal"*, and the fulfillment of His *"promise"*. Paul then added to this listing by designating the Holy Spirit as *"a deposit"*. The word *"deposit"* is the word (arrabon) which literally means "earnest". If you have ever purchased a house, you recognize this concept. Usually to buy a home you have to put up "earnest money" which shows good faith to the seller that you intend to complete the deal and pay the full amount at the proper time if all the agreed upon conditions are met. This is exactly what this word means in the text.

Paul is saying that by giving believers the Holy Spirit, God is giving the Spirit as an earnest...a deposit...a first installment to show that the full amount (our inheritance) will be paid at the right time if all the conditions be kept. By giving us His Spirit, He is guaranteeing that the full amount will be available if we are faithful and overcome to the end (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21).

What Can We Do With This Truth Today?

In Romans 8:23 Paul called our experience with the Holy Spirit the "firstfruits" of more to come. Think about this...the Holy Spirit brings us new life, fills us, cleanses us, protects us, teaches us, comforts us, helps us communicate with the Father and empowers us to love others supernaturally. If His interaction with us now is just a "deposit", can you imagine what Heaven will be like? The experience we currently have with the Holy Spirit is just a foretaste of the inexpressible joy we will have when we are in the direct presence of God one day. It is as if God has given us enough to wet our appetites for more and to assure us that one day He will give us all.

God has placed a considerable investment in us. He publicly tells the world that we are His. He is not ashamed to mark us as His own...to put His identification seal of the Spirit upon us. That gives another level of insight into His great love for us, doesn't it? That tells us that He really does believe in us and has eternal plans for us. If He didn't, He would not have given us such a priceless Earnest.

Does our public claim to be related to Him match His public Claim to be related to us? Is our investment in the things of His Kingdom an adequate response to His Investment into our lives?

"Father, thank You for investing Your Spirit in me. Thank you for not being embarrassed by me and for identifying me as belonging to You. You believe in me. You have plans for me. Help me be faithful to



PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

By Will Mackey - Day 17

***"Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory."
(Ephesians 1:13-14)***

Good morning everyone! I am praying for you today...calling your names before our Father...asking Him to bless and strengthen you.

We will finish up the list of 9 spiritual blessings today by looking at number 9. Paul told the Ephesians that God gives his children an *"inheritance"* through Christ. Think about this concept for a moment. We have an inheritance that we will receive one day. It is something our Father has set aside for us and will give to us after we pass from this life to the better life.

Strangely enough, God does not give us many details regarding what our inheritance will entail. There seems to be a mystery surrounding it. Let me do a quick run-down of the New Testament and show us what God does say about our inheritance.

He tells us our inheritance is an eternal inheritance (Heb. 9:15). In other words, our inheritance will be given us when we enter eternity. We are told our inheritance is eternal life (Matt. 19:29). We will inherit the kingdom (Matt. 25:34), meaning we will get to live out eternity under God's immediate Presence and Leadership. Jesus told us that we would inherit the earth (Matt. 5:5), obviously referring to the New Earth (Rev. 21). Peter taught that our inheritance cannot perish, spoil, or fade (1 Peter 1:4). Paul taught that we will share this inheritance with the saints (Col. 1:12).

We are also told our inheritance is our salvation (Heb. 1:14). It will be a blessing (1 Peter 3:9) and filled with glory (Rom. 8:17). Our inheritance will be incorruptible (1 Corinthians 15:50) and will be reserved for us in heaven (1 Peter 1:4). It includes eating from the Tree of Life (Rev. 2:7) and being safe from the second death (spiritual death – Rev. 2:11). We will receive hidden manna and a new name (Rev. 2:17).

Our inheritance will include having authority over nations and receiving the morning star (Rev. 2:26-29). And finally, our inheritance will include robes of white, our names being kept in the Book of Life, and Jesus will acknowledge us to the Father and His angels (Rev. 3:5-6).

Some of those things mentioned are easier to understand than the others. Even the best of Biblical Scholars can only offer their best guess as to what a few of the descriptions really mean. My point is this: God is keeping most of

the detailed descriptions of our inheritance a secret...for now. Does He want it to be a surprise? Maybe so! Is it just impossible for us to understand with our earthly minds? Probably so!

As I think and pray, another thought comes to mind. I wonder if God keeps the details of our reward a secret because He doesn't want us to be motivated to serve Him by our desire for a reward. He wants us to be motivated to serve Him by our love for Him and our trust in Him.

What Can We Do With This Truth Today?

I imagine most of us have given thought to what it would be like to come into a large amount of money as an inheritance. With an inheritance you would not only enjoy a measure of wealth but you would also be touched with the thought that a loved one cared so much for you that they left a portion or all of what they owned to you for your enrichment and future success.

This should be our perspective regarding our eternal inheritance. Our inheritance, whatever it includes, will be given to us by our Father, out of His great love and care for us. He promises us, if we overcome through faith, we will inherit life in the New Heaven and on the New Earth (Rev. 21:7-8). Wow!

May we deeply love the One who loves us so much. May we thank Him ahead of time for the wonderful inheritance He is planning for us.

"Father, thank You for leading Paul to remind the Ephesian Christians of the spiritual blessings they had in Christ. I have the same spiritual blessings through my relationship with Him. My heart is overwhelmed with gratitude for choosing me, for calling me to a holy and blameless life, for adopting me, for extending amazing grace to me, for freeing me from slavery to the enemy, for forgiving me, for making wisdom and understanding available to me, for marking me with Your Holy Spirit, and for setting aside an inheritance for me. May the renewed knowledge of these blessings ignite a fiery faith in me and cause me to live a life that honors the God who has blessed me. Amen!"



PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

By Will Mackey - Day 18

***"For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and your love for the saints, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers."
(Ephesians 1:15-16)***

Good morning everyone! Grab your Bible and a cup of something hot and let's sit at Christ's feet today and learn from His Word. I must confess to you that I am writing this in the middle of the night. I can't sleep. My heart is heavy for you and the Kingdom of God this night.

It seems to me our enemy is working overtime on Christ's church. His attacks often come in the form of personal hurts and frustrations, but also in the form of stress, busyness, and distractions. I think the last one is his favorite...at least right now. It never ceases to amaze me how easily he can derail us from the work of our Lord by simply increasing our stress or frustration level. *"Oh Father, help your people push through the enemy's schemes and stay focused on Your eternal work."*

Well...speaking of work, let's get to work. Remember...Paul was trying to bring revival to the hearts and lives of the Ephesian Christians. He began this process by reminding them of many (9) of the spiritual blessings they had from the Father through their relationship with Christ. Now he moves to step 2. Paul shared with them how he prayed for them.

"For this reason..." refers back to what we have just studied. Because of how rich they were in spiritual blessings from Christ, he interceded for them. Notice his next words...*"...ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and your love for the saints..."* Isn't that an interesting phrase? Notice the part *"ever since I heard..."*. Paul started the church years earlier but had been away from the church for several years. He had obviously received some recent news about the church which was, at least partly positive. He heard about *"your faith in the Lord...and your love for the saints."* After hearing this, he began to pray for them with an increased intensity.

Here is my first point. Most people stop praying for people in the church when Paul started praying for this church. Think about it for a moment! We usually pray for people so they begin to trust the Lord and love God's people. When they arrive at that level of spiritual maturity, we often stop praying for them and turn our prayers in other directions. This is precisely the time when Paul increased his prayers for them. This is also the time when the enemy of our souls begins to attack at a new level. He rarely attacks us when we are doing wrong or when we are doing nothing for God.

However, when we are trusting the Lord and loving people the way we should, the enemy launches an assault that cripples many believers.

Paul knew what we must learn...there must be much intercession made for the saints of God. We must pray much for Christ's church, not only for their souls' sake but also for the Kingdom's sake. When Christians fall or get discouraged and side-tracked, the Kingdom of God suffers because it doesn't move forward as it should.

I see this happening in our church right now. God has given us His vision and called us to do His work and yet, because of the enemy's attack, many of our people are finding it hard to focus and commit to the work of the Kingdom. I am increasing my prayer for the saints. Will you join me?

The second thing I notice in today's verses is that Paul gives us a perfect description of how the church should be characterized. God's church should have "*faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and...love for all the saints...*" (present saints and future saints). Scripture tells us these two ideas go together. Our faith (and love) for Christ will produce in us a love for the saints (and future saints). In fact, John tells us in 1 John 2:9, "*Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness.*" A true faith in Christ will so transform us that we will be able to love others with the same love Christ loves us with. John suggests if we do not experience the ability to love others as we have been loved, then perhaps we have good reason to question the legitimacy of our own faith.

Think about some of the examples you've read about where people claimed to love Christ but no love for others followed. How about the monks of old? Their love for God led them to live their lives in monasteries far away from the general population. Even in the monasteries they lived alone, rarely having contact even with other monks.

Or how about when other countries of old would set out to conquer other worlds in the name of Christ? The Spanish Inquisition comes to mind. Imagine arriving on a new continent in the name of Christ and then persecuting the people native to that land until they conformed to your Christian teachings? Absolutely absurd!

What Can We Do With This Truth Today?

I suppose I have already mentioned several ideas earlier in today's study. So...as a recap...we are to intercede continually for God's people with great detail. Unfortunately, our enemy is alive and well. Secondly, we should test the quality of our faith by examining how well we love others. Faith in Christ and love for others are inseparable.

"Father, enlarge my heart for Your people. Ignite a desire in me to pray for my brothers and sisters...to cover their lives with my prayers. Help me to demonstrate my love for them by praying much for them. Amen!"



PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

By Will Mackey - Day 19

"I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation so that you may know him better." (Ephesians 1:17)

Last time we discovered that Paul began sharing with the Ephesian Christians specifically how he prayed for them. To begin with, Paul prayed to *"the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father..."* In other words Paul prayed to the same Father that Jesus prayed to when He was on the earth. Notice the deep respect Paul conveys when he speaks of God. I wonder if Christians today have lost a little of that awe and respect when they speak about their God? In some Christian circles, the concept of God is reduced to someone who listens to us and gives us what we ask for...much like an employee might do. Paul speaks of God as *"the glorious Father"...*the head of everything...the great Creator of the universe.

Notice the first thing Paul asked for on behalf of the Ephesian church. He asked the Father to give them *"the Spirit of wisdom and revelation..."* Paul wants them to have, from the Holy Spirit, *"wisdom"* (sophia) and *"revelation"* (epignosis). "Sophia" is the word for knowledge or insight about the things that matter most in life such as God, humanity, and relationships.

"Epignosis" is from the base word "gnosis" which also means "to know". When the "epi" is in front of the word it means something is larger and intense in scope. In other words this knowledge will come about from a *"revelation"* from God and will be more than an academic or theoretical giving of knowledge. It will be deeply personal and intimate and will be given in a much larger portion.

Paul prays that God's Spirit will teach them the deeper things of God and His eternal truths. No wisdom that is needed to live life according to God's will and to help others know God's will is to be withheld. Paul asks that deep insights into how the Father thinks and feels and plans will be given. He asks that these Christians would have a spiritual disposition for understanding God's motive and movement upon the earth. They were to know about the things that concerned God and about how He would minister to the people of the earth.

All this wisdom and knowledge is to come by the Spirit's personal revelation as they spend time with God in fellowship. Think about this for a moment. In our society we are used to going to an "expert" when we want something. We go to a shoe maker (brand of shoes) when we want a pair of shoes. We go to a clothes manufacturer (brand of clothes) when we want clothes. We go

to a trainer when we want to learn a sport or get fit. We go to a pastor when we want to know something about God. What Paul is advocating here is that the Ephesian Christians receive God's revelation personally and learn to think and live according to the wisdom and revelation given them directly by the Spirit. He wants them to be deep thinkers motivated by what they have heard from God themselves.

And here is the reason for it all. Paul wanted the Spirit to give them wisdom and revelation so they could *"know him (the Father) better."* Wow! Did you catch that? The purpose for all of that was so they could know the Father better...so they could grow in their knowledge about Him and so they could grow in their experience with Him.

We are used to this idea applied in other areas. If you are a tradesman, you are expected to grow in your knowledge and experience of your trade. I read once that cardiologists learn 50% more about the human heart every 5 years than they knew the previous 5 years. It is natural to move toward maturity. It is normal to research, learn, and experience deeper things in other areas of life.

Shouldn't it be like this with our relationship with God, too? Christians should get to know God better every day. If a friendship doesn't grow it tends to vanish after a while. If people relate to God today based on the same way they understood Him a year ago, that relationship has to be stale and unfulfilling. God's nature is so infinite in its depth, breadth, and height. His character is limitless. We could spend eternity exploring God's nature and never know all about Him.

What Can We Do With This Truth Today?

Can you even imagine the depth of wisdom and revelation that is available to us as His children? Anything we need to know about life and how to live it according to the Father's will is ours for the asking (James 1:5). God wants to share more and more of Himself with us so that we can be closer to Him. Can you fathom the level of life that is available to us if we would only pursue it? How do we pursue it? If this wisdom and knowledge comes by revelation of the Spirit then we need to spend time in fellowship with God's Spirit and His Word. That is the place where the revelation happens.

Until we are ready to set a goal in knowing God better and willing to slow down and fellowship with God and His Word, we won't be a people of *"wisdom and revelation"*. With only a superficial understanding of God, our only hope can be to barely make it through life and enter heaven by the skin of our teeth.

"Father, I want to know You like never before. I want to know your heart, the way You think, the way You feel, and why You do what You do. I want to understand Your desires for humanity and how I can cooperate with Your perfect will. Amen!"



PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

By Will Mackey - Day 20

***"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, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe...*" (Ephesians 1:18-19)**

Good morning everyone! I hope your week is a great one. Remember in our last time together we began looking at the second step in Paul's strategy to revive the spiritual lives of the Ephesian Christians. Paul began sharing with them how he was praying for them.

The first way he prayed for them was to ask the Father to give them wisdom regarding the deeper things of God and the knowledge of how to implement that wisdom in the areas of their lives. He wanted this for them so that they could ***"know him (the Father) better."*** (17). Verses 18-19 tell us the second prayer he prayed for them. Let me outline it for us.

I. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so you may know...

- A. the hope to which he has called you
- B. the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints
- C. his incomparably great power for us who believe

Notice the phrase ***"that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened..."*** Our spiritual heart (kardia) is the whole inner life of our mind, will, and emotions. It is the moral control room of our soul. It is our heart that is to be pure (Matt. 5:8) by the cleansing of the Holy Spirit (Acts 15:9). The Scriptures tell us that God knows our hearts (Psalm 44:21), searches our hearts (1 Chronicles 28:9), opens our hearts (Acts 16:14), re-creates our hearts in salvation (Ezek. 11:19), tests our hearts to see our loyalty to Him (Jeremiah 12:3), strengthens our hearts (Psalm 27:14), and establishes our hearts to walk holy before Him (1 Thess. 3:13).

The state of the heart determines whether one is good or evil. It is out of the heart that the issues of life flow (Prov. 4:23). It is with the heart that mankind believes (Rom. 10:10) and loves God (Mark 12:30). And it is also in the heart that Christ dwells (Eph. 3:17).

Paul prayed that the Father would enable their hearts to see things as they really are...that they would have moral and spiritual comprehension unlike they had before. Think about the difference between looking into a room when it is dark and then looking into the same room when the light is turned on. When the room is dark, we see faint images at best. If we tried to walk into the room, we would bump up against whatever was in the room. But when the light is on, we see things in the room as they really are. We know where things are and how to navigate through the room successfully.

This is what Paul is praying for in the lives of the Ephesians. He deeply wants their hearts to see things in the spiritual and physical realms as they really are. He wants them to be able to walk through life with an understanding of what God is doing in the heavenly realms and in the earthly realms. He wants them to see God's larger agenda and understand how they can daily cooperate with that agenda as they live out their Christian lives in their sphere of the world.

What Can We Do With This Truth Today?

What would it be like if our Father began to enlighten the eyes of our hearts? Would our lives look any different? You bet they would!!!

How differently would we view the other people in our lives? Would we see the role we play at our jobs and the people we have daily contact with as having more value...more eternal importance? What about the neighborhoods we live in? Do we live where we do by accident? Could it be that those who live in front, beside, or behind us are there by Divine design...that God has arranged our lives with incredible eternal opportunities for producing much spiritual fruit?

How would that affect the way we talk to our families, friends, acquaintances, strangers, or how little we talk to God? Would it make any difference in what we spend our time thinking of, worrying about, angry with, or feeling guilty for? Would we sleep more...or less? Would we spend more time making money to buy all the stuff we want...or less time? Would we spend more time by ourselves or with other people? Would we watch TV more or less often?

What we say and what we do and the things that are a priority to us all come from the way we see God, ourselves, and our world. If the way our hearts saw the Lord...His Sovereignty...His Will for the earth...was enlightened, we would definitely live with more passion for Him than we do. If the way our hearts saw ourselves...our value...our vast worth to God...was opened up to another level of comprehension, we would most certainly live with more purpose than we do. If our hearts could see more clearly how God sees the people we see every day, I am convinced our relationships would be lived out with more focus and priority than they are now.

Will you ask God to enlighten the eyes of your heart? Will you pray Paul's prayer for another person today?

"Father, our eyes too often only see the surface issues of the material world we live within. We don't see how things really are. We don't see as You see. Help us see through Your eyes. Help us be engaged with the real issues going on around us. Empower us to live deeper than surface living. Enable us to live as You created us to live...to think as You created us to think...to feel as You created us to feel...to influence as You created us to influence. Amen!"



PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

By Will Mackey - Day 21

"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, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe..."
(Ephesians 1:18-19)

Hi everybody! Grab a cup of something hot and your Bible and let's study for a while.

Paul is sharing how he prayed for the Ephesian Christians. First, he asked God to give them wisdom and the know-how to apply that wisdom. This, he said, would help them know the Father better. Secondly, he prayed that God would enlighten the eyes of their hearts. He asked that they could walk through life with an understanding of what God was doing in the heavenly and earthly realms. Now we come to our study today.

Paul told the Ephesians that there were three things that the enlightenment of their hearts would help them know. We will touch on the first one today. Let me outline it for us again.

I. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so you may know...

- A. the hope to which he has called you
- B. the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints
- C. his incomparably great power for us who believe

First of all, if our hearts are enlightened, we will be able to better know *"the hope to which he has called you..."* When Paul used the word *"hope"* he was not talking about the "I hope so" definition we have today. When people use the word "hope" today, it has an uncertain feel to it. When a kid says he hopes he gets to go to the park after school, he means he is not sure if his parents will take him but he does want to go. This is not the idea behind this word as it is used in the New Testament.

Eternal life with God is often referred to as "the hope" that Christians have (Rom. 8:22-25, Titus 2:13, 1Pet. 1:3). As I mentioned a moment ago, this does not mean that Christians "hope so" that heaven is real and that one day we get to go there. When we speak of heaven as our "hope" we speak of it with faith as our certain knowledge of the future...our assurance of our eternal destiny with Christ. The Bible uses the word "hope" to describe heaven because it is a place of hope rather than a place of despair.

Our world is going down-hill fast. The Bible says things will get worse before they get better (Matthew 24). Sin destroys and brings despair. If we were to look only at the world, we would lose all hope. It is on a pathway for destruction. In contrast to this, God is a God of hope. He promises that at the end of it all there

will be a new heaven and a new earth (Rev. 21) As Christians, when life is over on this earth, we have the assurance that we will live eternally on a new earth and in a new heaven. We will have Christ, life, purpose, safety, happiness, and fulfillment...or using another word – hope.

What Can We Do With This Truth Today?

Hope is such an important element of our lives. Life is hard and sometimes it gets harder. No amount of salvation will exempt a person from this. There is no level of relationship with the Savior that will take the possibility of this away from a person's life.

Whenever I feel closed in by the world or see the hurt that humans bring upon other humans, my mind goes to my "hope". When our Savior returns... that event will usher in our great hope...a life in eternity with our Lord. On that day *"God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, no sorrow, nor crying; and there shall be no more pain..."* (Rev. 21:4).

When we begin to see with new eyes what our Lord is doing in our world and begin to see the destruction that sin causes in the lives of those who God loves, we better understand the greatness of the hope to which God has invited us.

We are called (invited) to live lives free from despair. This is only possible when God opens the eyes of our hearts to reveal His absolute Sovereignty at work on the earth. We need not despair. We are looking forward to the hope that is ours through Jesus Christ.

Will you ask God to enlighten the eyes of your heart? Will you ask God to do that for another person today?

"Father, help me to understand better the hope to which You have called me. As I see the despair that sin and rebellion brings to the human soul, enlarge my understanding of the freedom from despair that Your Gospel brings now and one day in heaven. Amen!"



PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

By Will Mackey - Day 22

"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, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and 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..."
(Ephesians 1:18-20)

Good morning everyone! I hope your week is going great. Grab a cup of something hot and your Bible and let's spend some time together.

Let me update us on where we are. Paul is sharing how he prayed for the Ephesian Christians. First, he asked God to give them wisdom and the know-how to apply that wisdom. This, he said, would help them know the Father better. Secondly, he prayed that God would enlighten the eyes of their hearts. He asked that they could walk through life with an understanding of what God was doing in His world.

Paul told the Ephesians that there were three things that the enlightenment of their hearts would help them know. We looked at the first one last Thursday and will touch on the last two today. Let me outline it for us again.

I. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so you may know...(18)

- A. the hope to which he has called you (18)
- B. the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints (18)
- C. his incomparably great power for us who believe (19-20)
 - 1. The power is like the working of his mighty strength
 - 2. The power is like the power when he raised Christ from the dead
 - 3. The power is like the power when he seated Christ at his right hand.

First, when light is brought to our hearts we more clearly understand the hope (heaven) for which we are awaiting. Secondly, Paul said we also can better know "*the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints*." I won't spend time here since we just talked about our inheritance on Day 17. But think about this for a moment. Paul is saying that the Father's inheritance is filled with riches (*things that are precious to God and the believer*).

The closer we walk with Him the more we will understand and appreciate what our Father has made for us to enjoy one day (*our inheritance*). Did you notice the phrase "*in the saints*"? This seems to indicate that at least part of the riches of his inheritance is found *in* us. In other words, we are part of God's wealth. God sees those who come to Him through Christ as some of His most valued treasures.

Third, when light is brought to our hearts we more clearly experience *"his incomparably great power for us who believe."* The more we have our spiritual eyes opened and our hearts illuminated by God's Spirit, the more we will experience the mighty power of God in our lives. Paul told the Ephesians that the power God gives to those who believe is God's own mighty strength and is the same power that raised Christ from the dead and the same power that seated Christ at his right hand after the resurrection. Imagine this...God's power is for those people who will *"believe"* Him...who trust Him...who will take Him at His Word even when the circumstances in life look the opposite of what God has said...who will *"believe"* Him each day and every day.

What Can We Do With This Truth Today?

Let's think about this. Paul said to the Ephesians and is saying to us today that God is ready to pour out His power on those who really believe. What will God give us power for?

God empowers our salvation. He converts our souls away from the power of sin. He breaks through the many walls of resistance we have placed between Him and us. He convicts, convinces, and moves us to repentance. He forgives us, dealing mightily with the punishment due us. He displaces our guilt and frees us from the power Satan has had over us because of guilt and shame. He breaks the dependencies our own souls developed for the sin that ruled over us. He cleanses our hearts from its disloyalty and dysfunctions. Our hearts are set free to love God with all that we are and all that we have.

Our Father calls us to join His mission and empowers us to follow Him. He makes the way and opens the doors of other men's hearts despite the efforts of His enemies. He gives His children spiritual gifting so that love and grace can be shown and communicated, even in the face of hatred and violence. He empowers miracles so that the lost will see that He loves them and means only good to them.

He sustains those in His army who are battle weary, tempted, and discouraged. He breathes a freshness of life back into them. He heals their wounds and strengthens their minds. He refreshes their faith and teaches them how to defeat His enemies and theirs. He enables His own to be faithful, to fight the good fight, and to receive their reward.

And one day, He will raise His own from the dead and give them the keys to His Kingdom...a new heaven and a new earth. And it will be His great power that creates it all and sustains it all forever and ever. Wow...what power!

May I ask you a rather serious question? *Is your life characterized by the revelation of God's mighty power or are you living a spiritually weak and defeated life?* If it is the latter, according to Paul, you have a "belief" problem. Is it possible that you are refusing to trust God in an area of your life? The Scriptures tell us it is impossible to please God without unswerving faith (Heb. 11:6).

"Father, enlighten the eyes of my heart so that I might know your mighty strength applied to every area of my life. A characteristic of your Kingdom is power. Enable me to live in your power so that others might see you and believe. If there is an area of my life in which I am not trusting you...forgive me, correct me, and help my unbelief. Amen!"



PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

By Will Mackey - Day 23

"...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, 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. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body the fullness of him who fills everything in every way."
(Ephesians 1:19-23)

Hi everyone! I pray you have enjoyed walking with our Savior this week. I am also praying that our Father is enlightening the eyes of your hearts and enabling you to walk in step with His Spirit each and every day. This is what makes the Christian life so exciting. We get to partner with God. This is our privilege through Christ.

We are finishing up chapter 1 of Ephesians. At the end of Paul's prayer for the Ephesian Christians he adds a few important statements about Christ and the authority the Father has given Him. He states that the Father has "*seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms*" and then says a few things about that "*seat*". He said Christ's seat is:

- I. far above all rule, authority, power, dominion, and title that can be given now or in the future
 - A. God places all things under his feet
 - B. God appointed him to be head over everything for the church
 - Which is his body
 - Which is the fullness of Christ who fills everything in every way

First, Paul wanted them to understand it is the power of our heavenly Father that raised Christ from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the spiritual realm. This place of authority and leadership is the highest leadership position that exists under the authority of the Father. It is above every other possible spiritual power.

The various words used by Paul are words that somewhat mean the same thing. Paul is using the vocabulary list of the Gnostics, a religious cult at the time, which spoke a lot about the spiritual authority of angels and how the angels could gain power and over-power different elements of spiritual and earthly life. Paul wanted his readers to know that Christ has authority over all such angels, those who serve God or fallen angels. Paul emphatically states that Jesus is over everything and everyone, all the time, every time.

All such beings and any influence or power they may possess are "*under his feet*" or completely subject to Him. He can do anything He wants to them or with them. Their power is limited and cannot prevent Him from doing whatever pleases Him.

Not only does Christ have full authority over the complete spiritual and earthly realms, *secondly*, Paul told them that the Father has given Jesus the position of

"head over everything for the church". Too often people dismiss the church as an option when it comes to living the Christian life. Why would the Father give Jesus the position of *"head"* over something that wasn't all that important...something that was only an option for believers?

If Christ is really the head over the church then the church should be about the real business of Christ. The *"head"* wants to lead His arms, hands, and feet on missions that will accomplish His plans. Too often the body is distracted or not willing to be led by the head. Unfortunately, Christ's body thinks for itself instead of letting the head do the thinking. They (*the parts of Christ's body*) set out using their gifts and abilities to do what they want to do...to do only what they can do with the time they have to give and the abilities they see in themselves. This is a recipe for unfruitfulness...as God counts fruitfulness. How sad!

Paul said the church is *"the fullness of him"* which means that the church fulfills his leadership role. By that I mean that the *"head"* cannot do all that His role needs to do without a body to follow Him. Therefore, it is imperative that the church be the body of Christ and function in our role as it is meant to be.

Just so we don't take the last concept too far in our minds and think that Christ needs us so He can be who He is, Paul put the last phrase in...*"who fills everything in every way."* Even though the church fulfills his leadership role, He fills the church with Himself and with gifts/graces so that the church can be His body accurately.

What Can We Do With This Truth Today?

When we enter a relationship with Jesus, we meet the One who is over everything. Talk about friends in high places ☺. Given who Christ is and His place of authority over all things, why would any of us be satisfied with living a defeated life? There should be no sin strong enough to enslave us. There would be no affliction from the enemy that can stop us. There should be no spiritual hold on those we love that Christ cannot break and bring freedom to. There would be no community His church cannot successfully bring the gospel to. There should be no neighborhood that the prince of darkness can keep Christ's church from penetrating and winning. There would be no local, state, or national leadership need in which Jesus cannot break evil's hold upon and give the people a true voice of wisdom.

What keeps us from seeing our Lord and His authority in our world like we should? Paul suggests it is that the eyes of our hearts are not enlightened. Often, our hearts are led by our own senses (what we see, hear, etc.) and not by the Holy Spirit.

What could happen if we would get up every day and commit to walking in step with the Spirit on that day? What if we specifically asked Christ to open our eyes so we could see what He was doing that day for the people in our little part of the world? What would happen if we asked Him if we could join the work He was already planning to do? How much different would our homes, neighborhood, work places and the places we frequent most look to us...become for us? What an incredible life that would be!

"Father, enlighten the eyes of my heart so that I might see what You are already doing all around me. Teach me to see through different eyes. Give me the desire and the courage to join Your work in the lives of the people around me. Amen!"



PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

By Will Mackey - Day 24

¹As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ²in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature^[a] and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. ⁴But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. ⁶And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:1-7)

Hi everyone! Let's get to work by remembering what Paul is doing in his letter. He has heard that the Ephesian Church was experiencing some spiritual platitudes. He writes this letter to inspire them and to help them re-ignite their passion for the things of Christ and the building of His Kingdom.

In chapter one Paul employed two items to begin the "reviving" process. First, he wrote to help them realize nine spiritual blessings that were theirs because of their relationship with Christ. Second, he shared his specific prayers for them so they could recognize the spiritual possibilities they could attain to. Now, using all of chapter 2, Paul continued his goal by helping them remember where Christ had brought them from. Our passage for today reminded them that Christ had brought them from death to life.

Paul said, "...you were dead in *transgressions and sins*, in which you used to live..." The word transgression (paraptoma) means to take a wrong road by following the flesh and fallen, carnal instinct. He explained this concept in more detail in verse 3 when he said, "All of us also lived among them at one time, *gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts.*"

The word sin (hamartiai) deals more with missing the mark due to conscious choices of the mind based on wrong ideas and motives. Paul uses both words to describe the full extent of spiritual death. For the spiritually dead the thoughts, ideas, and motives are self-serving and inaccurate, so much so, that one finds himself making wrong choices and living out of human, fallen instinct instead of according to Divine revelation.

Notice also that Paul said this is the way they "used to live..." For the Christian lives not according to human, fleshy instinct but according to God's Divine Word and because of this, his mind can be renewed (Romans 12:1-2) and his mind, ideas, and motives can accurately reflect God's wisdom and will.

Paul mentioned that two things kept perpetuating their spiritual death. He said it was, "...when you followed the ways of the world..." and by following "the ruler of the

kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient." When we follow society's consensus of life and truth, it leads us away from the Lord. Following the influences of ungodly people, even if it is mutually accepted by the majority, is the same as following the influence of the devil. He is a major spiritual influencer who rules the hearts and lives of most in society.

Paul reminded them that they were spiritually dead but that Christ had made them alive. Notice verses 4-6. He said it was God's love and mercy *"because of his great love for us, God who is rich in mercy..."* that initiated this process. Because of His love and mercy, God gave *"grace"* and *"saved"* them. As a result of being saved, God *"raised (them) up with Christ and seated (them) with him in the heavenly realms..."* In other words, God brought them into a full relationship and fellowship with His Son Jesus and as a result they were exalted to a place of honor, as family members, with Him. As a result, one day in heaven all will know it is because of God's grace and kindness that any person is there (7).

What Can We Do With This Truth Today?

These great truths should revive faith in all of us. There is nothing like a trip down memory lane to bring a proper perspective to our present condition. How can we live in a state of spiritual dullness when God's love, mercy, and grace have brought us from death to life? We were all dead in our trespasses and sins and now we are fully alive. He has brought our very souls to spiritual life. He has re-created our hearts and minds and therefore the lives we live.

How is your walk with Christ these days? Are you walking through a spiritually dry time where it is hard to stay focused and hard to stay excited about spiritual things? I know how that feels. I've experienced those times too. Sometimes this is caused by willful sin and the only cure is repentance and walking in obedience. It won't go away until you face up and deal with God about it.

If, after examination, you have determined that it is not a result of willful sin, then maybe our study today offers you a great idea. Why don't you take some time and think backwards. Think back to what your life was like before Christ came into it. Remember and compare the "before" and the "after" you knew Christ. After some lengthy reflection then spend some time thanking God for what he did for you and for what he is doing now. Most of the time, this will revive the dullness and put pep back into your spiritual step. God loves you and has initiated a relationship with you. *The Sovereign Lord of the Universe knows you, loves you, wants to spend time with you and has a purpose for you.* If that truth doesn't get your spiritual motor running then you...☺

"Father, sometimes it seems that just going through life saps every bit of strength we have. And then if you add on to that all the pressures and stresses that come with life, it can really take its toll. It is easy for us to get into a pattern of running full steam and then collapsing each night for a few hours of sleep and then waking to do it all over again. When we live this way, it is like we are running on instinct instead of a thoughtful plan.

Lord, there has to be more to life than that. Help us today to know how to live as we were designed to live. Teach us how to enjoy our spiritual aliveness and to live our lives out of that "aliveness". Show us how to live by Divine revelation and to interact with our world through godly thoughts, ideas, motives, and actions. Help us live life to the fullest (John 10:10). Amen!"



PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

By Will Mackey - Day 25

**⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.
¹⁰ For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Ephesians 2:8-10)**

Good morning. I've been thinking about you this morning and praying that our Father will bless you with more of Himself. Enjoy His Presence today.

In chapter one Paul employed two items to help this church re-ignite its excitement for the things of God. First, he wrote to help them realize nine spiritual blessings that were theirs because of their relationship with Christ. Second, he shared his specific prayers for them so they could recognize the spiritual possibilities they could attain to. Now, using all of chapter 2, Paul continued his goal by helping them remember where Christ had brought them from. Paul reminded them in verses 1-7 that Christ had brought them from death to life. In today's study he reminds them that Christ had brought them from a life outside of God's grace to a life supported by His grace.

In our passage for today, Paul has two main points. Let me put the passage in outline form.

- I. By grace you have been saved, through faith (8)
 - A. and this not from yourselves (8)
 - B. it is a gift of God (8)
 - C. not by works, so that no one can boast (9)

- II. We are God's workmanship (10)
 - A. created in Christ Jesus (10)
 - B. to do good works (10)
 - C. which God prepared in advance for us to do (10)

Paul taught the Ephesians that it was by *"grace you have been saved, through faith..."* It is only because of the love, mercy, and grace of God that a human can come to a saving relationship with God. Believe it or not, this passage is one of the most misunderstood...primarily because so many don't read all of it.

Many come away concentrating only on the first five words and making some strong assumptions based upon those words. They say that this part of the verse proves that humanity has nothing to do with its own salvation. If it is by grace that we are saved then there is nothing we can do to participate in our own salvation. If one continues down the road of this logic, one must also say that since mankind had nothing to do with becoming saved, then mankind can have nothing to do with becoming unsaved. Thought out to its natural conclusion, this idea would give religious license to humanity living any way it pleases and still maintaining a "right" standing with God. In fact, this very concept was a Gnostic (a cult in the first

century) concept that Paul, John, and a host of Biblical writers constantly battled. Oddly enough, this concept can be cleared up simply by reading the whole passage.

While it is true that it is only by God's love, mercy, and grace that redemption is extended toward fallen humanity, Paul also clearly taught that the human response to this love, mercy, and grace is of utmost importance. Notice his words, *"through faith"*.

Paul taught that salvation comes to the door of the human heart via grace. That grace and the salvation it brings can never be earned by our own efforts (*and this not of yourselves*). It is truly *"a gift of God"*. We could never do enough good things to make up for our sin and persuade God to save us. If we could do that then we would have the right to brag that we have become saved by our own ingenuity and persuasiveness (*not by works, so that no one can boast*).

However, Paul did teach that it was *"through"* a believer's *"faith"* (belief and trust) that God's grace can be appropriated to the human soul. Faith is an obedient response to the Divine gift. Paul does not equate a person's *"faith"* with the unsaved person's attempt to earn his standing with God through his own *"works"*. Works, as Paul means it here, are acts of some type of service to God or humanity with the purpose of winning God's approval. Faith is an action-filled response to the grace of God.

So to be clear, we do have a responsibility for our own salvation. God can and does freely extend His grace/salvation to the door of the human heart. But this free salvation can never be received and brought into a person's life until that person opens the door of faith (through belief, repentance, a trusting heart) and invites it in.

Paul also taught that *"we are God's workmanship"*. The word workmanship is the word (poiema) which is where we get our English word "poem". It literally means a "manufactured product". God builds us or manufactures us through our encounter with Christ (*created in Christ Jesus*) and His discipling process. He builds us *"to do good works"*. So...saving us from hell is not all there is to it. He saves us so He can re-build us so He can have us do godly work, which He has *"prepared in advance for us to do."* From the beginning God has called those who use His name to actions that reflect His holy character (1Peter 1:15-16).

What Can We Do With This Truth Today?

Our faith status can both, open the door to receiving God's free gift or close the door to receiving God's free gift at any point on the spiritual journey. The exciting point Paul is trying to get across is that God is for us without any effort from us. He loves us because He is love. He has thought about us and has thoughts about us. There is no limit to what He can do for us, in us, and through us. All we need to do is to respond to Him in faith. He has done everything, provided everything, and empowered everything. All we need to do is say "yes"... "yes"... "yes" to God.

"Father, when will we learn that our spiritual success in life comes completely from you? You have provided for everything we could possibly even think of or hope for. You are holy, wise, loving, and compassionate. There is none like You. All that You are and all that You can do is ours if we daily say "yes" to your Lordship. Thank You for this incredible gift and blessing for our lives. Amen!"



PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

By Will Mackey - Day 26

¹¹ Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (that done in the body by the hands of men) --- ¹²remember that at that time you were separated from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. ¹³But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. (Ephesians 2:11-13)

Good morning. I'm praying for you today. Are you ready to study for a few minutes? Let me refresh our memories.

In chapter one Paul used two ideas to help this church re-ignite its excitement for the things of God. First, he wrote to help them realize nine spiritual blessings that were theirs because of their relationship with Christ. Second, he shared his specific prayers for them so they could recognize the spiritual possibilities they could attain to.

Now, using all of chapter 2, Paul continued his goal by helping them remember where Christ had brought them from. Paul reminded them in verses 1-7 that Christ had brought them **from death to life**. He reminded them in verses 8-10 that Christ had brought them **from a life outside of God's grace to a life built upon His grace**. In our study today, we will see how Paul reminded them that Christ brought them **from being estranged from God to a life reconciled to God**.

Paul utilized three images to help them see what the Father has done for them through His Son. Let me lay them out for you and then we can look at each one over the next few days.

1. Paul showed them they were very far away from God and now have been brought near. (11-13)
2. Paul showed them they were behind a tall wall that kept them from God but now the wall has been broken down. (14-17)
3. Paul showed them they had no access to God before but now they have been given full access to Him as family members. (18-22)

Did you catch his words at the conclusion of our verses for today? Let's look, *"...you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ."* Paul began this section with a little history lesson. God created the world

and loves all that He creates. However, redemptively speaking, He formed and chose a nation of people (even before they became a nation – the Hebrews who would eventually be named Israel). God chose to use this people to formally reveal Himself to His world and bring to the world His redemptive plan to save mankind.

During the earlier days of this process, God led the Israelites to circumcise their men and baby boys as an act of obedient faith and as a symbol that they were in a covenantal relationship with God (Genesis 17:9-14). This act eventually came to symbolize that just as flesh is taken away from the body, the spiritual heart is to be cleansed from its fleshy and carnal desires (Colossians 2:9-14).

The point being that those outside of the nation of Israel were not looking forward to a coming Messiah and had no understanding of how to approach God, know God, or worship Him. They were without a *"promise"* from God and without *"covenants"* with God. They only followed their own empty philosophies and traditions. Because of this, they were *"without hope and without God in the world."* God, through His Son Jesus and on His own volition, reached out to those who were far away and brought them near to Him.

What Can We Do With This Truth Today?

The underlying point Paul was making to the Ephesian Church and to us today is that God brought us who were far from Him and who couldn't do anything about it, near to Himself. He wanted us near to Himself. He wanted us close to Himself. He wanted to be close to us. We didn't do anything to deserve this or to motivate God to do this. It was His decision and His gift to us based purely on His love and compassion for us.

This truth should put an extra pep in our spiritual step today. God loves us and wants to be close to us. Without you or I doing anything to deserve it, He chose us and brought us near. It seems to me that with this truth kept firmly in our minds it would be hard to feel lonely or afraid, or unloved, or a low self esteem. The Sovereign Lord of the universe knows about you, chose you, and invited you to live a life that is close to Him and in fellowship with Him. Wow! Let's think on these things today.

"Father, when I am tempted to believe the lie that I am not important or that I am not wanted, would you bring me back to this passage? The truth is You brought me near to Yourself. You wanted to be close to me. You see me differently than I see myself. It seems that my world does everything it can to push me down and keep me there. Some days it feels like one big struggle to survive. You see me and my life differently than that, don't You? You see someone who belongs to You. You see someone who has been given the grace to live life in step with Your Spirit. Help me to understand that reality better. Help me remember the truth about You and me. Amen!"



PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

By Will Mackey - Day 27

For he himself is our peace, who made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in his one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.
(Ephesians 2:14-22)

Hi everyone. Our passage today seems a little larger than normal but the two truths we are looking at are easy to spot.

Remember, in an attempt to revive their spiritual walk, Paul was helping them remember the kind of life Christ had brought them from. On his third point Paul reminded them that Christ brought them **from being estranged from God to a life reconciled to God**. He used three images to get this vividly across to them. The first image was that they were far away but now they had been brought very near. We will look at the second and third images today.

Paul began this section by stating that Christ is "*our peace*". He had just finished saying that Gentiles were originally not part of the covenant people of God because they did not have the promises and covenants of God. This fact, put up a dividing wall between Israel and the rest of the world and because of the world's hostility, it put up a huge wall of separation between God and the Gentile world. Paul said that Christ is the One who brought peace to this relationship by tearing down the wall that separated God and Gentiles and separated Jews and Gentiles.

Christ tore down this dividing wall because he took the sins of humanity upon his body on the cross (1Peter 2:24), condemning sin in sinful man (Romans 8:1-5) so that there was no longer a need to attempt to do this through the "*commandments and regulations*" of the law. In other words, men would now come to God based upon Christ's work on the cross and not based upon their obedience to the commandments and regulations of the law. This new way would cause both Jew and Gentile to approach God the same way and on the same terms, thus taking away what separated them.

In doing this, he created *"in himself one new man out of the two."* This is how he *"came and preached peace to you who were far away (Gentiles) and peace to those who were near (Jews)."*

Paul said that because of this great act of tearing down this wall of separation, both Jews and Gentiles have full access to God through the same Spirit and come to God as equal *"members of God's household."* Just like a house is built upon a solid foundation, this new *"household"* is built upon the solid *"foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus as the chief cornerstone."* Paul also said that this new *"household"* is like a spiritual *"building"* that is being built with the purpose of becoming *"a holy temple in the Lord."* In other words, God wants His people to be a people in whom He dwells through His Spirit.

What Can We Do With This Truth Today?

That seems like a lot of passage but it really presented only two main truths. God, through Christ, tore down the wall that separated us from Himself and because of that we have full access to God as family members. Think about this for a moment. We are in God's family (1John 3:1). We have access to our Father because He is our Father.

I know lots of kids. But only my own kids can enter my house unaccompanied and then walk right into my office, interrupting me from whatever I am doing. They have access to me at all times and under any circumstance. Why, because they have earned that privilege? No! It is because they are my kids...my family...members of my own household.

This is what we have with our Heavenly Father. We need not phone ahead, make an appointment, or worry about interrupting Him. We are His children and have access to Him whenever we want it. We don't earn this privilege. It is ours because we were adopted into His family and are full members of His own household.

How long has it been since you went into the living room of our Father's house, climbed up into our Father's lap and sat down and talked awhile? How long has it been since you went into the kitchen of our Father's house and allowed Him to feed you with all the spiritual nourishment your soul has need of? Has it been a while? Why? You know...you fully have the right to do so. You are His child. Our Father is waiting for you today.

"Father, I am Your child. I am a member of Your household. Why do I have trouble continuing to look at my life through that perspective? How much time do I waste trying to handle things without my Father's counsel? How much effort do I spend worrying about things that are inside of my Father's loving care over me? How many times will I continue to fret about resources that are within my Father's ability to give to me? Lord, help me to get this idea through my thick skull. I AM YOUR CHILD. YOU ARE MY FATHER! Amen!"



PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

By Will Mackey - Day 28

¹For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles— ²Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, ³that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. ⁴In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁵which 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. ⁶This 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. (Ephesians 3:1-6)

Hi everyone. Hope you had a good start to your week. I am thinking of you this morning and praying for you. We begin chapter 3 of Ephesians this morning. Let's remember Paul's purpose for writing this letter was to bring a spirit of revival to the hearts and lives of the Ephesian Christians.

In chapter 1 he wrote to help them realize nine spiritual blessings that were theirs because of their relationship with Christ. Second, he shared his specific prayers for them so they could recognize the spiritual possibilities they could attain to. In chapter 2, Paul continued his goal by helping them remember where Christ had brought them from. He reminded them that Christ had brought them from death to life, from a life outside of God's grace to a life built upon His grace, and as Gentiles, from a life estranged from God to a life reconciled to God. In chapter 3 Paul stays with this last point and expands his explanation of it.

Paul began this section by reminding them that he was in prison for his ministry to the Gentiles, *"the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles."* Because he was preaching that the Gentiles were welcomed into the family of God through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the Jewish religious /political leaders framed Paul and had the Romans arrest him.

Paul maintained God had called him to this type of ministry, *"the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you..."* This controversial message, according to Paul was *"made known to me by revelation..."* He refers to parts of this message as a *"mystery"* and one *"which was not made known to men in other generations."*

All through the Old Testament one can see God's love and care for the Gentile (non-Jewish person). God has always made that clear. But still, even in the most progressive Jewish mind, God would always love the Jew more than the rest of the world. Because of this predominant thought, both Jew and Gentile missed God's overarching message for a few millennium.

However, since Christ came, Paul continued, *"it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets."* This *"mystery"* that God had explained to Paul and the other Apostles and has proclaimed through those who preach Christ's Gospel would run cross-grain against everything the Jews had made their covenant with God out to be. It would forever change to whom God's message was given and how it would be proclaimed. This idea literally turned the religious world of Paul's day "on its head." The message was far more powerful than God welcoming Gentiles into fellowship with Himself.

Paul said the main point of this mystery *"is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus."* Wow! In the cultural context of Paul's day, this was huge. To the Jews this was sacrilege. To the Gentiles this was "Good News". Paul was saying that in Christ all the purpose of God was completely fulfilled. God had set out to reconcile the world back to Himself. He chose a nationality of people through which to model His nature and leadership and through which to foreshadow His great redemption.

Through law and sacrifice He revealed both His holiness and His love, thus laying the foundation upon which to understand and embrace His coming Messiah. Israel was supposed to obey God and through that obedience influence the world to hunger after God. But because of their rebellious hearts, God's way was often turned into a means to promote a religion of favoritism.

The great mystery revealed that God, through Jesus Christ, had made Gentiles equal heirs with the Jews that receive Christ. Gentiles would not be considered step children by God but full, legitimate, equal members of God's family, receiving all the promises of God. Paul said in Galatians 3:28-29, *"There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."* God had planned long ago that He would reconcile the world through His Son. He would lay down the foundation for His Son through a particular people group but He would accept people, both Jew and Gentile, based upon their relationship with His Son. This is why Paul would then say that both Jew and Gentile would be *"members together of one body."* They both would have to be part of the body of Christ and it would be because of this and not race that they have access to God.

What Can We Do With This Truth Today?

God doesn't have favorites. He loves all of His children equally. His love is not based upon nationality, race, gender, or social status. If we are His, all of us are recipients of all that He has ever promised His children. Christ's death and resurrection does more than keep us out of hell. His sacrifice also gives us a completely new identity. I am not Will Mackey, Gentile. I am Will Mackey, the Father's son. And if you know Christ, so are you!!!

"Father, I am fully Your child with all of the privileges and responsibilities that come with being in Your Family. May I bring honor to the Family Name. Amen!"



PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

By Will Mackey - Day 29

7 I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. **8** Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, **9** and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. **10** His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, **11** according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. **12** In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. **13** I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.
(Ephesians 3:7-13)

Hi everyone. I am praying for you today.

In our last study, we saw Paul begin to help the Ephesian Christians (and us) to see what he called the great "*mystery*" of God's plan, to which he had been called of God to teach. In verse 6 Paul laid out the mystery when he said,

"This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus."

There it is. God loves every people group. He doesn't have favorites. Israel's purpose was to be a blessing to all nations (Genesis 12:3) and not to be God's special and isolated people. Their role was to reveal the true God to the world and to bring to the world, through its lineage, the great, long awaited Messiah.

Paul began this section by giving a little more insight into his specific ministry call from God. He said, first of all, he *"became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power."* He saw himself as God's servant and as a person given the gift of God's grace to teach God's gospel. He also saw himself as not deserving of this privilege, *"Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me:"*

His ministry call was to do two things: *"to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery..."* His mission was clear from God. He was to help the Gentiles understand God's full redemption plan and to help the entire church (both Jew and Gentile) understand the great love and plan of God for the world implemented through Israel.

Paul said that in times past this great truth was kept on the back burner, *"which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things"* but has now become the mission of the church to proclaim this truth, *"His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our*

Lord. Did you notice the last phrase in verse 10? Paul said that it is now God's intention that the church proclaims this great truth to *"the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms..."* Let's take a closer look at what Paul means with this phrase.

Angels are intensely interested in human redemption (1Peter 1:12; 1Cor. 4:9). They have seen God's power and wisdom throughout the ages. They had heard about God's love for and desire to reconcile all of His creation to Himself. What they hadn't heard before was God's intention to bring both Jew and Gentile into one new creation, namely the church...the body of Christ. God's wisdom and power is that through the blood of Christ, mankind can be redeemed, filled with Christ's love and power, and those who were once enemies can be brought together into one body...Christ's body. The good and bad angels watch this redemptive miracle and learn more about the deeper wisdom of God.

Paul ended with an encouragement for the Ephesian Christians to not be discouraged by his imprisonment. The fact that he is in trouble for teaching the truth is to God's glory and is proof that he is doing the will of God.

What Can We Do With This Truth Today?

I am struck by the power of Christ's Gospel. His Gospel is the power of God unto salvation. The power of God is at work forgiving and cleansing a person...filling that person with His Spirit and making the person part of the Body of Christ. I am struck by the unity. God brings together people who would not otherwise be together and forms them into a unified body to accomplish His work.

I look at the American church. As I talk with pastors across our country, I hear that a spirit of consumerism saturates the church. Many across this land look at the church as just one of many community services they pay for and choose from. Shallow commitment is the norm. Often commitments to the church are not kept. The moment people get what they deem as a better offer, the commitment to the church is the first to go, often stating "something came up". Too many times the church gets leftover time, money, talent, and energy.

So many Christians are so easily distracted from the mission God has given the church. Many leave churches and begin attending other churches for the most selfish of reasons. Where is the power?...the unity?...the spiritual fruit? They claim to have the Spirit but there is no evidence of His love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control. God warns us the luke-warm believer makes Him sick (Rev. 3:16). How very far away the church is from what God has created her to be. I wonder if the American church will be able to stand at the Great Judgment.

You and I can change that. You and I can allow God to light a fire in our hearts for the kingdom of God. We can allow His heart and His purpose to rule us, drive us, and consume us. Let's denounce the silly things that divide us and distract us. Let's begin to look at the church as a place to serve and not a place to be served. Let's stop insisting on getting our preferences and instead focus on holy living and service to others. Let's give the work of God our best and our priority.

"Father, help me realize I am a new creation. I exist for You...not You for me. I am not saved so I can have a better life. I am saved to work as a member of God's family to accomplish God's will on earth the way it is done in Heaven. Amen!"



PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

By Will Mackey - Day 30

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. (Ephesians 3:14-19)

Hi everyone. Our passage for today is powerful. Are you ready to get started?

Remember in our last study Paul had shared something that, only since Christ came into the world, had God revealed to His people. This great mystery was revealed and we learned that God, through Jesus Christ, has made Gentiles equal heirs with the Jews that receive Christ. Gentiles will no longer consider themselves to be step children but full, legitimate, equal members of God's family, receiving all the promises of God given the Jews.

Furthermore we learned it was God's intention to bring both Jew and Gentile together into one new creation called the Church and to have that new creation make known the manifold wisdom of God. All of God's planning for His creation is to be fulfilled through Christ and His body...the Church.

When you think about it, this is staggering. Those who are in Christ have an enormous privilege and a monumental responsibility. So heavy was this responsibility on Paul's heart that he once again shared with the Ephesians how he prayed for them. In fact, Paul got so caught up in sharing his heart for them that he began writing and it seemed he scarcely took a breath. I am going to outline the next few verses to make it easier to grasp what he is saying.

- I. I kneel before the Father who created and named it all and pray that...
 - A. He would strengthen you
 - 1. out of his glorious riches
 - 2. with his power through His Spirit in your inner being
 - 3. so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith
 - B. After you are rooted and established in His love, I pray He would give you power:
 - 1. together with all the saints
 - 2. to grasp how wide, long, high, deep is the love of Christ
 - 3. to know this love that surpasses knowledge
 - 4. to be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God

Wow! Paul understood how to pray, didn't he? He knew that the only way the Ephesian church (or any church for that matter) could fulfill its calling

was to be directly strengthened by the indwelling Christ Himself (A) and to be given, from Christ, the ability to grasp the outer reaches of His love for mankind (B). He wanted them to know this love, both experientially and as it was directed to others. The keystone of his request was that they would be *"filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."* Through the power of His indwelling Spirit, he asked the Father to give the Ephesian Christians all He had planned for them and to give them a full measure of Himself.

What Can We Do With This Truth Today?

The church is given the responsibility to demonstrate the wisdom, love, and power of God in our world. We are called to experience and live out the full redemption of God and to show the power of God's redemption over sin and its dysfunction (1John 3:4-10). We are to live life filled with God's Spirit...His very Presence.

What incredible love has been poured out on us (1John 3:1)! What undeniable power lives in us through the risen Savior's Presence within us What powerful living is available to us if we would only trust and obey!

How much do you think God expects of us if He has invested that much in us? I mean, if God created this world and then stepped away from it to let us fend for ourselves, it would be safe to say that He expects very little from us. If He initially wound this world up like a top and all the spin was predetermined, we could comfortably put our minds at ease regarding His judgments. But to have given us His love, His mercy, His grace, His Son, the Cross, the Resurrection, the Ascension, and the actual infilling of His Spirit into our hearts is to have given us His very best and everything needed to have victory over sin.

I am not trying to get us to look at this in the negative (what we cannot do) but let's look at it in the positive (what we can do). With this quality of investment made by our Creator and Father we have the potential of becoming thoroughly transformed people, re-created to be more and more in the image of His Son Jesus.

May I ask you a few obvious questions? Are you living a transformed life? Are you transformed in heart, as well as, in practice? Has there been a cleansing of your mind and desires, as well as, of what you do? The purifying begins in the heart before it can really happen on the outside. Don't be satisfied with a partial transformation. Don't mistake Christianity as only a way that cleans up the outside of a person. God wants you to have His fullness...His full qualities living inside you...His purifying power cleansing, freeing, and re-creating the recesses of our minds and motives. If it is just the outside that we seek to clean up, we are just like every other religion. Even the cults (Mormonism,etc.) can pull that off. But our Father has so much more in mind for us...for you.

"Father, help me really become a new creation. Fill me with all of You. Cleanse me on the inside and straighten out all the crooked ways within me. Kick me off of the throne of my own heart and take your rightful place as the one and only king of my heart. Amen!"



PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

By Will Mackey - Day 31

As a prisoner of the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says: “When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men.” What does “he ascended” mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe. (Ephesians 4:1-10)

Good morning everyone. I hope you are enjoying the mighty presence of Christ in each and every day this week. He has promised to be with us every step of life's way (Matthew 28:20b).

We ended our time together in our last devotional with Paul praying for the Ephesian Christians to be responsible with the calling of God for their lives. Today, beginning in chapter 4, Paul begins to lay out specific ways in which they can fulfill God's purpose for their lives. Once again, let me repeat what God has invited all believers to be involved with. It was God's intention from the beginning to bring both Jew and Gentile together into one new creation called the Church and to have that new creation make known the powerful wisdom of God throughout everyday life. All of God's hopes and plans for His creation are to be fulfilled through Christ and His body...the Church.

How in the world can we be faithful to such a call? Paul's answer to that anticipated question might surprise you. Paul began with the charge, ***"I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received."*** Then he began to lay out the "how to". Let's outline the verses.

- I. Live a life worthy of your calling. (1-8) -How?
 - A. Be completely humble. (2)
 - B. Be completely gentle. (2)
 - C. Be patient, bearing with one another in love. (2)
 - D. Keep the unity of the Spirit in peace. (3) -How?
 1. Remember there is one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father (4-6)
 2. Remember we all been given the same grace (as Christ apportioned it) (7)
- II. Christ filled the whole universe with the opportunity to receive God's grace (8-10)
 - A. Christ descended to the lower regions of the earth (9)
 - B. Christ ascended higher than all the heavens to give gifts to men (8, 10)

Let's just observe the outline today. I'll begin breaking it down the next time we meet. Read it a few more times.

Do you understand what Paul was saying? He said the way to begin fulfilling this enormous calling of God is through humility, gentleness, showing patient love, and keeping unity between Christians. He further said that the reason we can keep unity between us is that we are all part of the same body (Christ's body), we all have the same Spirit (Holy Spirit), and we all have the same hope (Heaven).

We all have the same Lord (Jesus), the same faith (in the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus), the same baptism (in the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit), and the same Heavenly Father, the one true God. He then added we all have been given the same grace. With all this in common, we should be able to love each other and work together.

What Can We Do With This Truth Today?

The context of Paul's writing then is the same as it is today. *"In the world there is nothing but discord, disharmony, and disunity. Nation is divided against nation, and man against man; class is divided against class, and in man himself there goes on an inner battle between his higher and lower nature"* (William Barclay).

We see in the great truth Paul shared with us that it is God's intention that all of this discord, disharmony, and disunity be done away with through Christ. Through Christ man can be freed from the sin and guilt that once took him captive. Mankind can be cleansed from the unholy nature that once possessed him. Through Christ, hatred can be replaced with love and rudeness is done away with by patience. Christ becomes the One Person that all can gather around and from whom all can draw new life...life as it was meant to be.

It is the function of the church to take this love to mankind, to proclaim this message, and to model this transformation. This will be impossible unless the people within the church are a certain kind of people. They must be of humble character, of a gentle nature, of a loving disposition, and committed to unnatural unity. Only then will we be demonstrating the love and power of Christ.

May I encourage you to make a choice to live up to your calling in Christ. Don't settle for self-focused living. You are called to something much greater...much higher...much more holy. Be the church as God has designed her to be. Reflect His nature and the power of His redemption in what you think, say, and do.

"Father, I pray again for You to help me become a new creation. After hearing from Paul what Your plan is, I cannot be satisfied with living life the way I have lived it. Every time I am arrogant or rude or unloving or separate from other believers to go off in my own direction, I am not representing the power of Your Gospel. I am saved for Your glory and to fulfill Your purpose, not for my own glory and purpose. It is not my preferences that I should live for but for Your will to be done in all things. Fill me, change me, cleanse me, and empower me to be my part of the church...the body of Christ. Amen!"



PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

By Will Mackey - Day 32

As a prisoner of the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says: “When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men.” What does “he ascended” mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe. (Ephesians 4:1-10)

Good morning everyone. I trust your week has gotten off to a good start? Are you ready to get into our study for today?

In our last study we outlined our passage and made some observations. Let me remind us of the context. Paul dropped an incredible truth in our laps in chapter 3. Here it is again: It was God's intention from the beginning to bring both Jew and Gentile together into one new creation called the Church and to have that new creation make known the powerful wisdom of God throughout everyday life. All of God's plans for His creation are to be fulfilled through Christ and His body...the Church. Read that last sentence again. Wow! *How in the world can we be faithful to such a call...with such expectation?* Paul's answer to that question might surprise you. Paul began with the charge, *"I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received."* Then he began to explain how to live a life worthy of this great calling.

Paul gave the Ephesian Christians and us 5 words that represent 5 incredible characteristics of holy living. Paul was saying that by living out these truths, they and we will be laying the foundation for God's calling to be fulfilled. Let's look at 4 of them today and save the 5th one for Thursday.

Paul began with the word *"humble"* (tapeinophrosone) and saying that we are to live in a state of humility. Notice also that he said we are to be *"completely"* humble. Humility begins when we put God first, other's second, and ourselves last. Notice how it is the exact opposite of the world's thinking. Humility involves knowing ourselves, accepting ourselves and being ourselves. It is not about elevating ourselves to look or to be perceived in a certain way. It is to be at home in our own skin. Paul would say it this way to the Roman Christians, *"For by the grace given me I say to everyone one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given to you."* (Romans 12:3)

The second word Paul used was the word *"gentleness"* or meekness (praotes). Not only are we to be humble but we are also to live a life of meekness. Meekness is not weakness. It is power under control. In secular Greek literature, one often

finds this word used to describe a soft wind or a wild horse that has just been broken and tamed. Both are now gentle but have great power and strength that is under control. We are told that Moses was meek (Numbers 12:3 – often translated as humble but the word in the Hebrew is equivalent to praotes in the Greek). Jesus spoke of himself as being meek (Matthew 11:29). Neither man was weak but exerted great strength, courage, and influence. Both are described as having the quality of gentleness or meekness.

The third word Paul used was the word *"patient"* (makrothumia). It literally means "long tempered". At its essence this idea means to endure discomfort so as to never give up. Those who have this quality and choose to live out of this quality often bear insults and injury for redemption's sake. They keep being patient hoping that one day the one they are burdened for will be fully redeemed.

The fourth word Paul used was the word *"love"* (agape). In the Greek there are four words used to convey love. There is (eros) which depicts more of a romantic love between husband and wife. There is (philia) which depicts the affection that close friends have for each other. There is (storge) which depicts the affection that family members have for one another. And there is (agape) which means an unconditional benevolence. This type of love can be lived out inside of all the other types of love just described. It means that there is nothing the other person can do or not do that will keep you from seeking his/her highest good.

What Can We Do With This Truth Today?

What Paul said in this section is incredible. He makes the point that if we ever hope to live a life worthy of our calling as the church...the Body of Christ, we must live lives that fully express the very character of Christ Himself. Christ is humble (Philippians 2), meek (Matt. 11:29), patient (2Thess. 3:5) and loving (Eph. 5:25). In simple terms it is about living out the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-24). It is about surrendering to the full leadership of the Spirit and submitting to His purifying work (Acts 15:8-9). It is about asking Christ to crucify our old nature (Romans 6:6-7) and to live His life through us (Gal. 2:20).

Only Christ, with His nature and power, can fulfill all things as God the Father desires it. The effectiveness of our participation will be in direct proportion to how much Christ lives through us...by how much we consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to righteousness (Romans 6:11-14). We will never be able to partner with Christ in fulfilling the big plans of God until we interact with our world and our church in humility, meekness, patience, and agape type love.

Where are we at in all of this? Are we making that transition from seeing Christianity as all about us to seeing it as being redeemed so we can work with purity and assertiveness to fulfill God's redemptive plans for our world? If not...why not? What are we waiting for? We know the truth...now all we have to do is walk in it. How do we get started? Start with re-reading the passages we read in the last two paragraphs. Look deeply at the truth. Then talk to the Father about what He said and what He wants from us. Let me know if I can be of any help.

"Father, Thank You that Your plans are bigger than anything we could pull off by ourselves. Thank You that Your purpose is so great, so inclusive, so huge, and so powerful that only through our relationship with Christ can we ever be part of it. Help me become fully the man You have created me to be. Help me open myself up to the full redemptive work You want to do in me. Amen!"



PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

By Will Mackey - Day 33

As a prisoner of the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says: “When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men.” What does “he ascended” mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe. (Ephesians 4:1-10)

Good morning. I am praying for you today.

Before we move ahead today, let me share something I meant to share in our last devotional. Remember we learned in chapter 3 that all of God's plans for His creation are to be fulfilled through Christ and His body...the Church. Last time we began answering the question of how we could be faithful to the call God has given every Christian. What I wanted to mention then was that the rest of the letter is one continuous explanation of how Christians are to *"live a life worthy of the calling"* they have received.

Paul's point to the Ephesians was that how they lived their lives would determine their level of participation in the great plan of God. Every area of a Christian's life, when lived out in truth, will testify to the great wisdom of God and validate His redemptive plan to the world. Paul taught them how important the following areas were to pleasing God and their testimony to the world:

- Personal character (4:1-2, 25-30; 5:3-18)
- Relationships between Christians (4:3-10, 31-32; 5:1-2, 19-21; 6:5-9)
- Church's ministry (4:11-16)
- World's philosophy (4:17-24)
- Marriage/home (5:22-33)
- Parenting (6:1-4)
- Spiritual battle (6:10-20)

Notice which one got the most verses. In Tuesday's study we began looking at the first passage concerning personal character (4:1-2). Paul was saying we must live lives that fully express the very character of Christ Himself. Christ is humble (Philippians 2), meek (Matt. 11:29), patient (2Thess. 3:5) and loving (Eph. 5:25). In simple terms it is about living out the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-24).

In today's study, Paul made a shift from personal character to relationships between Christians. He said that we must *"make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."* Christians must be people who understand the importance of unity and its powerful effect upon the unsaved world. Unity is not

the same as uniformity. Uniformity is when everything must look alike, etc., and most of the time this comes about by way of some kind of pressure. Unity is different. We are to keep unity through the grace that the Spirit brings.

Paul suggested to the Ephesians that unity should be easy to understand since we all have so much in common. He said we all have 9 things in common with each other. We all have the same *"peace"* (passes understanding), all in the same *"body"* (Christ's), all have the same *"Spirit"* (Holy Spirit), all have the same *"hope"* (Heaven), all have the same *"Lord"* (Jesus), all have the same *"faith"* (centered on the Gospel), all have the same *"baptism"* (Father, Son, and Spirit), all have the same *"Father"* (God), and all are the recipient of the same *"grace"* (unmerited favor). With all of this in common, why do some struggle with getting along and working together? Why must we focus on the things we have different convictions about? Our lack of unity only serves to disprove the Gospel in the minds of the unsaved.

Unity is one of the most powerful demonstrations of the power and wisdom of God. Earlier he talked about the unity of Jews and Gentiles coming together in the body of Christ and forming the Church. This *"unity"* would also include everyone from all walks of life. Imagine this...people from different backgrounds and family upbringings coming to Christ, filled with God's Spirit, and beginning to set aside their personal agendas/interests in order to accomplish the will of God together! This phenomenon will get the world's attention because the world cannot pull this off. The world is constantly at war and drawn into different conflicts with others. When they speak of peace and unity they only mean, *"let's take a break from fighting and find some ideas to compromise on."* When Paul speaks of peace and unity He means proclaiming, *"the unsearchable riches of Christ..."*

Also notice that Paul said we should *"make every effort"* to keep unity among our relationships within Christ's body. That verb phrase (spondazontes) means to make a zealous effort to care for this.

What Can We Do With This Truth Today?

How do you see your brothers and sisters in Christ? How do you relate to them? Over the years I have heard so many times, *"I love the Lord but cannot stand so and so..."* Every time I have taken them to this passage and to 1 John 2:9-11, *"Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness. Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble. But whoever hates his brother is in darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him."*

Only through the power of Christ can we put self interests aside and be unified to others for the sake of Christ. Only through Christ can we keep our focus on preserving the unity that is so important to the work of Christ. The ability to live this way validates the Gospel, like no other, in the world's eyes. Let's think about our attitudes toward those whom God has placed in our lives at church. Are we creating unity with them? Are we learning to work together to fulfill God's will in our community? Are we setting aside self interests for the sake of the Kingdom?

"Father, help me see unity the way You see it. Help me see my brothers and sisters the way You see them. Fill me with Yourself so much that when I walk through life with my church family I can put the differences we have aside and concentrate on the many things we have in common, including the call of our Father to be the body of Christ and to reconcile the world to Himself. Amen!"



PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

By Will Mackey - Day 34

As a prisoner of the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says: “When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men.” What does “he ascended” mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe. (Ephesians 4:1-10)

Hi everyone. I hope your week has gotten off to a great start. Let's finish up this portion of chapter 4 today. Since it has been a few days since our last study, let me get our minds back in gear.

Remember we learned in chapter 3 all of God's plans for His creation are to be fulfilled through Christ and His body...the Church. The particular way the church can do its part is to *"live a life worthy of the calling"*. Paul's point to the Ephesians was that how they lived their lives would determine their level of participation in the great plan of God. Every area of a Christian's life, when living out the Truth, will testify to the great wisdom of God and validate His redemptive plan to the world.

Paul laid out 7 areas of most importance for the Ephesians to live Christ-like lives in. Those areas were: *personal character, relationships between Christians, the church's ministry, countering the world's philosophy, marriage/home, parenting, and spiritual warfare*. Paul had just finished a section of teaching on *relationships between Christians* and he highlighted the importance of unity. He then listed 9 blessings or gifts we all have in common from Christ, ending with the gift of *"grace"*. Now we are ready for today's study.

In verses 8-10 Paul began to explain the "source" of all those gifts. He said, *"...Christ apportioned it."* In other words, Christ gave those gifts as He was pleased to give them. Then he said, *"...When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men."* Paul is describing the imagery given in Psalm 68 and quoting verse 18. This psalm describes the coming Messiah going out in battle against the Lord's enemies and coming back from the battle triumphantly. As He returns to His people, those He has captured trail behind Him and He shares the battle spoils, giving His people gifts of victory.

Paul then said if He *"ascended"* then He also must have *"descended to the lower, earthly regions."* This of course is speaking of Christ's death and time spent in the grave. Finally, Paul ended the idea with this statement, *"He who descended is the very one who*

ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.” This, of course, is the main idea Paul wished to express.

Let me make this whole thing a little easier to understand. Paul, referring to the imagery of a beautiful, worship psalm, was painting a powerful theological picture of Christ. He was saying Christ was the person the psalmist was referring to. Christ descended to the earth (His birth) and to the lower earthly regions (His death and grave) and then ascended higher than the heavens (His resurrection and ascension) in order that He might fill the whole universe with His activity as the sovereign, victorious Lord.

His sovereign leadership extends to all places. He is supreme over all the powers of heaven and earth. There is nothing that is not subject to Him, no place in the universe or order of existence where His presence is not known or felt. And as the sovereign, victorious Lord, Christ gives gifts to His people in order for His people to accomplish His Will.

What Can We Do With This Truth Today?

Think about this great truth today. This means our world was not deserted by Christ after He died. When Christ ascended to the right hand of the Father everything was put under His feet (Phil. 2:9-11). We live in a Christ-filled world. He has authority in every part of it, at all times.

As His church, He has given us all we need to fulfill His will. He gives us all we need to know Him, to live Godly lives, to work in unity with other believers, to enable His people (church) to mature, to counter the world's philosophy with God's wisdom, to build godly marriages, to raise godly kids, and to defeat the enemies' schemes and plans every time.

We are not asked to live lives worthy of God's calling all alone. We are not to do it by the power of positive thinking or by mere human strength or will. We don't get the job done by trying to live a good life or by attending church regularly. We accomplish His will by using the gifts He gives. It is a matter of obeying and using what He has supplied us for His purposes.

Remember the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30)? Jesus was saying this very thing when He told the disciples this story. Simply invest what the Owner entrusts to you and you will please the Owner. Be faithful to do what the Owner tells you to do with what the Owner gives you (grace, redemption, cleansing, gifts, talents, etc.) to do it with. Successful Christian living is no more complicated than that.

"Father, help me stop trying to live a life worthy of Your calling by the power of my own will or intellect. You fill my world and my heart with Your Presence. You have given me all I need in order to do life Your way. No wonder You say, 'my yoke is easy and my burden is light.' (Matt. 11:30) You already supply all the hard stuff. Thank You. Amen!"



PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

By Will Mackey - Day 35

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

(Ephesians 4:11-13)

Hey everyone. Our study for today is a good one. Before we begin, let me remind us what the rest of the letter looks like:

Remember Paul's point to the Ephesian church was that every area of a Christian's life, when lived out in Truth, will testify to the great wisdom of God and validate His redemptive plan to the world. He then taught them about 7 important areas and how living out the Truth in these areas would be a powerful part of living *"a life worthy of the calling"* of God. Those areas are:

- Personal character (4:1-2, 25-30; 5:3-18)
- Relationships between Christians (4:3-10, 31-32; 5:1-2, 19-21; 6:5-9)
- Church's ministry (4:11-16)
- World's philosophy (4:17-24)
- Marriage/home (5:22-33)
- Parenting (6:1-4)
- Spiritual battle (6:10-20)

Paul began chapter 4 teaching on personal character, then moved to the topic of relationships between Christians, and then began a section on the church's ministry. This is where we begin today.

Not only does Christ give gifts to His people like peace, the fellowship of believers, hope, the Lordship of Christ, faith, the Fatherhood of God, and grace (verses 3-7) but He also gives other gifts, as well. He said Christ gives *"some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers..."*

Some of these "other" gifts come in the form of those who have spiritual gifts. For instance, Christ gives the church those who have the apostolic gift and those who have the prophetic gift, and those who have the evangelist's gift, and those who have the gifts of shepherding and teaching. Actually, it is not so much the person that is God's gift to the church but the spiritual gift that person has that is what Christ is giving to the church.

There are three categories of ministry represented by this list of gifted persons. There are those who have an authority throughout the whole church, those whose ministry is not confined to one place or area, and those who care for believers in a local context. The apostles and the evangelists were responsible to plant the church in every place much like we use missionaries today. The apostles, especially, were the overall leaders of the church. The prophets brought a

particular word from God to certain situations much like the itinerant revivalist does today. Pastors and teachers were responsible for the day to day building up of the church much like the role of pastor and associate pastor are used today.

What Can We Do With This Truth Today?

Let's bump our heads against what Paul is telling us one more time. Christ gives gifts to his people (the church). Some of these gifts come in the form of personal blessings that help us know Christ better. Other gifts come in the form of spiritual gifts given to believers. All spiritual gifts given to believers are to be used to bless the body of Christ (the church). While this is true, Paul chose to highlight 5 spiritual gifts as important gifts to the organization and administration of the church. Those 5 are: the spiritual gift of "*apostle*" (church planter, authoritative leader), "*prophet*" (preacher, revivalist), "*evangelist*" (those who share Christ with the lost), "*pastor...teacher*" (those who, day in and day out, spiritually feed God's people and care for them).

Paul is not saying that the people who have these gifts and use these gifts are Christ's gifts to the church. He is saying that Christ gives the church the function of these spiritual gifts. Have you ever thought of these ministries in these terms before? For instance, have you ever thought of the role of your pastors as being a gift from God, given to you by Him, for a specific purpose?

My purpose in saying that is not to bring more attention to pastors. However, my desire is to bring more attention to God's spiritual gifts of pastoring and teaching and for us to see His spiritual gifts as important gifts to the church. The truth is...until we see the role of pastors/teachers as something God has graciously given to the church for a reason, we won't permit God's "reason" to take hold in our lives.

Seeing their role as a gift from God does not mean they are special people. They are just people living out their gifting...a gifting, I might add, they had nothing to do with receiving. It was given them by grace and was not something they earned. To see this idea the way God intends, we must get our eyes off of things like personality, talent, and style. These things will disappoint us and at times, frustrate us. In those times, we must keep our focus on the spiritual gifting part and trust God's purpose behind the gift. The role they perform and the gifting they exercise are gifts of God to the church. We will look at God's specific purpose in our next study.

"Father, it is tempting to look at the church and its leaders with secular eyes. I am tempted to look at these people through the lens of personality, talent, and style. It is so easy to evaluate based upon these components instead of seeing the gift to the church that each leader represents. When I don't see it this way, it becomes hard for me to submit to the oversight and authority God has given them for the church. Help me to trust in Your gifting given to people. Help me to see that despite personality, talent, or style You are in control and You have given the church all that she needs to fulfill Your great plans. Amen!"



PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

By Will Mackey - Day 36

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

(Ephesians 4:11-13)

Hi everyone. Today in our study we will build upon our last devotional. Let's do a quick review.

Paul taught that Christ gives gifts to his people (the church). Some of these gifts come in the form of personal blessings that help us know Christ better. Other gifts come in the form of spiritual gifts given to believers. All spiritual gifts given to believers are to be used to bless the body of Christ (the church). While this is true, Paul chose to highlight 5 spiritual gifts as important gifts to the organization and administration of the church. Those 5 are: the spiritual gift of *"apostle"* (church planter, authoritative leader), *"prophet"* (preacher, revivalist), *"evangelist"* (those who share Christ with the lost), *"pastor...teacher"* (those who spiritually feed God's people and care for them).

Paul is not saying that the people who have these gifts are Christ's gifts to the church. He is saying that Christ gives the church the function and results of these spiritual gifts. In other words, the ability to create new churches, lead churches, preach, win the lost to Christ, and the ability to spiritually feed God's people and care for them are Christ's gifts to His own church. We should look at these gifts as gifts from Christ and cooperate with His purpose in giving them.

Now for today's study. Paul is now ready to help the Ephesians understand God's purpose for giving the Church such gifts. He said in verse 13, *"until we all...become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."* This is the ultimate goal Christ has in mind when giving the church the apostolic, prophetic, evangelistic, pastoral, and teaching gifts.

Paul used the word *"...mature"* (teleios) which means to be fully developed or complete. A person reaches maturity by living in all the light Christ has provided. It includes deep, unbroken fellowship with Christ so that we may be Christ-like in our speech and conduct. It means to reflect Him and to have His reflection in us. Someone once gave a good definition of a saint. He said a saint is *"someone in whom Christ lives again."* Full maturity is Christ's goal and must be our goal. As long as we live on earth we will have need of more growth and maturity. We will never reach perfection. But we can reach what God considers to be "maturity" in our walk with Jesus. How do we get there? Paul, beginning in verse 12, lays out the journey.

Paul said the spiritual gifts of leadership were given to *"prepare God's people for works of service..."* The word *"prepare"* is the word (katartismos) which means to set a

broken limb or to mend something until it is ready to function as it was designed to do. Christ gives these particular spiritual gifts to the Church so that the Church... *"God's people"* can be prepared to live and function as they were intended to live... *"works of service"*. The word *"service"* is the word (diakonia) which refers to practical, everyday service to God.

Paul then builds upon this foundation a second thought. He said, *"...so the body of Christ might be built up..."* These gifts are to build up not tear down. They are gifts of construction not destruction. They can build up by adding to the body through the apostolic and evangelism gifts. The body can also be built up by growing the spiritual lives of believers as the prophetic, pastoral, and teaching gifts do.

Next Paul adds to this a third thought. He said, *"...until we all reach unity in the faith..."* Those with these gifts are to prepare God's people to live as they were created to live so that Christ's body is built up and can reach unity of the faith. These gifts, properly used, help the body come together from very different backgrounds to commit to the Truth, depend upon Christ exclusively, and appreciate His great plan expressed through His body (the church). Those with these gifts will model this unity; teaching, correcting, protecting against disunity, and insisting that God's people take up this mindset. For a refresher on unity, go back to Day 33.

And finally Paul adds a fourth thought. He said, *"...until we all reach unity...in the knowledge of the Son of God..."* This would certainly mean scriptural knowledge, as well as, relational knowledge that comes from walking with Him consistently over time. God wants all to know Christ and know Him well. The deeper we know Him and the longer we serve Him the more we are enabled to *"become mature"* in Him.

What Can We Do With This Truth Today?

I want to make sure we see that it is God's will that you and I become mature and that God Himself has made arrangements for our journey. The fellowship of believers we associate with plays an important part in whether or not we allow God to accomplish His purpose in us. In choosing that fellowship, we must be careful not to choose or stay at a church based upon personalities, music, programs, or how good it makes us feel. We must ask a different set of questions. We must look at Christ's goal for our spiritual maturity and begin there.

We must ask questions like: *"What church will prepare us, construct us, insist that we come together and stay together in unity, press us to know Christ personally and follow Him daily?"* *"What church will not only expect us to become mature but will also confront us in love when we show immaturity?"* When we find a church that will fulfill this role in our lives, we have found a church that is worth investing our time, tithe, and talent in. This kind of church is a place that takes Christ's gifts to His Church and Christ's purpose for giving those gifts, seriously. Do you see the role your church plays in your life in these terms? Do you see the role your pastor or other spiritual leaders play in your life in these terms?

"Father, it is tempting to look at the church as an organization designed to please people instead of one that is in the business of preparing people. The church isn't a country club. The church is a construction site. It is a place where we learn how to live/serve, where we get stronger/deeper/wider/higher, where we practice unity and really get to know our Savior. The church is a place where we mature as human beings. Help me treat the church as You have designed it to be. Amen!"



PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

By Will Mackey - Day 37

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is Christ. (Ephesians 4:14-15)

Hi everyone. I hope your week is going well. I am praying for you today. Be encouraged...God loves you and has wonderful plans for your life.

We have been working in chapter 4 of Ephesians. In our study Paul had finished teaching us that God's ultimate purpose in giving his church the apostolic, prophetic, evangelistic, pastoral, and teaching gifts is to enable His people to obtain a spiritual maturity of faith and life. In today's study Paul shows us what this "maturity" looks like.

The first characteristic of maturity is, *"we will no longer be infants..."* Babies are cute and adorable. However, what would we think of a baby that never grows up? The infant stage is good for the beginning stage of a life but ceases to be good if this stage is prolonged.

So it is with Christianity. It is God's will that we move through spiritual infancy and become mature believers. The writer to the Hebrews said, *"...though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teachings about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death and of faith in God..."* (Hebrews 5:12 - 6:1)

Infants can't feed on the solid food of God's Word. Infants have to keep rehearsing how to be saved. They keep falling away from God and coming back. They don't live righteous lives but keep playing with evil. It is God's will for new believers to *"go on to maturity"*. It is God's will for those who have been believers for a while to *"go on to maturity"*.

The second characteristic of maturity is stability. Paul said we will no longer be *"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."* The mature are stable. They are not tossed about by every religious idea or novelty that comes along. They know God's truth and know Satan's lies. Unfortunately, even Christian media has many religious quacks who are scheming how to kidnap God's children through false teaching and make them apart of their cultic-like following. Their goal seems to be power, prestige and money and not - *"...anyone who doesn't take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."* (Matt.10:38-39)

A third characteristic of the mature believer is when he/she speaks to and loves others according to the truth, *"Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him, the Head, that is Christ"*. Infants do not know how to do this. They judge everything by their emotions. They are often selfish, speaking and reacting to life out of emotion and instinct.

The mature believer looks at people through the light of truth (the Scriptures). He or she responds with a love that comes from Christ and cares more for the other person than he or she cares about being right or being personally validated. The direction of maturity is towards Christ and being Christ-like. He is the Head of the Church and the Anointed One of God.

What Can We Do With This Truth Today?

I met a man the other day who had been doing the same job for 20 years. After a lengthy conversation about his job, I had the thought that maybe he had 1 year of experience that he repeated 19 more times.

I wonder if God looks at our experience with Him like that? Some of us stay in a perpetual state of spiritual infancy and keep repeating this state over and over again for years. We wrestle with the same problems and sins year after year. Some, after years of being a "believer", still play around with evil and have to keep going back to God asking for forgiveness for the same sins over and over again.

Others, after years of "knowing" Christ still can't keep themselves excited about Christ and are constantly seeking for that spiritual "secret" that will make all of their dreams come true. If they could just have the "right" pastor of the "right" church, that has the "right" music and offers the "right" programs...their spiritual lives would be successful. In short, their eyes are on themselves instead of on honoring Christ and fulfilling the Great Commission.

God has put into place in His Church what is needed to help every believer grow to maturity...to Christ-likeness instead of child-likeness, to doctrinally stable instead of uncertain about the content of God's Word, and to loving others instead of using others to feel good about ourselves. If we refuse to grow up in Christ, we will have no adequate excuse to give Him when we stand before Him one day.

Are you committed to becoming a deeply mature believer? Are you cooperating with God's plan to get you there? Are you working with those God has placed in your lives with the necessary gifts to help you grow?

"Father, search me and see if there is any wicked way in me! Look deeply and see if I have allowed any immature way to remain in myself. I want to grow up in You. I want to experience the maturity You long for me to have. Teach me to cooperate with Your gifting to the Church and Your plan to grow me. Amen!"



PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

By Will Mackey - Day 38

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, 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. (Ephesians 4:14-16)

Good morning everyone. I hope your week has gotten off to a great start. I pray you enjoy the Presence of Christ today in every aspect of your life.

Paul has been talking about how Christ gives the Church spiritual gifts (via individuals) so that those of us who follow Christ can be *"...built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."*

He then talked about the characteristics of this spiritual maturity. He mentioned that those who are mature will act spiritually grown up, not childish. Those who are spiritually mature will also be stable in their knowledge of Christ and will be faithful in their walk with Christ. They will speak and act in love (God's love) according to God's truth. It is God's will that we all be like this.

Paul wraps this section of teaching up with a word picture...one that he used all the time. He said, *"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."*

Paul likens the church...the body of Christ to the human body. He called Christ the *"Head"* in verse 15. It is Christ who gives the Church the gifting to accomplish His desires for the church (maturity, etc.). It is *"from him"* (Christ, the Head) that the *"whole body"* (the church) *"grows and builds itself up"* (experiences preparedness, unity, faith, knowledge, maturity, fullness of Christ).

Just like the head (brain) in our body gives direction for the nourishment, oxygen, and blood flow to go to each part so that those parts can be healthy and function as they were designed to function... so does Christ for the Church. But also like each part of our bodies must cooperate with the nourishment, oxygen, and blood flow to strengthen itself with those resources...so must the body of Christ...*"grows and builds itself up in love, as each part is doing its work"*. Drawing from Christ Himself, the church effects its own growth.

Each part must do its work if the whole body is to succeed. The body only fulfills Christ's desires when every part is doing its work... All of its work must be done in the context of love...love for Christ and love for other members of Christ's body. Love empowers everyone to care about the building up of all the others.

What Can We Do With This Truth Today?

This type of love can be a rare commodity in the American church today. Many times the American church bases its operation on meeting the cultural expectations of its clientele rather than following the Scriptures. For example, because of these expectations, when choosing the upfront people, many choose talent over godliness, thinking that talent will attract others and numerically grow their church.

Christ never once commanded us to attract the unsaved with our style or talent. But He did say, *"But I, when I am lifted up...will draw all men to myself."* (John 12:32) It is when we lift Christ up through obedience that men are attracted to the power of the Gospel. It is when we choose holiness over sinfulness that Christ is glorified and men marvel at the change in our hearts and the Spirit's power in our lives.

A pastor once told me of an effort in his church to have one of his staff people dismissed. The complaint was that he was not the most talented person available for the job. His heart was great and his work ethic was outstanding. The fruit of his efforts was consistent and continuing to mature. But because he was not "polished" enough, some wanted him to go. The pastor went on to explain how hurtful some people were. "Not once," he said, "did they ever think of God's will or the potential for spiritual growth of that particular person. They didn't show a Christ type love to this man. They did love their own shallow desires. All they wanted was someone they could show and tell others about. It was all about pride and had nothing to do with building others up in love."

Church should be THE place for love and nurture. Other than the family, it ought to be the one place a person can be safe in...can be built up and not torn down in...the place a person can grow in...develop his/her potential in...find unity in...mature in.

There are a few hundred of us studying Ephesians together via email. We are from many different churches and from many different states. We even have a few people studying with us who live outside the country. May I ask you a few questions?

What kind of place is your church? Is it committed to following Christ and His Word or does it jump every time the culture (even Christian culture) says "jump"? Is it being built upon the back of talent or upon the commitment to godliness? Does it have clearly embedded upon its vision and upon the hearts of its people the call and purposes of Christ? Does it want to please God rather than men?

If you said "yes" to those questions, you are blessed. Invest your time, talent, and tithe into God's vision for that church. If you said "no" to those questions, then God wants you to be part of the solution for your church. Don't leave it. Pray, love, obey, and teach. Call your fellow churchmen to live at a different level. Invite them to join you as you do your part so that Christ's body (the Church) in your place can become all it was designed to be.

"Father, sometimes we think of 'worldliness' in the church as allowing the more known sins to go unchallenged. You are teaching us that 'worldliness' has many faces. When we allow the values and expectations of the world to lead the church in how it functions, we have fully embraced 'worldliness' in the church and will reap the consequences of such a choice. Help our churches be different. Help us have the courage not to submit to the whims of the world in order to be accepted by it. Amen!"



PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

By Will Mackey - Day 39

So I tell you this and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more. You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. Surely you heard of him and were taught in him according to the truth that is in Jesus. You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. (Ephesians 4:17-24)

Hi everyone. I pray you have enjoyed our Lord's Presence each day this week. He invites us to enjoy a wonderful fellowship with Him. I encourage you to make time for that fellowship with Him today.

Remember we learned in chapter 3 that all of God's plans for His created world are to be fulfilled through Christ and His body...the Church. Paul then began to answer the question of how Christians (the Church) are to live lives *"worthy of the calling"* they have received from God.

His point to the Ephesians was simple...*how they lived their lives would determine the level of participation they would have in the great plan of God*. Every area of a Christian's life, when lived out in truth, will testify to the wisdom and power of God and reveal His redemptive plan to the world. He wanted to focus on seven areas of human life. Those areas are:

- Personal character/godliness (4:1-2, 25-30; 5:3-18)
- Relationships between Christians (4:3-10, 31-32; 5:1-2, 19-21; 6:5-9)
- Church's ministry (4:11-16)
- World's philosophy (4:17-24)
- Marriage/home (5:22-33)
- Parenting (6:1-4)
- Spiritual battle (6:10-20)

In today's study, Paul taught the Ephesians about resisting the world's philosophy. He gave only a brief description of what fallen human nature can look like when it organizes itself into a society. There are 5 characteristics of a society who forgets God.

Paul said, *"...you must no longer live as the Gentiles do..."* The Gentiles, as referred to here, meant those cultures and societies who were secular in their underpinning, as opposed to the Jews, whose foundations were established by obedience to God. These cultures are characterized by *"the futility of their thinking"* (useless logic and philosophies), *"darkened in their understanding"* (couldn't recognize good and evil), *"separated from the life of God"* (due to the ignorance and hardness of their hearts),

"lost all sensitivity" (their sense of human purpose and responsibility), and had *"given themselves over to sensuality"* (indulged in sexual impurity and a continuous lust for more).

Fallen humanity is bent toward evil. Without God a society moves away from right thinking, morality, human purpose, and healthy relationships with each other. Paul made a clear distinction between those fallen human traits and the new nature with which those who follow Christ will live. In Paul's mind, an encounter with Christ changes a person and a changed person lives differently by leaving his/her sin.

Paul then traced the spiritual journey of the believer. He said those who were redeemed can be described by 5 characteristics. Those who follow Christ had *"heard of him"* (someone told them about Christ), should be *"taught in him in accordance with the truth..."* (learn the truth and begin to base their lives upon the truth), should *"put off your old self..."* (repent and leave their old ways), they were *"made new in the attitude of your minds..."* (radically changed on the inside of their hearts and minds), and they learned to *"put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness"* (make holy choices that are based upon truth and not natural instincts).

Paul's point was that mankind can change and is expected to change. Christ brings the hope that humanity can be redeemed from the inside...out...that hearts and minds can be so fully redeemed that a person's whole life can change and that person can live a life of righteousness and holiness (one that reflects God's nature). This, of course, was humanity's original responsibility (Gen. 1:26-28).

What Can We Do With This Truth Today?

There is a debate going on in the western church over how a church (Christians) should relate to those who are estranged from God. Does the body of Christ simply welcome and accept a person estranged from God giving them a place to contemplate the love of God or does the church, in love, tell that person God's truth...the whole truth, even if that truth opposed his/her sinful lifestyle?

This week I read with interest in our local newspaper about a fallen pastor's dream of starting a new church. The newspaper columnist interviewed some of the people who attended his first service. A popular response those in attendance gave to the question, 'Why are you here?' was the fact that this once fallen pastor was accepting of them and their sinful situation.

Acceptance is an interesting idea, isn't it? Are we called to accept or to love? Are they the same thing? Can acceptance also require change or does it mean you accept them without conditions? Did you notice what Paul said in verse 22? He said of the Ephesians, *"you were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by evil desires..."* Paul said that part of their redemptive journey included being taught to put off their old sinful self and former way of life. Christian acceptance can be an initial characteristic of love but falls short of real love when it does not include the truth that we must leave our sin behind. Repentance is necessary to enter a relationship with Christ.

"Father, You did not send Your Son to live, die, and rise from the dead so that those who follow Him will still have to live in spiritual darkness. Thank you that we can change from darkness to light, from ignorance to truth, from our old self to righteousness and holiness. Amen!"



PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

By Will Mackey - Day 40

Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. In your anger do not sin; do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need. Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. (Ephesians 4:25-29)

Good morning everyone. I hope you enjoyed your weekend and honored our Lord by giving Him the gift of worship and praise together with other believers. In our last study, Paul, in his teaching about resisting the world's philosophy, taught us about coming to Christ with repentance, forsaking our old lives/choices and experiencing true transformation. In today's passage, he moves back to the topic of personal character and godliness.

First of all, Paul talks about falsehood, *"Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor..."* The real motive behind misrepresenting oneself or lying to another person is usually one of control. We want to control a situation for our benefit or control how we fair in a given circumstance when others are in control. Sometimes we are tempted to be careless with the truth or to manipulate it so it serves our needs. Paul said that we must *"put off"* this type of thinking, much like we would put off (take off) a coat when it is no longer needed. As we follow Christ, He becomes our leader, He supplies our needs, and our identity and security are gained exclusively from Him. There is no longer a need to fear and no longer any need to use falsehood.

Paul adds another reason we should not lie to one another. Not only is it against the moral law of God, but as Christians, we are *"all members of one body."* Satan is a liar (John 8:44). He wants us to believe that God is a liar (Gen. 3). When truth is proclaimed, God works in those situations. When lies are told, Satan works with those circumstances. Because of this, whenever deception is used, it hinders the body of Christ from working in ways that honor God.

A second area of character and responsibility concerns anger, *"In your anger do not sin; do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold."* There are two different types of anger; a good type and a bad type. A good type of anger is focused on sin and the hurt that sin brings to others' lives. For example: Jesus' anger in Mark 3:5 regarding the religious leaders' reaction to His healing of a man on the Sabbath day and again in John 2:13-17 regarding what people had done to the worship of God in the Temple.

The bad type of anger is more self-absorbed. It often involves a bad temper that reacts to something it doesn't like. Anger of this sort, if left unresolved will turn into resentment and eventually leads to hatred and bitterness. Paul also tells us not to put off the resolving of such anger. We are to take care of it the day it

happens. If we put it off it will most certainly give *"the devil a foothold."* We don't want to give the devil any opportunity to influence us or our relationships.

A third area of the Christians' character and responsibility deals with stealing, *"He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need."* In Paul's day stealing was a very common thing to do, especially in the public bathhouses in Greek culture. While people were bathing, others would steal their clothes and personal items. Whole people groups made their living by taking from others.

Once again, Paul insisted that a person who has come to Christ must give up the old lifestyle. A change of behavior is expected. He cannot continue to break God's laws as he did before he received the grace of God through Jesus Christ. This grace was given to him so he could *"work"* and do *"something useful with his own hands"* and become a positive part of his community, *"that he may have something to share with those in need."* Grace is never given so people can continue to deliberately sin and wrongly think that they are getting away with it.

A fourth area Paul is compelled to address is the area of the Christian's speech, *"Do not let unwholesome talk come out of your mouths..."* The word for unwholesome is the word (sapos) which means "rotten". Jesus told us, *"...For out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks."* (Matthew 12:34) When the heart is changed by the redemption that Christ made available, what comes out of the mouth will and must change too.

Paul goes on to say that believers should not only 'not' say some things but he/she should be using his/her speech to be *"helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen."* Our mouths should be used to communicate love and blessing to other people and not be used to fill others' minds with rotten ideas that will only hinder their spiritual walk.

What Can We Do With This Truth Today?

We can only begin a relationship with Christ by walking through the doorway of confession and repentance (1 John 1:6-9). We come to God realizing our spiritual poverty (Matt. 5:3) and putting our trust in the sacrifice of Jesus to enable our forgiveness and spiritual healing (Isaiah 53:5-6). All of this is available to us because of God's love and grace. Grace is given to us so that sin will no longer be our master (Rom. 6:11-14). God's plan of redemption is about transformation, not only forgiveness. Forgiveness isn't the end game. It enables the relationship between God and man to get started. The end game is the transformation and Christ-likeness of God's people (1 John 3:4-10, 2 Peter 1:2-4)

Have you experienced the true transformation that Christ died to bring you? When you came to Christ, did you come to Him in confession and repentance, leaving your sins behind and beginning life anew under His grace and power? Don't settle for being a religious person who admires Christ. Make sure you are a true follower of Christ, redeemed by His blood, and walking in obedience to Him every day.

"Father, thank You for salvation. Thank You that real change (inside and outside) is available to us. Thank You for not leaving us under the control of sin. Thank you for enabling our lives to be made new. Amen!"



PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

By Will Mackey - Day 41

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.
(Ephesians 4:30-5:2)

Hi everyone! May I encourage you today to remember the sacrifice of God's Son so that you and I might know Him and walk in holiness everyday of our lives. Enjoy the power of His salvation today.

Paul has been teaching about personal character and responsibility. He has called for repentance and true transformation in the lives of those who name the name of Christ. God's forgiveness is not the end game for God. Transformation is God's end game. Transformation is not an option. It is the goal.

He warns us not to *"grieve the Holy Spirit, with whom you are sealed for the day of redemption."* The Holy Spirit is our guide and the director of our lives. We should not live contrary to His guidance and direction. To do so will *"grieve"* Him and hurt the heart of God. Back on Day 16 we dealt with this idea of being sealed with the Holy Spirit. Paul is not as wordy in this verse because he explained the concept in more depth in 1:13-14. He said that we were *"marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance..."*

Many misunderstand this concept. We are not sealed like one would seal a Ziploc storage bag and nothing inside can escape. We are *"marked with a seal"*. In that day, official papers were fastened together with a blob of hot wax. Before the wax cooled off, the signer of the document pressed his identification (usually a signet ring) into the wax, thus putting his authentic mark on the document. Paul told the Ephesians that the Holy Spirit was God's authentic identification mark on the life of the believer. There is an important clarification to be made here. Paul, in his foundational teaching on this subject, uses the word "seal" (sphragizo) as a noun not a verb. The Scripture does not say the believer is sealed (verb) but is marked with an identification seal (noun). So when Paul says we are sealed in 4:30, he is referring back to his original teaching in chapter 1.

When we believe and are filled with the Holy Spirit, God gives us His Spirit to live within us (His identification mark on us...in us). Because of that mark (the Holy Spirit), others will know who we belonged to...whose family we are part of. He will begin to produce His nature in us since we are now part of His family. This is why it will grieve God if we think and act in ways contrary to our Father's nature and will.

As a way of a sweeping summary of related topics, Paul goes on to say that we are to get rid of all *"bitterness"* (settled hostility toward others), *"rage"* (hot tempered explosiveness), *"anger"* (habitual, fostered hostility toward others), *"brawling"*

(fighting with others), *"slandering"* (verbally trying to hurt others), and *"malice"* (any mean spirited and anger based movement) toward other people. As followers of Christ we are not to participate in these things any longer.

Paul said instead of using those negative relational characteristics we should pattern our relationships with others based upon how God treats us. In fact, the way we keep from using those other means is to purposely choose to *"be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."* If we purposely choose to respond to and treat others with the same kindness, compassion, and forgiveness that Christ has shown us, we will be honoring God's identification mark on us.

We are to be *"imitators of God"*. Just as a child will imitate the character and actions of his/her parents, so we must be and do as our heavenly Father is and does (1 Peter 1:15-16). We are to *"live a life of love, just as Christ loved us"* and a life of sacrifice *"and gave himself up for us..."* for others. This is the way to truly reveal our God to the body of Christ and to the unsaved world. By living like this we will be living a life worthy of the calling of God (Eph. 4:1) and participating with Christ in God's plan to reconcile the world to Himself through the Church (Eph. 3).

What Can We Do With This Truth Today?

Wow...some deep truth, isn't it? You have heard me say before that I am burdened for the American Church. It has been subjected to a weak pulpit ministry for at least the last two-three generations. The American preacher has been bitten by the "popularity" bug and has allowed worldly advertising ideas to replace "old fashioned" friendship evangelism. A strong move toward entertainment and a constant need to remind the world that we are not nerdy has taken the place of godly, powerful, Christ-like living.

The church is afraid to be different from the world because it has believed the lie that if we are like them we will win them. Nothing could be farther from the truth. It is only when we reveal Christ as He truly is that those who the Spirit is calling are drawn to Him.

The church's current course of action accomplishes two things. First, it creates an expectation that the church is a service people pay for and those who attend are the consumers. They come to church to get and not to give themselves away. Second, it creates a group of people who attempt to approach the Lord out of selfish desire and do not come to Him with a keen sense of spiritual poverty and true repentance. Those who don't know Christ need to be convicted, not impressed.

Since meeting Jesus, has your life taken on characteristics that represent God's nature?...His love for humanity?...His grace for humanity?...His sacrifice for humanity? This is God's end game! This is what it is all about. This is God's desire for you. This is God's expectation upon you.

"Father, help us as American Christians to read our Bibles and know the truth. Help us not to get sucked into every Christian fad and new expression of doctrine. Teach us to be men and women who are followers of Your Son Jesus. Amen!"



PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

By Will Mackey - Day 42

But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. For 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. (Ephesians 5:3-6)

Good morning everyone! Let's get started with our study today.

You remember in the last few chapters of his letter to the Ephesian believers, Paul was making a very simple point...*how they lived their lives would determine their participation in fulfilling the great plan of God.* He was teaching that every area of a Christian's life, when lived out in truth, will testify to the wisdom and power of God and reveal His redemptive plan to the world. Paul then focused on 7 areas of life in which believers are to *"live a life worthy of God's calling"* (Eph. 4:1). Those areas and their references are listed below. Those in red are the remaining passages in our study.

- Personal character/godliness (4:1-2, 25-30; **5:3-18**)
- Relationships between Christians (4:3-10, 31-32; 5:1-2, **19-21**; **6:5-9**)
- Church's ministry (4:11-16)
- World's philosophy (4:17-24)
- Marriage/home (**5:22-33**)
- Parenting (**6:1-4**)
- Spiritual battle (**6:10-20**)

In our study today and the next few days Paul returns to the topic of personal character and godliness. He said, *"But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people."* God, through His Apostle, is laying out for us the highest standard of living in all the world. As followers of Christ we are to live in absolute sexual purity. Notice Paul said, *"...there must not be even a hint..."* of such sin in our lives. God would never call us to a standard of living that was impossible. The phrase *"sexual immorality"* is the word fornication, which includes all sexual sin. In that day to which Paul was writing the Greek culture saw sexuality very differently than God created and instructed it to be. Sexual activity between unmarried people, unfaithfulness within marriage, and the practice of homosexuality were wide spread. The culture was completely accepting of such sexual evil to the point that it was common place and people felt no shame in participating in such carnal activity.

Paul continued that there should not even be a hint of *"...any kind of impurity, or of greed..."* among the community of faith. The word *"impurity"* means uncleanness or anything that God says is morally unclean and the word *"greed"* means

covetousness, which refers to desiring what other people have and not being grateful to God for what we already have. All such thinking and action has no place in the lives of those who have experienced the redemption that Christ brings.

Paul goes on to say that followers of Christ, also should not be involved with *"obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking"* which are *"out of place"* in the Christian community. The word for *"obscenity"* means foul talk or shameful talk. This would include indecent talk like cursing, gossip, and slander. The phrase *"foolish talk"* literally means silly talk and is commonly used in Greek literature to describe what you hear when listening to a drunkard. *"Coarse joking"* means using filthy, crude, or rude language, particularly at the expense of others, to make people laugh or see others in a foolish light. This kind of speech and the thinking that is behind the speech has no place in the Christian community. Paul says instead we should be communicating to God and others the more positive message of *"thanksgiving"*.

In order to protect them from some of the false teaching that was being spread in Paul's day, he said, *"For 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."* One cannot live like this and at the same time be a true Christian who has the hope of eternal life. When a man or woman encounters the powerful redemption of Christ, they cannot remain the same...the old sinful habits cannot be allowed to live on...the former way of thinking and acting cannot be allowed to stay. Already Church teachings had developed that communicated a false representation of God's grace. Grace was being used to excuse and therefore enable sinful behavior, not to overpower and destroy it.

What Can We Do With This Truth Today?

Isn't it amazing that our enemy had already begun perverting the concept of God's grace, even in the earliest days of the Church? He had already instructed evil and misguided men to teach that it was ok to continue in one's sin because God in His grace would always forgive him. In fact, through this carnal way of thinking, they came to believe that after a person was saved, the spirit of a person could remain saved even if he was using his mind and body to do all sorts of evil and sin. This is why Paul had to write what he did to the Ephesian Christians. They were beginning to believe this doctrinal hog wash. For further study you can look at 1John 3, Hebrews 10:26-30, Galatians 5, and Romans 6 just for starters.

May I tell you something very scary? If you were to take a poll of the formal (written down) doctrinal beliefs of 70% of the Christian churches in America you would find a very similar, if not identical, doctrine of grace preached and taught in their churches. This is one of the reasons why in the most recent surveys on moral and social issues such as abortion, divorce, and sexual impurity, there is no statistical difference between the Church and the secular culture. It seems the Church is filled with people who have lost their fear of God. They have been spiritually rocked to sleep by a lie that says God's grace is unlimited regardless of how irresponsible they become. Paul's teaching is clear for us today...*"let no one deceive you with empty words (doctrines)."*

"Father, help us get serious about knowing Your Word. We will always be vulnerable to the enemy's lies unless we know Your Word intimately. Help us invest the time it takes to study the Bible and learn the Truth. Amen!"



PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

By Will Mackey - Day 43

Therefore do not be partners with them. For you were once in darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of light consists of all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. 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.' (Ephesians 5:7-14)

Good morning everyone! I hope your week has gotten off to a great start. I also hope you are enjoying the truth Paul is teaching us in his letter to the Ephesians. I appreciate Paul's straight-forwardness and the way in which he helps his readers understand God's powerful redemption and the freedom we have because of it.

As you remember our text for today is part of a larger passage. In our last study Paul began to revisit the topic of personal character and godliness again. He drew a clear line regarding how people who have truly encountered Christ live and how those who are faking it live. Paul continues with this theme in verses 7-14.

"Therefore do not be partners with them." By *"them"*, Paul means the immoral, impure, and the greedy people (verse 5) and those who are disobedient to God (verse 6). The word *"partner"* means one who participates with.

"For you were once in darkness, but now you are light in the Lord." So far Paul has listed 5 reasons not to participate in the things of darkness. He said it is improper for those who follow Christ (3), it is out of place for the Christian community (4), the loss of grace and our inheritance (5), the wrath of God (6), and now he affirms it is because we have moved from one kingdom to another...from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light. As citizens in this new kingdom, we have the responsibility to *"live as children of light"* which means to live in a way that pleases our King, *"and find out what pleases the Lord."*

When we walk in the light of Christ *"goodness, righteousness, and truth"* are characteristics in our lives. We want to be good and choose goodness over badness. We want to be righteous and choose things that are right instead of things that are wrong. We want to know the truth and make choices that are founded upon truth instead of lies about God, ourselves, or others. Walking in the light of Christ means to *"have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness..."* Instead of participating in darkness we should *"expose"* the evil that darkness promotes. We expose it by telling people the truth about it...about its effects...that in God's view it is *"shameful to even mention what the disobedient do in secret."* How much more shameful would it be to participate with them.

When people of light get around darkness, *"...everything exposed by the light becomes visible for it is light that makes everything visible."* Just like turning a light on in a dark

room makes it possible to see the items in the room, the light of Christ, when it comes into contact with spiritual darkness, makes the things of darkness visible for all to see. Darkness hates the light because the light shows the darkness for what it is. Darkness succeeds best when its dark character is kept hidden. Light exposes the deeds of darkness and walking in the light leads to love, mercy, grace, forgiveness, purity, and freedom.

The last phrase combines the poetic ideas of Isaiah 26 and 60 with the promise that if we awake from our spiritual slumber Christ will restore us and be our light.

What Can We Do With This Truth Today?

One of my favorite hymns is And Can It Be? The third verse paints a scene in which our souls are imprisoned in the dark dungeon of Satan's kingdom. When the light of Christ comes in, it makes visible our sin, and through repentance we become free from that which enslaved us. Look at the words...

*Long my imprisoned spirit lay, Fast bound in sin and nature's night.
Thine eyes diffused a quickening ray. I woke; the dungeon filled with light.
My chains fell off; my heart was free. I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.
Amazing love! How can it be that Thou my God, shouldst die for me?*

Not only are we to receive Christ's light and walk in it ourselves, we are also to reflect Christ's light to others. I read an article the other day about something the Russians did in space back in the early 90's. They literally deployed a space reflector. It was a 25 ft. aluminum-covered disc that they installed at the space station. Its purpose was to reflect the Sun's light onto the dark side of the Earth. With this, they produced a two-mile circle of light on Earth. This successful experiment moved the Russians to the forefront of this type of reflective technology.

It made me think of the church. Our purpose is not to produce a light of our own but to reflect the true Light of Jesus Christ. We reflect His Light when we make holy choices and speak the Truth in love.

Are you walking in all the light Christ has given you? Is there any part of His light that you are resisting?...ignoring?...just not getting around to implementing? You will never experience all that God has for you if you continue to treat God's Truth with casual indifference. To refuse light is to eventually turn it off in your life and to let darkness take completely over.

If you are walking in the light, are you reflecting His light onto the lives of others? Are you speaking God's Truth to everyone you know?...even if the Truth will make them feel bad or sad? It is nothing personal. You are not judging them. You are just doing your job. As a participant in the Light, you are also called to be a reflector of the Light. They have a right to know the Truth. Aren't you glad someone reflected His light to you and told you the Truth?

"Father, thank You for the power of Your light. Thank You that Your light exposes any darkness in our lives, enabling us to repent and seek Your forgiving and cleansing work. Thank You that Your light continues to keep our lives free from the things of darkness. Thank You that we don't have the pressure of creating light but only the privilege of reflecting Your light to others. Amen!"



PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

By Will Mackey - Day 44

Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. Do not get drunk with wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

(Ephesians 5:15-21)

Good morning everyone! Paul continues to work with us on the issue of personal character and godliness. God has shown us a lot in chapter 5 so far, hasn't He? God, through Paul, has told us to live a life that is worthy of Christ's sacrifice. He has told us to completely leave behind any sexual immorality, anything impure, and any greed. He has told us not to participate with those who disobey God. He has told us not to be deceived by those who say we can do evil and still fellowship with Christ. He has told us to walk in the light of Christ and to have nothing to do with the deeds of darkness. He has told us to expose darkness to others for what it really is. Now, beginning in verse 15, Paul continues to exhort us to walk in holiness.

"Be careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise..." How we live is important to God and should be to us. We are to map out the choices we make with great care and thought. Our choices and priorities are to be characterized by God's wisdom and not the world's philosophy, which is really unwise. We should give our attention and energy in certain directions, doing certain things to bring about certain fruit. Paul goes on to give us 7 characteristics/examples of wise living.

"...making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil." Wise living involves having an assertive outlook on life. Paul tells us to be assertive as God brings opportunities to our lives. When we understand that a certain opportunity is from God we are to make the most of it. Rescue back as much time from an evil enemy to use in an evil world. When the door opens to minister to someone, walk through it quickly because all of hell is working to close the door again. Don't wait until tomorrow to do what the Lord has called you to do today.

"Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is." Wise living involves a guiding objective...fulfilling the Lord's will. The number one way to know God's will is to know the Bible. Within its pages we have God's redemptive story, God's thoughts, God's motives, and God's wisdom clearly laid out. Jesus tells us in Matthew 7:21 that there will be many who have claimed a relationship with Him but, who in the end, will be denied access to heaven because they did not give their lives to doing the will of God. We can understand God's will and have the responsibility to understand it. It is our job to seek it out and to manage our lives in such a way as to do it.

"Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery." Wise living involves a proper dependence upon the right One. Many have learned to depend upon different substances to get them through the tough times of life. They depend upon alcohol, among other things, to numb the pains of life and to help them forget their trouble, if only for a little while. Wise living refuses to depend upon anything other than God Himself. He is the only One who is completely worthy of our trust and dependence. He does not want us to avoid or momentarily forget our problems. He wants to lead us in facing and conquering them. He wants to free us from the dysfunction caused by our sin or someone else's sin.

"Instead, be filled with the Spirit." Wise living involves a holy relationship with God through His Son and in His Spirit. We are to be filled (literally means saturated like a sponge is when dipped into a pail of water) with the very Spirit of God. God, Himself, through His Spirit, is to live in us. His Spirit changes our nature. He cleanses our hearts from sin (Acts 15:8-9) and empowers us to live holy lives before Him. His Spirit leads us every moment of every day and enables us to do the will of God.

"Speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs." Wise living involves a building up of others. Life is hard. Life can get discouraging. As believers we have the privilege of encouraging our brothers and sisters in Christ. One way to do this is to speak the truth in love to them. We can remind them of the truths about God; His love, His grace, His mercy, and His provision. In Paul's day they had limited access to these truths written down. They had limited access to the entire Old Testament. It seems they had some access to the Book of Psalms but most of these great truths were made into hymns (the more official songs written and sung in church) and spiritual songs (informal choruses written by the ordinary person).

"Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." Wise living involves a heartfelt and grateful worship of God. God wants us to sing and make music to Him. We are to utilize the creative gifts He has given us to create for Him songs of praise and worship. Our hearts are to be filled with thanksgiving for all He has done for us. We owe Him everything. All we have in life is because of His goodness and mercy.

"Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." Wise living involves a respect for authority in those whom Christ has placed in our lives. A healthy life is an accountable life. We all know an abuse of this idea when we see it. We do not mean that others should control or manipulate us. But we are to gladly submit at appropriate times to the ones who Christ brings into our lives to make us strong.

What Can We Do With This Truth Today?

There is a difference between living on auto pilot and living an intentional life. Auto pilot living usually means we are overwhelmed, living in survival mode, and making little time for the most important things. Intentional living means we live carefully and thoughtfully, making the most of our time and our other resources. The latter is the wisest way to live. Examine your life up against the 7 examples of wise living. Start with the infilling of the Holy Spirit and the heartfelt/grateful worship of God. Then implement one of the others each week until they become habit.

"Father, help me live intentionally. Help me do what I do on purpose...for the right reason and with the right motive. Help me live wisely. Amen!"



PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

By Will Mackey - Day 45

Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church—for we are members of his body. “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united with his wife and the two will become one flesh.” This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.
(Ephesians 5:22-33)

Good morning everyone! This passage represents some of the most important Biblical Truth that we will study together. Within this passage we gain incredible insight into how God sees Christian marriage. Also contained in this passage is the key to marital happiness and fulfillment. Most marriages suffer discontentment and eventually a loss of closeness because couples don't understand God's higher purpose for marriage and don't implement their God-given responsibilities within it.

You will remember in the last few chapters of this letter Paul has been teaching us how we live our lives determines our participation in fulfilling the great plan of God to the world through His Son Jesus. God's entire hope for the reconciliation of this world to Himself is placed in His Son and His Son's body (the Church, 2:11-3:21). We've learned every area of our lives, when lived out in truth, will testify of God's wisdom and reveal His perfect redemptive plan.

Paul then began leading us through 7 different areas of life in which we are to live out the truth. Those areas are personal character, relationships with other Christians, the ministry of the local church, defeating the world's philosophy, raising children, fighting spiritual battles and our current topic ...our marriages and home life. As we begin today I want to begin with a brief overview and then in the following studies begin to dig deeper. Notice these lines...

“For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church...Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.. Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church...In the same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies...After all no one ever hated his own body, but feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church---for we are members of his body. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This is a profound mystery---but I am talking about Christ and the church.” (23-25, 28-32)

Did you notice all the references to Christ and the church while he talked about husbands and wives? Paul is comparing the actions of husbands and wives to the actions of Christ and the church. Husbands are to love and lead like Christ does for the church and wives are to love and follow like the church does for Christ. And then, after Paul laid down these ideas he said, *"For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."* Did you catch that? Christian marriage is meant to illustrate the relationship that Christ has with His church (*"for this reason"*).

The main reason for a Christian man and woman to get married is that through their union they might reveal truth about the relationship Christ has with His church. Are you serious? Why would this be important? Because it is within this relationship (Christ and His church) that God's great redemptive plan (the Gospel) is proclaimed and lived out. It is through the witness of the church (Christ's body) and the way in which Christ loves, provides, and cares for it that His nature, grace, and sacrifice are made known to the rest of the world.

When a husband's love/care for his wife reflects Christ's love/care for the church and when a wife's love/submission for her husband reflects the church's love/submission for Christ, the world sees a powerful, living testimony of the redemptive plan of God.

What Can We Do With This Truth Today?

The truth in this passage is so important that the enemy of our souls has worked overtime causing many to abuse and misinterpret it. Because of their own agendas most people never get past the *"wives submit to your husbands"* part. Many never get to the *"husbands, love your wives as Christ loves the church and gave himself up for her"* part and even fewer ever see the *"for this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and they will become one flesh"* part. For a lot of us the goal of marriage is far too shallow and self-serving. We saw today God's goal for a Christian marriage is for Christ (his nature, his love, and his grace) to be made manifest to others through how the husband and wife relate to each other.

As we look at our own marriages, is there an understanding that the purpose of our marriages is bigger than simply "living happily ever after"? Can we see that if the goal of marriage is to illustrate the redemptive plan of God then the way husbands treat wives and wives treat husbands must change?

If we take this higher view of marriage suddenly the small things are seen for what they really are...small. The big things are handled by applying God's principles and not with emotional arguments and logic. Can we even imagine what could happen in the lives of our kids and our kids' faith if they really saw a daily demonstration of the power of the Gospel at work within their parents' relationship? What would happen if they saw divine love, real sacrifice, incredible grace, and mature humility working within their parents' lives and marriages? I dare say it would make the Gospel much more attractive. Real transformation is contagious!

"Father, why is it so easy for me to always think it is always about me? It is a sobering thought to realize that my marriage isn't primarily about me or my wife...it is about Your gospel and redemptive plan. It is a union whereby Your nature, Your wisdom and Your power can be demonstrated day after day. Help me to get my eyes on the "big picture". Amen!"



PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

By Will Mackey - Day 46

Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior.

Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church—for we are members of his body. “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united with his wife and the two will become one flesh.” This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

(Ephesians 5:22-33)

Good morning everyone! I hope your week has been good and that you have enjoyed fellowship with Christ. There is nothing like enjoying His fellowship every day, is there? Christianity is not a religion of rules and regulations. It is a living and obedient relationship with a person...Jesus Christ.

The passage before us today is a powerful one. We are learning every area of our lives represents an opportunity to live out the Gospel of Christ and to show those who see our lives the redemptive plan of God for the world. Our marriages are no exception. Last time we learned when a husband's love/care for his wife reflects Christ's love/care for the church and when a wife's love/submission for her husband reflects the church's love/ submission for Christ, others see a powerful, living testimony of the redemptive plan of God for the world. There is more to marriage than living happily ever after. For the Christian, marriage, as well as every area of life, is about bringing honor and glory to God. How can we bring honor and glory to God through our marriage relationships? Let's begin to look at that today.

It is kind of funny to talk with people about this passage. There is something about the first sentence that irritates some and causes others to smile. Too often the men are the smilers and the women are cautiously listening. ***“Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord.”*** At first glance the words seem to smack against the conventional wisdom of the day. Honestly, even after we learn what it really says, our culture will still have a problem with it.

Let's look at this word ***“submit”*** for a few minutes. The word ***“submit”*** is the word (hypotasso) which comes from two words: hypo meaning “under” and tasso meaning “to assign yourself in an orderly manner”. So the idea is to deliberately decide to organize yourself under the leadership or influence of someone else. The one submitting is not forced to do this. He or she chooses to do this for a greater good. When you think about it submission is a normal part of life for all of us. God

expects all of us to submit to various people in our lives. Allowing another to lead is also part of the nature of the Trinity. Let me give you a few examples.

- Christian young people are to submit to older people (1 Pet. 5:5)
- Christians are to submit to one another (Eph. 5:21)
- Christians are to submit to civil authorities (1 Pet. 2:13-17)
- Christians are to submit to those they work for (1 Pet. 2:18)
- Christians are to be accountable to ministry leaders outside their own local churches (1 Cor. 16:10-18)
- Christians are to submit to their own pastors (Heb. 13:7, 17)
- Christians are to submit to God (James 4:7)
- Jesus submits to the leadership of the Father (Matt. 26:39; Heb. 5:7-9)
- The Holy Spirit submits to the ministry of Jesus (John 16:13-15)

Submission is not a concept that puts one person's value over and above another person's value. Because I submit to a police officer who pulls me over for speeding it doesn't mean that I am less a human, of less value, or have less honor than the officer. Is Jesus less divine because He submits to the leadership of the Father or is the Holy Spirit less divine because He submits to the ministry of Jesus? Neither is a wife of less value and honor because she submits to the leadership of her husband. By the way, when we look at the leadership of the husband we will discover that the word "**head**" does not mean "boss" or "bully" or "master". That word means "initiator"...more later. Submission is simply part of allowing those to whom God has given responsibility... to obey His call and commission.

Our fallen culture demonizes the concept of submission. It makes it out to be mean weakness. Actually it is the opposite of weakness. Only the strong and secure person can voluntarily place himself or herself under the influence of another for a greater good. God exalts this concept and requires it of all of us. To submit to God given leadership is to trust God completely and to know that God can and will have his way in my life even if those leading me are not perfect. It is to trust that God would not lie to me nor does He make mistakes.

What Can We Do With This Truth Today?

In order to make a more complete application on the subject of marriage I will wait until we have studied the entire passage. However, on the general subject of submission...far too many Christians who have grown up in our western culture have believed the world instead of the Bible. Take the layman/pastor relationship as an example. Over the last three decades a phenomenon called "church hopping" has occurred. It is simply this. When someone doesn't like what a pastor says or doesn't like the way a pastor leads a certain ministry it is most common to leave the church and "hop" to another one. But in the "hopping" we also remove ourselves from the spiritual authority/protection that God has placed in our lives through our pastors. I am not saying that there are no legitimate times to leave a pastor's leadership. If he/she is teaching untruth or living immorally, by all means, if God allows, remove yourself. But we should never leave because we are not getting our way. I firmly believe this is one of the big sins of western Christianity and a major reason for our immaturity, immorality, and lack of spiritual power.

"Father, help me understand that submission to Your authority and those You have called to influence me is the way to spiritual maturity with You and spiritual power to serve others. When I refuse to submit to those You place in my life, I am really refusing to trust and follow You. Amen!"



PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

By Will Mackey - Day 47

Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church—for we are members of his body. “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united with his wife and the two will become one flesh.” This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.
(Ephesians 5:22-33)

Good morning everyone! I am praying for you this week. I hope you are enjoying the passage so far. We are just beginning to see its depth.

Let's remember the two things we have learned so far. We have learned that the marriage covenant is designed and structured so that through the union of a man and woman in marriage, the world might see the truth about the relationship Christ has with His church...which reveals the great redemptive plan of God. The second thing we looked at was the concept of submission. We all submit to the leadership and influence of others. If we submit to those whom God has called us to submit to, we will be in the best possible position to grow and flourish spiritually.

With those two truths in mind, today we will begin to look at what God, through Paul, says is the responsibility of wives. I need to tell you up front, the bulk of the responsibility in the marriage relationship is on the husband. In this passage, Paul uses 33 words to layout and describe the responsibility of the wife and 179 words to layout and describe the responsibility that is upon the husband. It is at this point that husbands usually stop grinning from ear to ear 😊.

There are a total of three sentences that are directed toward the wife. They are: *"Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord...Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything...the wife must respect her husband."* Over the years I have heard many selfish interpretations of these verses, usually by husbands who wanted their wives to act more like hired staff instead of by men who wanted to honor Christ in their role of husband.

The first phrase says that wives should submit to their husbands *"as to the Lord."* Some have taken this to mean that the husband is supposed to be a lord to his wife or that the husband is to be treated by the wife the way she would treat Jesus, or that the husband is to have the same authority over the wife as Jesus has in her life

or that the husband is the wife's mediator through which she must go in order to get to God or that the husband owns the wife like Christ owns the church. All of these are wrong...dead wrong. These misguided ideas will eventually lead to a gross misunderstanding of God's view of women and a most unhealthy state for the wife and the marriage.

Paul, understanding how important this subject is and how prone mankind is to misunderstanding simple truth, gives us the next line just to make sure we don't go in the wrong direction with the first line. ***"Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything."*** This line says the same thing as the first line only with more detail. How does the church submit to Christ? The church (gathered individual believers), responding to the great sacrificial and all encompassing love of Christ, chooses to follow the leadership of Christ. If he did not love us we would not trust Him and would not submit to Him. Because of His love we (the church) follow Him and organize ourselves under His headship. So it is with a wife. Because of her husband's love (details of that love coming later) and in response to it, a wife chooses to follow her husband's headship and to organize herself under his role as leader.

Did you notice the phrase ***"in everything"***? This doesn't mean "without question" or a "blind following". This phrase means to submit with consistency. In other words, it isn't healthy to follow on Monday but decide that on Tuesday and Thursday you won't. It doesn't work to cooperate in one area of life but refuse to do so in another area of life. The trust factor at the foundation of submission is based upon the husband's deep love and therefore should involve a commitment to partner together consistently as a way of life. It is Christ's love for us that enables us to respect Him and then to trust Him. A husband's love is also the basis for Paul's line, ***"the wife must respect her husband."*** Receiving the love of someone enables us to respect that person which further enables us to trust that person. For the Christian and for a wife...it all starts with a deep abiding love.

What Can We Do With This Truth Today?

Can a wife submit to a husband who doesn't show her any love? Yes she can...just as a husband can deeply love a wife who does not respect or trust him. Sadly though, submission that is not in response to love can never be all it was designed to be just like love that is not reciprocated can never fulfill its intended purpose.

A submission that is not based upon receiving genuine love cannot appropriately express the way the church loves, respects, and trusts Christ. Submission given without having received love first will not rise above being a duty done out of obligation or a habit that is not connected to the heart. Submission without being loved is not given out of respect and trust. If we are healthy, we inherently cannot respect nor trust someone who does not genuinely love us. And, of course, submission without respect and trust is not what the Lord created it to be.

Some have said, "If the wife keeps on submitting in the absence of a husband's love...that act will create a love in her husband's heart." A wife's submission cannot create agape type love in the heart of her husband. Only a man who has encountered Christ... who has been reborn and filled with the Holy Spirit can love his wife like Christ loves His church. Love is a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22). Husbands...we must have a genuine encounter with the Christ.

"Father, I must know Your Son. Help me experience His love. Amen!"



PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

By Will Mackey - Day 48

Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior.

Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church—for we are members of his body. “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united with his wife and the two will become one flesh.” This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

(Ephesians 5:22-33)

Hi everyone! It is a beautiful morning. I am so glad we have God's Word...the Bible, aren't you? Isn't it so enjoyable to study God's will?

Before we move on to the "husband" section of this passage I want to spend one more day in the "wife" section. I made a comment in the last devotional about how easy it would be to misunderstand womanhood if we misunderstand this passage. Let's talk about that today.

Notice that Paul uses the word "wife or wives" 9 times in 12 verses. The word for "*wife*" is (goo-nay) which means feminine...a woman. The word "*wife*", by definition, doesn't describe what she does but who she is. Her purpose is captured in her essence and not in a particular task or role that she may fill. This is a very important Truth to grasp.

In Genesis 2:22-23 we read, "*Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, 'This is now bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman for she was taken out of man.'*" In the Hebrew it says that God made an (ish-shaw or fe-male). Because she was "*taken out of man*" verse 24 says, "*For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.*" Does this last phrase sound familiar? Paul, in Ephesians 5:31 was quoting Moses from Genesis 2:24.

Remember Paul told us that the reason a man and woman are to become one flesh was, through that intimate relationship, they might show the Gospel and the powerful relationship between Christ and His church. Now Moses helps us go another layer deeper. Moses says that the reason a man and woman can have such deep closeness..."*one flesh*..." is because of how God created the woman. Men and women can come together in an exclusive relationship in which they can deeply

identify with each other because they are created from the same material source and for the same joint purpose.

In Genesis 2:18 God said, *"It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."* The word *"helper"* is (ezer) which means a helper opposite him to fill up what is missing. Within this word is the idea of equality, suitability and comparability to Adam...of the same essence and worth...only different because different is needed. The concept of *"helper"* is not a lower-level idea. In fact, God acknowledges Himself as mankind's helper in Psalm 121:1-2 and in Isaiah 41:10, just to name a few. God comes beside mankind and fills up what is missing in order for mankind to fulfill his mission.

All of these Genesis passages are founded upon God's mandate to humanity in Genesis 1:26-28, *"Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over...all the earth...So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful...fill the earth, subdue it. Rule over...every living creature...'"*

Notice that male and female are both created in God's image and likeness. Both male and female are given the same mandate from God...to fill the earth and subdue/ruler over it. God created the man to fulfill certain responsibilities in accomplishing that mandate and God created the woman to fulfill certain responsibilities in accomplishing that mandate. Both male and female qualities represent the image and likeness of God. For example, the qualities of creating/power usually attributed to manhood are found in the Godhead (Jeremiah 32:17). The qualities of nurture/sensitivity usually attributed to womanhood are found in the Godhead, too (Luke 13:34/Eph. 4:30). Often many of the qualities of womanhood are opposite the qualities of manhood. This is by design...*"a helper suitable for him"*.

Translation...opposites attract by Divine design. Our wives fill up what is missing in our nature and we fill up what is missing in their nature. Together we more accurately and fully reveal the image and likeness of God as we think and act upon the earth. Women were not created to serve men but to partner with them to get the larger mandate from God done. It was not until after the fall into sin of mankind that we see the headship of man in this partnership clearly communicated (Genesis 3:16).

What Can We Do With This Truth Today?

Many husbands and wives spend much of their time trying to change the other. What would happen if we realized that men and women are different by design and the differences are meant to complete one another? Husbands, we must learn to appreciate the natural essence of our wives...the particular characteristics of her nature. Wives, you should learn to do the same toward your husbands. Granted...we must all learn to exercise the qualities of our natures in appropriate ways and with wise balance. There are such things as over doing it with creating/power and over doing it with nurture/sensitivity. Let's learn to rest in the qualities of our spouses and trust that God has given them to us for our completion.

"Father, help me see my spouse through Your eyes. I want to see what You see...what You made...and how I can cooperate with Your design so that we can be an unbeatable team. Thank You. Amen!"



PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

By Will Mackey - Day 49

Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior.

Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church—for we are members of his body. “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united with his wife and the two will become one flesh.” This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

(Ephesians 5:22-33)

Hi everyone! Hope this week is off to a strong start. I pray you will enjoy the Lord's Presence and Guidance each and every day this week.

In today's study we change sides ☺ and begin looking at what God says to husbands. Guys...I am praying for us this week and next. God has 2 profound things to teach us. The second one is a bit more involved than the first one. Let's look at the first one today and again on Thursday.

Our Lord, through Paul, says, "*...the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior.*" We've already looked at the concept that when Paul compares the function of the husband to Christ and the function of the wife to the church, those comparisons have some limitations. Paul doesn't mean for us to try to apply every aspect of Christ to the husband and every aspect of the Church to the wife. An example from this verse would be: Paul does not mean that the husband is to become the Savior of the wife. Paul says things about Christ and His role with the church that belong to Christ alone.

Paul does however want the husband to pay attention to the concept of "*his body*". We will get into that next week. Today, let's look at the headship of the husband. Paul used the word "*head*" (kephale) which means the bodies' head, that part that initiates activity to the rest of the body...the proactive part.

Last Thursday, I mentioned toward the end of the devotional that it wasn't until after mankind's fall into sin that we see the headship of man in the marriage partnership clearly communicated... (God to Eve) "*...Your desire will be for your husband and he will rule over you.*" (Genesis 3:16). Guys...please understand that both Adam and Eve sinned and on the day God confronted them He was not handing out promotions. Something happened within the marriage relationship after the fall. The reason God pointed it out was that it was going to be different than it had been

before. This is what happened. From that time the Lord began to foreshadow His redemptive plan to reconcile the world (through His Son and His Body - the Church) and began to reflect that model/truth in the marriage relationship.

The role of *"head"* is not a promotion or any sign that the man is smarter or more valuable than the woman. It is simply God's choice to organize it this way. Headship is an enormous responsibility. As I stated a few days ago, this role does not mean boss, bully, or master. The head of the body initiates activity in the other parts of the body. The head's decisions should be designed to bring goodness, health and fulfillment to the whole body. This is, in essence, what the role of *"head"* in a marriage/family does.

What Can We Do With This Truth Today?

"I don't want to hear any more excuses. You...get me the T.V. remote. You...get me something to eat/drink. You...bring me the newspaper. I am the king of this castle and you are going to obey me." If I had a quarter every time I heard of a similar family scenario over the years, I would be a wealthy man. It is amazing how mankind with his fallen nature and selfish heart can so abusively try to misuse something that God has said. Someone who thinks/talks like this is an embarrassment to Biblical manhood. It conveys a concept so far removed from God's heart, it's hard to believe a person who would think and say such things has ever encountered the Christ.

Husbands, as the head in our marriages our first commission is to care for our wives and then our families. If you care for your wives properly, your kids will flourish because of how they see you treating their mother and because of the atmosphere you will create in the home. As the head of our families we are responsible to watch over them and protect them from the evil one.

As the head of our homes we are to know each person in our family...know their personalities, strengths and weaknesses. Then we are to lead them into scenarios/experiences that will help them flourish spiritually, mentally, emotionally, and physically. We are to help them discover God's purpose for their lives. We are to see to it that they grow, mature, develop, and become all that God has designed them to be. That's the role that headship plays.

Obviously we partner with our wives to accomplish those things but you as the husband are to keep these things on the families' radar and initiate their implementation. Because we are the heads of our families, God looks to us to obey Him and lead our families in this way. If you are a husband and/or a father, God will hold you accountable for these things. We have God's Word and He will judge us according to what we have done with it.

I don't know about you but when I began to understand these things more clearly, suddenly those things that I had allowed to fill my time/attention and distract me away from God's plans...didn't seem as important any more.

"Father, so many of us have misunderstood "headship". The perfect example for it has been right in front of us all along...YOU. You have built us to lead...to be the godly heads of our marriages and families. Help us begin to walk and lead as we should. Fill us and empower us. Change us and help us be like Your Son. Amen!"



PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

By Will Mackey - Day 50

Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior.

Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church—for we are members of his body. “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united with his wife and the two will become one flesh.” This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

(Ephesians 5:22-33)

Hi everyone. Let's get right into our study for today. Before we move into the 2nd truth God (through Paul) wants to show us, we need to spend a day looking at the general foundation of manhood. You will notice that in Paul's teaching he used the word "*husband*" 6 times. The word he used for "*husband*" is (aner), which means an adult male who is mature (and all the wives snicker ☺).

On that note, if we are going to understand more fully the role God gives the husband, we also need to understand God's design for manhood. Let's take a trip back to Genesis chapter 2 and look at four things about the original man: how the Lord first created the male in regards to design and function.

In Genesis 2:15 we read, "*The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it...*" From the beginning and before the fall into sin of mankind, God built some things into manhood. In regards to the earth and life on the earth, man (the male) was supposed to "*take care of it*" and to "*work it*". To take care of something means to see the whole picture and to figure out how, through the management of it, to take care for it. This implies leadership. To work it means to actually do the work of taking care of it. We see two concepts coming together here...man is built to be a servant-leader. He is designed to lead and also to do the work of getting the job done.

In Genesis 2:16-17, we read, "*And the Lord God commanded the man, 'You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.'*" Notice two more things about how God built manhood in the beginning. *Number One*: God entrusted Adam with vital life information (not to eat from a certain tree and the consequences for disobeying) and expected him to understand it for himself and to help others understand it and live by it. Adam was given wisdom (important truth about how life works) and had the responsibility to mentor (shape the lives of others) with that

wisdom. Again, we see two concepts coming together...man is built to be a wise-mentor.

Number Two: Because Adam was made wise (by God's Word) and was given the responsibility to mentor others, it also meant that he was to use his wisdom and mentoring ability to protect others from the enemy and the consequences of disobedience ...*"knowledge of good and evil...you will surely die..."* He was to protect them from the awful existence of experientially knowing evil by participating in it and from the spiritual death that would follow. Adam was to be on the look-out for the enemy and protect loved ones from his evil schemes. Again, two concepts come together...man is built to be an alert-warrior.

And last, in Genesis 2:18 we read, *"The Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.'"* Notice that the Lord said it wasn't good that the man be alone...meaning it was better for him to fellowship with someone else. Part of God's plan from the beginning was that man should connect with someone other than himself. He is built to have a friend and be a friend. We might say...man is built to be a faithful-friend. I am grateful to author Stu Weber and his book Four Pillars of a Man's Heart for teaching me these great truths years ago.

What Can We Do With This Truth Today?

Men...our species is in trouble today. The enemy and our own culture have messed up our understanding/practice of manhood. As a gender, we are confused and out of control. Men are 6 times more likely to be arrested for drug abuse. 88% of all drunk drivers are men. 75% of all suicides are committed by men. 70% of all juveniles in state correctional facilities come from fatherless homes and an additional 20% are from homes that are said to have "weak/detached" father figures. Truthfully, as men, we have great influence and are badly needed. However, men, in vast numbers, are using their strengths in all the wrong directions.

Even educated and more refined men, who may not abuse drugs or drive drunk, are abdicating their leadership, their pursuit of wisdom and influence, their responsibility to spiritually protect and their capacity for deep committed relationships. Why is that? Many of us experience a manhood that operates out of a self-focus, centered around deep insecurities, and void of any legitimate knowledge regarding our created design and purpose.

We are built to both lead and serve at the same time. We are designed to understand how life works and shape the lives of others with that understanding. It was God's intention that we stand guard over those entrusted to us and protect them against the strategies of our enemy. Our Lord planned it that we should connect deeply with other people and reflect Him through committed friendship.

How would your marriage change if you began to take seriously your created purposes? How would it impact your children to be raised by a man who was dedicated to living out God's design, no matter how difficult?

"Father, am I Your man or the world's man? Help me recognize the lies my enemy and my culture have told me about my value, my worth, my purpose, and my responsibilities on this earth. Help me today to begin the journey of doing the Truth. Amen!"



PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

By Will Mackey - Day 51

Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior.

Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church—for we are members of his body. “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united with his wife and the two will become one flesh.” This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

(Ephesians 5:22-33)

Good morning everyone. This week we are still working on the 5:22-33 passage. Today will be our 7th study on it. (1) We've looked at the overarching message of the passage which is that the love and leadership of the husband and the respect and following of the wife are supposed to model the likewise relationship of Christ and His Church. (2) We looked at the idea of submission and discovered that God requires we all submit to multiple authorities in our lives. (3) We looked at the wife's role of respect/fellowship (submission) to her husband. (4) We looked at God's design for womanhood. (5) We looked at the headship of the husband in the marriage relationship. (6) We looked at God's design for manhood. (7) Today we will begin to look at the husband's responsibility to love his wife.

Our Father, through the apostle Paul, tells us that the husband is to love his wife in two ways. First of all, *"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless."* Wow, that is a mindful, isn't it? Let's break it down and see what we find.

Paul says we, as husbands, are to love our wives *"just as Christ loved the church..."* He then goes on to give a few examples of how Christ loves the church. Christ *"gave himself up for her"* which refers to his death on the cross. He died and rose again so that those who come to Christ by faith (the church) could be made *"holy"* and could experience the *"cleansing...by the washing with water through the word..."* This phrase is a poetic way of saying that individuals who come to Christ can be cleansed on the inside through following the truth in God's Word. It will be like a person washing the dirt off his hands with water, only this will be on the inside. Paul continues, *"...to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless."* The presentation of the church to Christ refers to the end of this age, when Christ returns and judges all mankind.

OK...let's sum it all up. We see that Christ's love for the church is sacrificial (with His death on the cross), is purposeful (enabling the church to become in quality what it was designed to be), and is perseverant (given consistently and faithfully to the end).

What Can We Do With This Truth Today?

I have heard husbands say so many times before, *"If my wife would only respect me more or submit to me more, then I would love her more."* Two truths: Your wife's character or actions cannot produce a Christ-like love in you for her. When a husband says this he is talking only on an emotional level. The type of love Paul is talking about has nothing to do with emotions.

Second, only when God's Spirit comes to live inside the husband can the husband's heart, mind, and body practice a Christ-like love to his wife (Galatians 5:22-23). Without the Spirit and His Divine Nature transforming the husband's nature, a husband will be driven and ruled by the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21). Just as Christ's love came first in His relationship with the church, so the husband's love lays the foundation (creates the environment) for the wife's respect and submission.

In order for us to show a Christ-like love to our wives, our love must be a sacrificial love. We are the ones who give up things in order to see our wives and families grow in their love and walk with Christ. It is we who learn to discover God's purpose for our wives' lives and who cooperate with God's Spirit who is at work in our wives' transformation and maturity.

Once again, it is we, as husbands, who persevere in the giving and showing of our love to our wives, no matter the circumstances. We are to give them a strong sense of permanence. Marriage is for life and there is no plan B. We, moment by moment, rely on God's power to enable us to love with a consistent love and with a love that never gives up (1 Corinthians 13:4-8). Again, this is absolutely impossible without experiencing a real encounter with Christ and having His Spirit living within us. If His Spirit does not clean and transform our nature, we cannot love like this.

"Father, as husbands, we know all too well the times when the love we have shown our wives has fallen far short of Your love for Your church. There were times when we weren't willing to sacrifice as much as was needed, when we weren't thinking of what was best for her, or when we were tempted to give up too soon. Forgive us! Fill us! Cleanse us! Empower us! Teach us! Help us see our role as husbands as a holy calling and a powerful way we can show those who know us... the love Christ has for His church. Amen!"



PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

By Will Mackey - Day 52

Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior.

Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church—for we are members of his body. “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united with his wife and the two will become one flesh.” This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

(Ephesians 5:22-33)

Good morning everyone. I hope this passage is helping us understand God's purpose for marriage, as well as, giving us wisdom in our responsibilities within our own marriages.

God, through Paul, is commanding husbands to love their wives in two ways. The first way husbands are to love their wives is to love them as Christ loves the church. As husbands, remember this meant that we love with a sacrificial love, with a purposeful love, and with a perseverant love. Today, Paul leads us to another thought about how we are to love our wives.

He says, *“In the same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies.”* Let me mention something before we dig this out. When you look at the cultural norms in Paul's day regarding men and women and their relationships, what Paul was teaching was revolutionary. The content of his teaching went directly cross culture. It went against everything that his audience had been taught before.

Just as the church is Christ's body, the wife was to be loved as if she was part of the husband's total self. Since woman came out of man (Genesis 2:21-22), when a man marries a woman, they can become united and the two can become one flesh (verse 24 and Eph. 5:31).

In practical terms this means that the husband would love her in all the ways he would love himself; spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical. He should love her spirit and make sure nothing hinders her from growing in her walk with Christ. He would love her mind and make sure he or no one else interferes with her using her mind for herself and to help others. The husband should also love his wife's emotions and make sure he or no one else hurts her or devalues her self-worth. He would also love her body and make sure she has everything needed to be healthy and whole.

When a husband loves his wife this way, he would also care for his wife's gifts and abilities. These should be honored and utilized in accomplishing God's goals for the family. A husband would also love his wife's perspective and wisdom. These are to be respected. He would also love his wife's goals and priorities. A husband who is loving according to God's command will cherish each and every one of these things about his wife just like he would respect these from himself.

What Can We Do With This Truth Today?

Imagine what our marriages would be like if husbands loved their wives the way they love their own selves. If husbands cared for, nurtured, cherished, honored, respected their wives the way they did themselves in all of the above stated areas, can you imagine the closeness with which they could live and the great partnerships that could be forged? What kind of message would our kids receive if they saw such love? ...such partnerships?

It seems that we as husbands spend a lot of energy trying to prove we can "do it" by ourselves. Husbands often get insulted when their wives try to give their perspective and insight. I hope that through this study we have learned we are built to go together by Divine design. Our wives complete us. We are not in competition with each other. Their strengths can balance our weaknesses. Our strengths will shore up their weaknesses. Together we can understand God's will about anything and accomplish everything He sets before us.

Hey guys...Gods' Word is given to us so we can see where we fall short and begin to obey His will. If we have received Christ's love in us then we can learn to love our wives in a way that resembles how He loves us. If we will see our walk with Jesus as a relationship to be lived, then it will be easier to translate how He treats us into how we should treat our wives.

Wives, do you feel loved like this by your husbands? Talk to him about this. Husbands, are you loving your wives like this? Talk to her about this. How can the two of you begin to take some definite steps toward this kind of relationship?

If you would like additional reading material on this subject, I would recommend the book, Every Man's Marriage by Stephen Arterburn and Fred Stoeker.

"Father, change doesn't come easy. We have so many habits in our lives. Much of our lives are spent living out of the relational patterns we set years ago. All couples should stop and re-think the what, why, and how of their relationships every once in a while. Help us to begin this dialogue with our spouses. Help us do the Truth no matter what. Amen!"



PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

By Will Mackey - Day 53

Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior.

Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church—for we are members of his body. “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united with his wife and the two will become one flesh.” This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

(Ephesians 5:22-33)

Good morning everyone. I hope you are enjoying the Lord's Presence this week. We are going to wrap up our study on this passage today. Let's look at the underlined portion.

Paul was actually quoting an Old Testament passage from Genesis 2:24. He said, *"For this reason..."*, which keeps us in context. It is because a man loves a woman with a sacrificial love (25), a purposeful love (26), a perseverant love (27), and a caring/nurturing love (28-29) that he *"will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife..."* How does a man know it is time to get married? He should get married only when God has developed a love with these characteristics within him and when he is willing to love his fiancé with this intensity of a Christ-like love.

We also see another description of the love a husband should love his wife with. Not only is his love for his wife to be *sacrificial, purposeful, perseverant, and caring/nurturing*, but his love for his wife is also to *transcend the love he has for his own parents* (31). We are told that the love for his wife leads him to *"leave"* his father and mother and to be *"united"* to his wife to the point that the *"two will become one flesh"*. In the Bible, no other relationship is described with such powerful language. The most intimate and highest loyalty must always belong to our spouses.

This, of course, doesn't negate our responsibility to love and honor our parents, at all times, for all of their lives. It does, however, teach us that a man's (and a woman's) love and commitment to his/her spouse triumphs over every other relationship, even over the birth/nurture relationship we have with our mothers and the nurture/guidance relationship we have with our dads.

God says we are to *"leave"* our parents. The word used here is "katalipo" which means to leave behind, depart, or loosen. The newlyweds (and the parents should

support this) should leave behind their parents' grip of authority over their lives. The married couple must depart from their dependence upon their parents. They should leave their parents physically, emotionally, spiritually, and financially. A marriage should not happen until the couple is mature enough to stand on their own four feet, from the start. Unfortunately, this is why so many marriages do not last.

God also says we are to *"be united"* to our spouses. The Genesis passage uses the word *"cleave"*. The word used in Ephesians is "proskollao" which means to glue or adhere oneself to something else, to fasten to or to bond to. The married couple should adhere and bond themselves together spiritually, mentally, emotionally, and physically. Becoming *"united"* doesn't happen automatically or on its own. In order to properly cleave to one another it takes a real investment of time, energy, and focus on the part of the couple. This type of investment will yield an incredible return.

What Can We Do With This Truth Today?

In all my years of pastoring and working with couples on marriage problems, I would have to say that the number one problem I've encountered was the issue of improper leaving and cleaving. Eighty percent of the marriage issues I have worked with over the years were caused because the couples had not properly left their parents' authority, dependence, and influence and therefore could not properly be united to one another.

Parents, we should raise our children so they can live as successful adults and be independent from us. It is an unhealthy situation when parents create an atmosphere whereby their grown children still depend upon them spiritually, emotionally, mentally, financially, and socially.

If couples never properly leave their parents' control, they will never be able to properly cleave to their own spouses. It is certainly their love and respect for each other that motivate couples to grow together but it is also the fact that the parents pull back (on purpose) and encourage the couple to seek God on their own and to learn to trust/depend upon their own spouses. This is one of the greatest wedding gifts parents can give their newlyweds.

There should never be a starvation of love and respect in a Christian home. Husbands and wives should love and respect each other with such intensity that each others' spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical needs are met.

May I encourage all of us to look at the health of our marriages and to apply the Truth God has shown us from this passage to our respective roles in our own marriages. Our marital problems will not go away because we ignore them. Our marital patterns will not change for the good until we change the choices that lay the foundation for those patterns. Knowing the Truth is not enough. We must also be people who do the Truth (James 1:21-25). Let's become people who do the Truth in every situation, every time.

"Father, You have given us such wisdom from Your Word. All we need to know to live life with the joy You have created us for, is at our finger tips. Inspire us to be people of The Book...Your Book...The Bible. Help us to pour over its pages day and night, drinking in its Truth and walking in its Light so that we may be a holy people...a people that please You. Amen!"



PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

By Will Mackey - Day 54

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother" — which is the first commandment with a promise — "that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy a long life on the earth." Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. (Ephesians 6:1-4)

Good morning everyone. We are moving into the final chapter of Ephesians (chapter 6) today. We will probably finish our study in Ephesians with 4-5 more devotionals.

Allow me to bring us back into the larger context of our study. Paul was teaching that every area of a Christian's life, when lived out in truth, will testify to the wisdom and power of God and reveal His redemptive plan to the world. Paul then began focusing on 7 areas of life in which believers are to *"live a life worthy of God's calling"* (Eph. 4:1). Those areas and their references are listed below. Those in red are the remaining passages in our study.

- Personal character/godliness (4:1-2, 25-30; 5:3-18)
- Relationships between Christians (4:3-10, 31-32; 5:1-2, 19-21; **6:5-9**)
- Church's ministry (4:11-16)
- World's philosophy (4:17-24)
- Marriage/home (5:22-33)
- Parenting/home (**6:1-4**)
- Spiritual battle (**6:10-20**)

In our passage for today, Paul laid out God's foundational instructions for the parent/child relationship. He gave two principles for the child and two principles for the father (parents). First, he said that children should, *"obey your parents in the Lord..."* and *"honor your father and mother..."*

It seems today's mantra is more like, *"Parents, obey your children for this will keep them happy and bring peace to the home."* God's perspective is very different, isn't it? By nature, children are self seeking and prone to rebellious actions (as all of us are – Romans 3:10-12, 23). There are two things God requires of Christian children. (1) God instructs children to obey their parents *"in the Lord"*. It is quite possible that some in Paul's original audience were children who had come to Christ but who did not have Christian parents. All children are to obey their parents unless their parents give them a command that contradicts the will of Christ. When children learn to trust and obey their parents, they also learn the fundamentals of learning to trust and obey the Lord.

(2) God also instructs children to honor their moms and dads. This means that they are to show love, respect, and care for their parents. Paul, of course, is quoting the 5th Commandment (Ex. 20:12; Deut. 5:16). He also adds that living a life of respectful love yields blessings to the child. When children obey and respect their parents they will, more than likely, escape much sin and the harm that comes

from rebellion. As they get older, acts of rebellion can threaten health and life span.

Paul then moved to the topic of parenting. God said two things to the head of the family, "*...do not exasperate your children*" and "*bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.*" Sometimes as parents we forget the real goal in parenting is not to control our kids but to slowly train them how to live under the Spirit's control. It is easy for parenting to become more about us than about our children's growth in maturity. It can also be easy to use our authority for our own benefit instead of concentrating its use on growing our kids. When this happens we are more likely to "*exasperate*" them. In Colossians 3:21 Paul said it this way, "*...do not embitter your children or they will become discouraged*".

We can hurt our kids on the inside when we say one thing and do another... when we always blame and never praise... when we are inconsistent and unfair in discipline... when we discipline without having first given instruction... when we show favoritism in the home... when we make unreasonable demands and give needless restrictions... when we make promises and don't keep them, or when we make light of things that our kids see as important.

We must always use our authority and influence in their lives to build them up spiritually, mentally, emotionally, and physically. In working with our children in each lesson in life we should continue with the pattern of teaching them, modeling it for them, communicating confidence to them, and then entrusting them to do it.

Not only should we remember what "not" to do with our kids, but we also must remember to give them real live models for living in relationship with Christ and we must teach them the Scriptures. Notice God says this is the fathers' (parents') responsibility. Pastors and teachers are in place to supplement the parents' training, not to replace it.

What Can We Do With This Truth Today?

The home life Paul described is not an unrealistic religious fantasy. It can be the reality of the home that puts Christ first and lives by the power of His Spirit. Christians have a great advantage over non believers because we not only have the infilling of God's Spirit in our hearts but we also have the guidance of God's Word. It is unthinkable for someone to have met Christ and to continue to live according to the old patterns and dysfunctions (1 John 3:8-10).

As Christians we should be wiser than the world. We have the One who is Wisdom living inside of us, guiding us through every day. Our lives, our marriages, and our parenting should be much different than what is seen in general society. We are to live lives set apart for God's glory and lives that show the world the loving/powerful redemption of our Lord Jesus Christ (Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 2:9-12). Sadly enough, according to recent polling numbers, there is almost no difference between the world and the church in moral and social issues. This is not what Christ died for. My brothers and sisters...this cannot continue. We should and must be distinctively different from the world in all we are and in all we do.

"Father, help us influence the world while not being influenced by it. Lead us to true godliness in our thoughts, words, and actions. Amen!"



PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

By Will Mackey - Day 55

Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only 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, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free. And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him. (Ephesians 6:5-9)

Good morning! I hope your week has gotten off to a great start. Let's take a look at our passage today. At first glance you may be tempted to think that this passage doesn't have any real application in our lives today. I think you might be surprised.

First of all let's make two quick observations. (1) The slavery in Paul's day was not identical to the horribly embarrassing events in American history. It was not an attempt to disqualify a particular race of people from basic human rights or equal citizenship. In Paul's day people were made slaves for a number of reasons, some of which included high debt, poverty, or if someone was a victim of a Roman conquest. (2) The idea that one person could own another was and is appalling to all that is good and holy. However, Paul's strategy was not to form a political campaign to abolish slavery from the Roman Empire. He wanted a more grass roots plan. He believed that if people served the Lord Jesus with all their hearts...all the time...God would heal the sinful dysfunctions within any culture.

Our passage addresses both Christian slaves and Christian slave owners. At first hearing the latter may sound like an oxymoron. Slavery was such an integrated part of everyday life (most household had slaves) that the person who came to Christ probably didn't think of it as an unholy thing as much as an unfortunate part of Roman culture. Sometimes slaves and slave owners went to the same church.

Paul's words went against the cultural norm of the day. They are simple and somewhat self-explanatory...so we won't spend much time explaining each statement. To the Christian slave Paul said, *"...obey your masters with respect and fear, and sincerity of heart..."* and *"...obey them not only when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart..."* and *"serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men..."*

Those loyal to Christ were to submit to those on earth who were in authority over them. They were to follow their leadership (unless they led toward disobeying God). Their "following" was to be done with *"respect"*, with *"fear"* (of not doing God's command), and *"sincerity of heart"*. He goes on to further explain what *"sincerity of heart"* looks like. For the Christian slave, to obey with a sincere heart meant to do the best he could even if the owner wasn't checking up on him. It meant he would work for his master with the same quality with which he would do a job for Jesus Himself, for in reality, he really was.

To the earthly master Paul gave the same command...*"treat your slaves in the same way..."* They were to lead with respect, with fear (of not doing God's command), and with a sincerity of heart. They were to treat the slave with the same care they would treat the Lord Himself with. Sincerity of heart would include not using violent coercions ...*"Do not threaten them..."* The earthly master was to lead with respect and keep in the fore-front of his mind a healthy fear based upon...*"he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven..."* and understand that with the Heavenly Master, *"...there is no favoritism..."* Earthly masters would be accountable to their Heavenly Master for how they treated those who were their slaves and the Lord will not look at them with the same blind bias as did the Roman culture.

What Can We Do With This Truth Today?

By laying these principles out for those under one of the worst possible situations in societal life (slavery), Paul, in effect, gave credence to applying these same authority/submission principles and attitudes to every other situation in which Christians will need to follow another's leadership. Perhaps the closest application to our own culture would be to see these principles in the light of our relationships with our employers.

Given what Paul taught us, the following statements would be true for us:

- When we come to know the Lord, Christ does not necessarily free us from all unfair and uncomfortable situations in life. Christian slaves in Paul's day were expected to live Christ-like lives, even under such horrible circumstances. Christ did not save us so we could demand that we be treated with all our rights and privileges in mind. After meeting Christ, it is never again about us...but always about Him and His purposes.
- When we come to know the Lord, Christ wants to transform every area of our lives, even our work ethic. Christ would have us work at a much higher level than the standard set by our culture or our companies' employment policies.
- As Christians, every piece of work we do should be done with such high quality that we would not be ashamed to show it to Christ.
- More pay and better working conditions should never motivate Christians to work harder and with more quality. Regardless of our working conditions or the amount of money we make, we should be giving our employers our best all along.
- Christians should have the best attitude and outwork anyone else at the workplace.

One of the greatest places to show our world who Jesus really is and what His salvation can do in the heart/life of an individual, is the workplace. It is here that we spend the majority of our waking hours and have our most consistent interaction with the unsaved. Is the light of Jesus shining bright at your workplace...through you? If not...why not?

"Father, help us to see that Your life living in us should impact every area of our lives. Help us be aware of how important it is for us to allow the power of the cross and resurrection to transform how we look at every relationship and every situation. Amen!"



PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

By Will Mackey - Day 56

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you will be able to take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. (Ephesians 6:10-12)

Good morning everyone! What a beautiful day it is in the Lord. I hope you are able to spend much time with Him today.

As Paul prepares to write his final instructions to the people in the church at Ephesus, he issues a call to arms...so to speak. He ends his letter by painting a verbal picture of a battleground upon which every true Christian must fight. Even with the wonderful promises of God and His indwelling Presence, a great struggle lies ahead for the believer. Our enemy is like nothing we can imagine. We must be prepared to meet him and stand strong against him.

Paul commissioned them (and us) to, *"be strong in the Lord..."* There is no need for the soldier of the Lord to experience spiritual weakness because our offensive and defensive weapons are found, *"in his mighty power."* Our success is not dependent upon how smart or how strong we are, personally. It fully depends upon our faith in the Lord and in utilizing the mighty power of God's Spirit (Zechariah 4:6).

Paul also gives instruction as to how to tap into God's mighty power. He tells the reader to *"put on the full armor of God..."* This is the only way believers can *"...stand against the devil's schemes."* Paul is describing a major battle scene complete with strategic war plans and the name of the leader of the opposition, Satan himself. The word devil means "accuser" because he accuses God's people day and night before the throne of God (Rev. 12:7-11). Satan means "adversary" because he is the enemy of God. He is also called the tempter (Matt. 4:3) and a murderer and a liar (John 8:44). He is compared to a lion roaming around seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8), a dragon and a serpent (Genesis 3:1; Rev. 12:9), an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:13-15), as well as the god of this age (2 Cor. 4:4).

The devil is a spirit creature that was part of the original creation and is also referred to in Scripture as Lucifer, son of the morning (Isa. 14:12-15). He was cast down from his original office because of his pride and desire to overthrow God's throne. The Apostle John said that one third of the angels fell with Satan when he rebelled against God (Rev. 12:4).

Paul was under Roman guard while he wrote this letter (4:1). Seeing the soldier's uniform day after day gave Paul the idea to teach about spiritual warfare using a word picture that everyone in that day knew. He likened the spiritual armor we need to fight the devil with the Roman soldier's armor. We will look at the armor in detail in the next devotional.

"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood..." This is not to say that we don't have struggles with people. We know that rogue spiritual forces can manipulate mankind and use people to oppress other people. He is saying that at the heart of the battle, our fight is not against other humans but against the spiritual darkness that seeks to use them. If we are going to do battle, let's do battle with what is at the foundation of the attack...with those who are behind it all.

Paul then seeks to describe the vast army of demons that seek to defeat us. He gives four phrases that are meant to describe in brief detail the administrative battle structure of the evil one, beginning from the least to the greatest. He says that our real battle is *"against rulers"* (archai) which probably describes the rank and file demons that possess the unsaved and harass the believer. He also says our battle is *"against the authorities"* (exousiai) which could denote those in authority over the (archai). This could be similar to a sergeant's position. If you have ever read The Screwtape Letters by C.S. Lewis, this concept of "authorities" might describe the relationship between Screwtape and Wormwood.

Above those, our battle is *"against the powers of this dark world"* (kosmokratoras) which directly translated means "world rulers". This could be a realm of demons that have authority over larger world areas such as are described in Daniel 10:5-11:1. And last he says our battle is *"against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms"* (literally high places). This describes more of an army of wicked spirits either inhabiting or at least bringing their combat to the invisible regions of the spirit world. It appears that the first two are those demons assigned to disrupt human lives. The last two are those who seek to influence larger regions and who do battle with God's angels.

What Can We Do With This Truth Today?

Paul is trying to make the point that, by ourselves, we are out-numbered, out-smarted, out-powered, out-organized, and out-maneuvered. The whole universe is a battleground, not a playground. Those who claim the name of Christ have simultaneously enlisted in God's army and have joined the fight for righteousness and truth. Our enemy has organized and structured his assault against God's people. What a bleak picture! How overwhelming! But wait...

Satan is a created being. That means he is not omnipotent (all powerful), not omniscient (all knowing), and not omnipresent (able to be everywhere at once). We are promised a way to *"be strong"* and *"stand against the devil's schemes."* Even against overwhelming odds, our Lord promises and delivers victory to those who will put on the whole armor of God. With this armor we will be protected from and will be able to bring harm to the kingdom of darkness.

If victory is provided for, why do so many Christians insist on living defeated lives? Why do so many insist that they cannot stop the sin that so easily entangles them (Hebrews 12:1)? Why do recent statistics show that there is almost no difference between how the world lives and how Christians' live when it comes to moral issues such as addictions, pornography, and divorce? Imagine...they are choosing to lose the battle even when they have all the resources necessary to win the battle. Imagine...they are choosing to allow the enemy to capture them even when they have all the resources needed to escape his clutches. Absolutely unthinkable!

"Father, help us want to win and be victorious over our enemy. Amen!"



PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

By Will Mackey - Day 57

Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able stand your ground, and after you have done everything; to stand.

Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith; with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert, and always keep on praying for all the saints."

(Ephesians 6:13-18)

Good morning everyone! Hope you have had a good start to this week. Let's get to work on our passage for today.

Paul is winding down his letter to the Ephesian Christians and leaving them with a call to arms. It is a call to understand their enemy. It is also a call to know how to protect themselves from the enemy, as well as, to know how to defeat his wicked schemes. He begins in verse 13 with the key to protecting and defeating our enemy's efforts. Paul says to, "*put on the full armor of God*" so that when the enemy brings the fight, the believer will be able to "*stand your ground*" and after all efforts have been made, in the final analysis... "*to stand.*"

Wow! A few things come to mind. First of all, notice the clear expectation of God that his people "*stand*" their ground (give up no ground in their lives to the enemy). The enemy will bring the fight from every direction and from every level of influence (11-12). Nonetheless, the call to believers is to stay stable, to remain, and to continue in victory.

Second, how is that possible? Believers are to "*put on*" the armor of God. Notice that we have something to do. That is our choice...our responsibility. It will not be done for us. We must choose everyday to put the armor on and to use the armor to protect ourselves and defeat our enemy. If we fail to do this, the enemy will find a way in and will wreak havoc.

Third, we are told to put on the "*full*" armor of God. We are not to put on part of the armor. We are to put on all of it...every piece so that every time we do battle, we are protected in every way. Every piece of armor has a purpose.

Paul then begins to lay out details of God's armor. Let me encourage us not to get too caught up in the Roman soldier side of the armor description (belt, breastplate, feet fitting, shield, helmet, and sword). Those were simply part of a head to toe system of protecting the soldier from harm mentioned only to illustrate that God's armor also offers complete protection and full ability to inflict harm on the enemy.

Remember, Paul is chained to a soldier during much of his imprisonment and is simply using this description to teach believers that they too are soldiers in God's army and they too have complete weaponry available. I've seen teachers spend

more time in describing the Roman soldier's armor and its place on the body than in describing the detailed truths concerning God's armor.

The most important idea in Paul's teaching is the description of God's armor (truth, righteousness, readiness from the gospel of peace, faith, salvation, the word of God, and prayer). These are the ideas, that when applied, protect us from the enemies' attempt to hurt us and enable us to hurt his attempts of winning influence in the lives of others.

Notice also that Paul adds "*pray in the Spirit*" to this list of ways to protect from and hurt the enemy but does not assign prayer to a particular piece of body armor, solidifying the idea that the items of God's armor are more important than the particular Roman armor assigned to it or the particular place on the body it was to be worn on. I simply want our attention to be spent on the most important things. We will begin our look at God's armor in our next devotional.

What Can We Do With This Truth Today?

Three ideas come from our study today. They are:

- God expects us to stand our holy ground no matter what the enemy brings to the table. He can expect this because He provides the believer with everything needed to be victorious.
- God expects us to utilize the armor He supplies to us. God will not dress us.
- God expects us to utilize everything He supplies to us. We are not to pick and choose. We are to walk in all the light He gives us...every day.

Unfortunately, when a soldier refuses to follow his commander's orders, he endangers his own life, the lives of his fellow soldiers, and the success of the mission. In much the same way, when a Christian refuses to follow God's orders, he makes his own life vulnerable to the enemy's influence, his fellow believers' lives more vulnerable to the enemy and jeopardizes the local mission's success.

Your actions (or non actions) have much influence. Our enemy is constantly throwing his schemes at us. They can be anything from a full frontal attack to a sly attempt to get to us through a back door. He can attack us like he did Job or distract us by having us focus on small, insignificant things instead of on the mission, at hand. The latter is one of his most effective schemes in the American church. Little things like music preferences or not getting our way on a certain issue are often allowed to pull our attention away from accomplishing the mission...with the church God has called us to work through.

And what is worse is when believers tell other believers that it is God's will that they leave a church (follow the devil's distractions), thus making Christ publicly responsible for their unholy and carnal choices. What we too often do not understand is that if we follow the devil's distractions, we will be opening ourselves up to his deeper influence. Paul's conviction is that if we put on the full armor of God, we will be able to close up these areas of vulnerability.

"Father, our enemy fights hard and dirty. But we have You and what You give us daily...Your armor. Help us be mature believers who learn how to spot the enemy's activity and to use the weaponry You give us to protect ourselves and defeat his schemes. Amen!"



PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

By Will Mackey - Day 58

Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able stand your ground, and after you have done everything; to stand.

Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith; with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert, and always keep on praying for all the saints.”

(Ephesians 6:13-18)

Hi everyone! I trust you have been enjoying a close walk with our Savior and partnering with Him to care for others?

Paul is using the analogy of the Roman soldier's armor to explain to the Ephesian Christians (and us) that God's people (soldiers) have a system of protection, given to them by Christ, that will protect them completely from the enemy's attack and will enable them to defeat his evil schemes against God's Kingdom.

As I mentioned in our last devotional, I don't want us to get too bogged down in the illustration. It is not the main point. In fact, the main point is quite simple. Let's break it all down. Paul labels 7 things that will protect from and inflict pain on the enemy. They are: belt of truth, breastplate of righteousness, feet fitted with readiness, shield of faith, helmet of salvation, sword of the spirit and one in which he doesn't associate a piece of armor; prayer in the Spirit.

If we take away the Roman armor analogy we have: truth, righteousness, witnessing, faith, salvation, the Bible, and prayer. These are the main points of Paul's message. Let's take a look at each.

"Stand firm then with the belt of truth buckled around your waist..." is Paul's way of saying that we should surround ourselves with truth. With truth on every side of us, it is much harder for the enemy to trick us with his lies. When truth is all around us, we are protected by truth because we allow nothing but truth to influence and lead us. When truth leads us then our emotions won't, our world can't, our past failures are powerless, and our future uncertainties don't.

In our world today, Christians, often without thinking about it, allow the devil's lies to enter their minds through what they watch, read, or listen to. Once his deception gets in, he can utilize the seed he has planted to bring about a whole bushel of problems.

"...with the breastplate of righteousness in place..." is Paul's way of saying that we should live righteous and holy lives. Walking in the light that Christ gives us protects the work in our hearts that He has already done. When we, through holy choices, maintain the integrity of our relationship with Him through obedience, He protects us from the fruits of disobedience which bring death. When we choose to disobey

the Lord, we are in essence saying to the devil, "Please come in and take control of this or that area of my life." Once he is given ground to stand upon, he will take more ground.

"and with feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace." is Paul's way of saying that we should be ready and eager to take the gospel to others. In other words, the most victorious Christian is the witnessing Christian. When our minds are on the spiritual health of others, we take on the mind and heart of Christ. At no time in our lives are we more engaged in the battle than when we take our role of *"Christ's ambassadors"* seriously (2Cor. 5:20).

"In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith; with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one." is Paul's way of saying that we should trust in Christ exclusively, in every situation. We are to literally hide behind our faith when the enemy assaults us with attack and temptation. When he hurls those hurtful words, impure thoughts, fears, doubts, and disappointments at us, we must stand firm behind the One we trust. We trust that what He has done in us is good and that He will complete His work (Phil. 1:6) in us in due time. We trust that all things that come into our lives will be used for our good and not to harm us (Rom. 8:28).

"Take the helmet of salvation..." is Paul's way of saying that we should protect our minds with the knowledge that we are saved and with the hope that we will be delivered from this fallen world some day (I Thes. 5:8). There is great power in being certain of what we hope for (Heb. 11:1)...of waiting with great expectancy for our Lord's promised return (John 14:1-4). The enemy often wears us down by promoting the thought that our trials and troubles will never end and that it is of little usefulness to continue the fight.

"...and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." is Paul's way of saying that we should always read and study the Bible. It is impossible to defeat our enemy with no knowledge or a false knowledge of the Holy Scriptures. With no knowledge or a wrong knowledge of God, His Kingdom, and how His work is to be carried out, Christians will unfortunately wander around participating in religious activity but never really join the work that God is already doing in our world (John 5:17, 19). God's word as a sword not only protects the believer but also delivers a painful blow to the enemy. God's word exposes his lies and faulty character, speaks of his final demise, and shows the world a holy alternative to what he pathetically offers.

"And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints." is Paul's way of saying that we should be guided by the Spirit to pray about everything. Our prayers are to be constant, intense, and unselfish. It is a good thing for our enemy to see that his attacks will only invoke our prayers to God more often.

What Can We Do With This Truth Today?

The message is simple. We must make certain choices if we want to have victory. God will not dress us. He will provide the armor but we must put it on every day. Before we leave the house each day, we should make sure we are fully "spiritually" dressed too. It will mean the difference between victory and defeat.

"Father, what more can we ask of You? You have given us everything we need for full and constant victory. We have no good excuse for living defeated lives. Help us walk in the light given us in this text. Amen!"



PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

By Will Mackey - Day 59

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. Tychicus, the dear brother and faithful servant in the Lord, will tell you everything, so that you also may know how I am and what I am doing. I am sending him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage you. Peace to the brothers, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love. (Ephesians 6:19-24)

Hi everyone. This is our last devotional from Ephesians. Wow, what a great study we have been on! I feel more confident in my walk with the Lord the more I learn His Word, don't you?

Before we look at verse 19-24, allow me to give you one more thought from the armor of God. Remember we simplified the armor down to: Truth, Righteousness, Witnessing, Faith, Salvation, Word, and Prayer. I was thinking over the last few days that all of these center around the person of Jesus. Jesus:

- is the Truth (John 14:6)
- is our Righteousness (2Cor. 5:21)
- is the One about whom we witness (Acts 8:35)
- is the Object of our faith (Gal. 2:20)
- is the Provider of our salvation (Luke 2:30)
- is the Eternal Word of God (John 1:1, 14)
- is the One through whom we pray (John 15:16)

So...the closer we walk with the person of Jesus and obey Him, the more of God's armor we put on. Simplifies it, doesn't it? I don't have to think about seven things. I only need to concentrate on being close to one Person. Let's get to today's study.

Paul is closing up his letter with some personal requests and information to his readers. He just wrote about prayer being a defensive and offensive weapon in the fight against our enemy. Now he is asking for the Ephesian Christians to pray for him and use prayer as the offensive weapon he needs. He said, "*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.*"

Notice he does not pray for comfort or peace for himself (remember he is in prison). He asks for prayer for the "*whenever I open my mouth*" or the specific opportunities to teach the gospel. He also asks them to pray that "*words may be given me*" or that he may know specifically what to say to a particular person or audience. And last, he asks for prayer so he might "*declare it fearlessly, as I should.*" It was because of his bold teaching of the gospel he was arrested in the first place. Perhaps the enemy was tempting him to dial it down a bit. Perhaps he was

tempted to think if he pulled back a little, he may be able to get out of prison sooner and then be able to reach more people once he was out. Nonetheless, Paul asked for prayer so he would have the ability to faithfully tell the truth, no matter what the circumstances were.

Next he introduces Tychicus, who he describes as *"a dear brother and faithful servant in the Lord."* He obviously brought this letter to them (2 Tim. 4:12) and while he is there he will *"tell you everything, so that you also may know how I am and what I am doing."* His purpose was *"that he might encourage you."* We also see this man mentioned on other occasions. In Acts 20:1-6 we discover he was an Asian man and one of many who worked with Paul's ministry as he traveled around the country. In Colossians 4:7 we also discover he delivered the Colossian letter and accompanied Onesimus (Philemon's runaway slave) back to his home. He also was one of two choices Paul was thinking about sending to Crete to replace Titus (Titus 3:12).

Paul ends his letter with a blessing. He said, *"Peace to the brothers...love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ...Grace to all who love...Jesus Christ with an undying love."* Notice how he brings several of the important words from his letter back into its final paragraph - *"peace...love...faith...grace"*. Paul calls these great and powerful words down from heaven upon this beloved church and perhaps upon all those who would read this epistle. He wanted them to experience the peace of God which passes all understanding. He wanted them to know the love of God shed abroad in their hearts. He wanted them to have great, abiding faith no matter what the circumstances. He wanted them to be grateful for the grace of God and live out their lives under its power to free from sin.

What Can We Do With This Truth Today?

There are so many ideas that come to mind after reading this passage. Let me share a few with you. First of all, notice Paul's focus. He was in prison at the time of this writing but could only think about furthering the Kingdom of God. He was in shackles and could only think of those who were imprisoned by their sins. Paul was focused on his life's mission...his call from God.

How easy is it for us to get distracted by the inconveniences of our lives? How many times do we move our focus off of the things of God and onto the little side issues of life?

Secondly, notice that Paul models the principle he taught the Ephesians regarding spiritual warfare. He knows that prayer is a vital force in defeating the enemy and thwarting his evil schemes. He was a praying man but also asked for prayer. We learn that every opportunity and every word of testimony should be bathed in prayer. Prayer must lay the foundation upon which God's work is built upon. Do you want to see God move in your life and the lives of those you care about? This movement of God will begin with prayer.

"Father, thank You for this study. Thank You for all those who took the journey with me. Bless them. Fill them. Use them to bring honor and glory to Your Name. Empower all of us to live according to Your Word. Help us to be doers of the Word and not just hearers. Amen!"