

# Ephesians

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By Phillip Kayser

## Introduction - Background information

When my father was a little child, his dad encouraged him to start praying for his future wife. So my dad actually started praying for my mom a few years before my mom was even born. And those prayers powerfully impacted not only his care for and concern for his future wife (which I think was good all on its own), but also how he prepared himself to be ready as a husband. When I was five years old my father taught me to start praying for my future wife, which is about the year that *my* wife was born. I taught my children from an early age to pray for their future spouses.

But this book indicates something that goes way beyond that - God set His love upon us long before there was a world. He chose His bride, planned for her future, laid up blessings for us in Christ Jesus, sent His Son to save her, and lavished upon us the riches of His grace. He drew us to Himself when we were dead in our sins and trespasses and began the process of transforming us into a bride that would be a beautiful match for His Son. This book is an incredible picture of the church of Jesus Christ and the privileges that each Christian has as part of that bride.

This book has become so important to me that I have memorized every word it. And I'll tell you something - it is impossible to memorize an entire book of the Bible without being profoundly changed by it. It's a book that stirs up your love for God and your appreciation for the church worldwide. It really does.

Now, this book is divided up into two parts. The first half is doctrinal; the second half is practical. Chapters 1-3 give us the doctrine of how God saved the church and called it into union with Jesus Christ and chapters 4-6 show us how the church should live out that doctrine in a rubber-meets-the-road kind of way. That doctrine should affect how we engage in marriage, church, civics, work, race relations, etc. But the focus throughout the book is on the *church* that Christ redeemed. I won't get into the chart, but I found Chuck Swindoll's chart that's on the back of your outline to be the best one out there. I think you will find it very helpful for your own further study.

Ephesians and Philippians have been contrasted by scholars this way: Ephesians focuses upon the *church* of Christ whereas Philippians focuses upon the *Christ* of the church. But both books show a unity between Christ and His church that is so glorious that it is breathtaking.

And speaking of breathtaking - I challenge you to try to read chapter 1:3-14 without taking a breath. Verses 3-14 constitute one long sentence in the Greek. Paul is so overwhelmed by the magnitude of what God has done for His people that he doesn't stop to take a breath. He

excitedly keeps on talking in one long sentence of 202 words. Now I know - Steven Baugh claims that it is a periodic sentence that does have nine pauses (so there probably are breaths), and he tries to justify putting periods in the English translation because of that. But the fact of the matter is that it is still the longest sentence in the Greek Bible. To me that is one of several indicators of the passion and flow of those verses.

And I have always been pretty enthused about this book. I said that I had memorized it. I have actually memorized it three times and forgotten it three times. Failure to review means forgetting - or at least the inability to recite the entire book word for word. So I memorized it as a child, and re-memorized it two times as an adult. I've recently started reviewing my memory work on it and have had my heart enflamed by it all over again. It's a wonderful, wonderful book!

Let me give you a little background. It is one of the epistles that Paul wrote from *prison* - of all places. And interestingly, Paul is so caught up in God's sovereign good pleasure for the church that He doesn't even think of himself as a victim of Rome or a prisoner of Rome. Look at how he words it in chapter 3:1. "For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles..." He's not first and foremost the prisoner of Nero. He is the prisoner of Christ. Christ is sovereign over Nero. Christ is using Nero's prisons as a means of undermining Nero's kingdom. Look at chapter 4:1 - "I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called..." God had Paul right where He wanted Paul to be. Rome may have thought that the Gospel was being corralled through this imprisonment, but Jesus had other plans. Through this imprisonment Paul would get to share the Gospel with kings, governors, eventually win converts from the Praetorian guard (I believe it was the Praetorian guard in Caesarea, rather than Rome), but through those guards the Gospel had eventually penetrated into Caesar's household. It would have been impossible to reach those people without such an imprisonment. Don't think of your difficult times as a tragedy. God's got you right where He wants you. Take advantage of it. Rejoice in it. Have faith that He can advance His kingdom through your apparently imprisoning situation.

But let's back up a little bit and give the history of how he got to prison. During the year and a half that Paul was in Corinth, Paul wrote 1 and 2 Thessalonians. Paul then sailed to Syria with a Christian couple, Aquila and Priscilla, on what may be called his second missionary journey. They arrived in Ephesus in Acts 18:19 for a brief visit, and Paul left Aquila there to plant a church. And apparently Aquila was amazingly successful. After Paul went on to Jerusalem, God sent a man named Apollos to join Aquila. Apollos is said by Luke to have been mighty in handling the Scriptures in Acts 18:24-28. Aquila and Priscilla mentored him in the Gospel.

While all of that was taking place in Ephesus, Paul was traveling through Galatia and Phrygia strengthening the churches there. Then Acts 19 tells us that Paul returned and preached in Ephesus for two years. Acts 19 tells us about Paul casting out demons there and rescuing countless people from the occult in that city. And Ephesus was saturated in the occult. The value of the occult books that were burned by the converts in verse 19 totaled 50,000 pieces of silver. That's a lot of occult books. That was the time when the sons

of Sceva tried to cast out a demon in the name of the Jesus whom Paul preached. And Acts 19:15 records,

And the evil spirit answered and said, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?" Then the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, overpowered them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.

Apart from Christ, humans are powerless against demons. But Paul through the power of Christ made a huge dent in the occult practices of Ephesus.

One of the reasons Ephesians 6 gives such extensive counsel on spiritual warfare is because Ephesus was one of the empire's centers for the occult. Ray Stedman says of Ephesus:

[It was] a city in the grip of superstition, fear, demonism and darkness. It was a city devoted to sex and to religion—in other words it was the San Francisco of the Roman empire...it was a center for witchcraft, superstition, demonism. A weird mixture of black arts, worship of demons, astrology, occult practices of various kinds...(which) filled this city of priests, magicians, witches, warlocks and quacks of every kind."

So I am saying this to illustrate that understanding the background helps us to understand the book as a whole. And I'll quickly list some other examples: Paul has to teach men how to honor, cherish, provide for, and defend their wives because of what they were saved out of. The history books that we have show that the men of Ephesus did not treat their women well. The sex trade that so abused women in the pagan temples was a huge industry.

Another example: he counters the drunkenness of Ephesus by putting on the opposite. He shows how to put off the demonic lies and deceitfulness of politics, education, philosophy, and religion with the principles for gaining integrity, faithfulness, and truth for the Christian. His description of the attributes of God in this book stand in stark contrast to the sinful attributes of the finite ungodly gods and goddess of Ephesus - such as Diana the Great. The race riots of Acts 19 stand in such contrast to the unity that comes through Christ. The stranglehold that the guilds had on economics stand in stark contrast to the loving relationships that Christian masters and employees should have with each. The whole book is a masterful paradigm for Christian living. And you see its relevance for today by understanding its relevance to Ephesus in Paul's day.

But by the time Paul wrote this, he had been seized in Jerusalem, almost killed by the Jews, rescued by the Romans, and held indefinitely in Roman custody in Herod's palace in Caesarea. And when it looked like he might be handed over to the Jews, he appealed to Caesar. Herod was close friends with the emperor and there was a constant flow of the emperor's relatives through his fabulous vacation resort palace in Caesarea. So whether you believe he wrote it while still in Caesarea in Herod's Praetorium (as I do) or whether he wrote it a year or so later in the Roman Praetorium (as most Evangelical scholars do), it is a remarkable tribute to grace that Paul overflows with enthusiasm even though he is writing from prison. There is a lot more background we could give if we were preaching a series on Ephesians, but let me give you a whirlwind overview of this great book

## Overview

### Our heavenly calling in Christ (1:1-3:21)

Paul gives three chapters of doctrine that display the magnificent calling the church has in Christ.

#### Individual blessings - Life with God (1:1-2:10)

##### o Introduction to Ephesians (1:1-2)

The introduction is not a throwaway clause. To people who had been rescued from the occult, it reminded them that they had a new authority, a new revelation, a new calling in life, and a complete breaking off of the occult curse by the grace and peace of God.

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Those words would have brought such comfort to those Christians. Acts 19 indicates that they had previously insulted demons by burning their books and yet here Paul indicates that they did not need to fear their curses. And when I say “curses” I don’t just mean empty words. As a kid I used to say to those who tormented me, “Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me.” But it was wishful thinking. The words of my tormentors hurt me just as much as the regular beatings I got. There was a psychological torment that went deep. But the word for curse goes beyond that. If you study the Biblical concept of curses, you realize that curses do more than just hurt. They can bring on demonic affliction. Demons can latch onto curses and bring them to reality. And anyone who has come out of demonism and is experiencing the backlash of that should meditate upon and claim from God every verse in this magnificent book. It is intended to break the curses of Acts 19 against Christians and to replace them with blessings. And that’s the very next verse:

##### o Every Spiritual Blessing (1:3)

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,

This whole first half of the book is going to be helping these Ephesians to lay claim to these heavenly blessings and to find security in their identity in Jesus Christ. He is their bank account. Every blessing is in Him.

And by the way, that phrase, “in Christ” occurs 12 times, “in the Lord,” another 7, “in Him” another 6 times, “in whom” another 4, and “in the heavenly places” another 5. When you add up all of those statements, you have 35 references to union with Jesus. Of course, this will be dwarfed with the *images* of union with Christ that will be brought up later - such as the church being the temple of Jesus, the body of Jesus, bride of Jesus, and the family of Jesus. These are the kinds of doctrines that help to break the insecurity we may have developed from both sticks and stones and the words that have hurt us. Even the lure of the occult that some people feel - it’s a lure of belonging - is nothing compared to the privilege

of union with God through Christ. I've highlighted every "in" statement in chapter 1. That word "in" is my glory. That word is my security. It occurs 88 times in this book. 88 times!

Now, as I said earlier, verse 3 begins a long long sentence of incredible privilege.

#### o Choice & Predestination (1:4-6)

The first glorious privilege is God's choice of us. I felt like I had kind of chosen my wife long before I knew her because I had spent years praying blessings into her life. But what's remarkable about God's choice of us is that He chose us even *though* He knew us inside and out. He chose us *despite* our filthy imaginations, bad motives, secret envy, and all the pain we would cause Him. He chose us despite knowing our forgetfulness of Him, and myriad other ways in which we would prove to be not very lovable. But He would change all of that through Christ and by His Spirit. Just as He turned the darkness and void of earth in Genesis 1:2 into something beautiful by day six, God has destined to turn us into a beautiful bride without spot or wrinkle; a beautiful temple; and other glorious images. He will turn a hopelessly dead corpse from its inability so that He alone could gain the glory when something wonderful emerges to bless His Son. Let's read of God's glorious and unmerited choice of us in verses 4-6:

4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, 5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.

Those three verses deserve at least three sermons, and maybe more. They are verses that have made me weep on more than one occasion as I have meditated upon God's kindness in choosing me. Those who want to turn predestination into God choosing us because He saw something lovable in us do not understand the Gospel. One person told me, "We must have some worth or God wouldn't have chosen us." No. Glory in what God did to an undeserving people. Let God be the potter and us be the clay.

#### o Lavish Grace (1:7-8)

And let God's grace be lavish. Look at the lavishness of His grace in verses 7-8.

Eph. 1:7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace 8 which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence,

It's almost painful to stop at any of the places that I will pause because the impetus of Paul's passions makes you want to keep reading. But it's almost as painful to not spend time glorying in each word - something we won't have the leisure to do in today's sermon. But man cannot take credit for any of this lavishness that God poured out upon us.

#### o God's Great and Sovereign Purposes (1:9-12)

In verses 9-12 he speaks of the greatness of God's sovereign purposes. It is not of man who wills. Instead, verse 11 says,

...being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will...

It's His will that counts, not ours.

#### o Steps of Salvation (1:13)

In verse 13 we have the steps of salvation. So the Father predestines and plans. The Son purchases and provides. The Spirit applies that redemption and seals us for eternity. And when he says that "you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise" he is not talking about the seals on a refrigerator baggy. Seals were like signet rings that you would press into wax. They authenticated, guaranteed, and protected documents. And The Holy Spirit does the same for us - promising that having begun a good work in us, He will complete it until the end.

It's hard to know how much to preach on and how much to leave out. But I hope to give enough this morning that you will be stirred up to cherish this magnificent book.

#### o Pledge of the Holy Spirit (1:14)

Verse 14 speaks of the pledge of the Holy Spirit.

#### o The Need for Prayer (1:15-17)

verses 15-17 give a magnificent prayer of Paul on behalf of the church - that the church would have their eyes opened to realize the incredible privileges that we have. That implies that we tend to be blind to those privileges. And we do. It's not until you start meditating deeply in Ephesians that you begin to realize the staggering nature of "the hope His calling" or "what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints" (verse 18).

#### o Understanding the glory of Christ and the church (1:18-23)

Verses 18-23 are almost beyond comprehension in terms of privilege. In what way can the church be said to be "the fullness of Him who fills all in all" (verse 23)? How is it possible that we can experience the same power that raised Jesus from the dead and seated Him at the right hand of God (verses 19-20)? It is staggering that we are united with the Christ who is exalted above every principality and power and might and dominion and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in that which is to come" (verse 21). These are descriptions of our position and privilege that are hard to comprehend. And yet we live so far below our privileges.

#### o Spiritual Death (2:1-3)

And none of it was given to us because we were any good. Chapter 2 makes that clear because it describes us as having been dead in trespasses and sins. Dead. A corpse. A corpse does not give life to itself. The Gospel of Paul is a Gospel that humbles the pride of man and causes that same man to glory in God and in God alone. This is the Gospel of the Reformation. It is not a man-centered Gospel.

#### o God's Rich Mercy (2:4-6)

We glory in God's rich mercies in chapter 2, verses 4-5.

#### o God's Glorious Purposes (2:7-10)

We glory in His purposes in verses 7-10. In fact, I despaired of finding one key verse in this book since there are so many key verses in Ephesians. And I've listed several samples in your handout. But verses 8-10 are certainly verses we should memorize. Let me read them:

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Wonderful encouraging words.

So far we have looked at the individual blessings we have in Christ. Each one of us without exception is a spiritual billionaire. We need to learn how to access our spiritual bank account in heaven. We already have those blessings according to chapter 1:3. But those blessings are in Christ. When we write checks on our bank account, it must be in Christ's name. We can't sign our own name. Chapter 2 indicates that we no longer exist. We legally died and were raised with Christ and have taken on Christ's name. And by prayer and faith in His name we can bring those blessings into space-time history. There is so much that is crammed into a chapter and a half.

### Corporate blessings - Life with with believers (2:11-3:21)

But having spoken of individual blessings, he goes on to talk about corporate blessings in chapter 2:11 through chapter 3:21. These too are amazing.

o The church of Jew and Gentile is the new commonwealth of Israel (2:11-22)

In these first verses we discover that we Gentiles were grafted into the Israel of God and are considered to be true Jews. This is astonishing, when you think about it. Beginning at verse 11:

Eph. 2:11 Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh

That word "once" is the Greek word *πότε*, which means once but no longer. They are no longer considered Gentiles. They are part of Israel. This is the great mystery that even in the *flesh* we are not to be considered Gentiles. I sometimes am not as clear on that as I should be. The church is Israel. How can that be for people who were not physically circumcised? And the answer is that their baptism is considered a circumcision. So at verse 11 again:

Eph. 2:11 Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are *called* Uncircumcision by what is *called* the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands— 12 that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

If you skip down to verse 19 you will see that we were not only brought near to God, and to the covenants, and to salvation, but we were brought right into that commonwealth of Israel. So verse 12 said that they were previously "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise" - but look at verse 19:

Eph. 2:19 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

Privilege, privilege, privilege! Incredible privilege! And how did He make this miracle of a corporate unity of Jew and Gentile in the commonwealth of Israel possible? Verses 14-18 explain:

Eph. 2:14 For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, 15 having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, 16 and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. 17 And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. 18 For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.

Hallelujah! This speaks of an incredible corporate blessing.

o This mystery which was rejected by apostate Israel is why prophets were needed in every church (3:1-7)

Chapter 3:1-7 says that it was precisely for the purpose of revealing this mystery - this mystery that Jew and Gentile are all the new commonwealth of Israel (the true Israel) that Paul's message was needed and the message of the prophets was needed. Chapter 2:20 says that this miraculous new body, new commonwealth, and new temple was built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone. Just as you don't need new cornerstones being laid in every century and have multiple Christs being raised up in each century, you don't need new foundations or prophets being laid in every century. Jesus was laid once and for all time and the prophetic revelation was laid once and for all time in the first century. Chapter 3:3 says that this mystery was revealed to the apostle Paul. Verses 5-7 says about this mystery,

which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: [so there is the revelational foundation to settle this mystery] 6 that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel, 7 of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power.

This union of Jew and Gentile in the new Israel was so controversial in the book of Acts that it took repeated efforts by Paul, the apostles, and prophets to settle it. It first ecumenical council was held in Acts 15 to try to settle this foundational doctrine. But Paul here states that this was the primary purpose for God sending the apostles and prophets - to establish the new Israel. It took 12 apostles to rule over twelve tribes. It took 120 men in the upper room to establish the new commonwealth. It took the 70 prophets sent out by Jesus to equal the 70 prophetic elders under Moses. That makes 190 prophets, and that didn't even count the women prophets. But that prophetic task is finished. The foundation is laid. We now have every prophetic utterance we need in the pages of the Bible.

o God's call to appreciate this miracle (3:8-21)



And on the basis of this magnificent theology, he issues a call to the church to begin to appreciate the privileges we have, to begin to appropriate the power that we have, and to give God the glory that He deserves. This theology is transformational on so many levels.

It is transformational of fatherhood, since verses 14-15 say that God is the source and pattern of fatherhood on earth. I knew a woman who was terrorized and abused by her father, and the very word “father” conjured up ugly feelings. She didn’t want to think of God as a Father. But I encouraged her to meditate deeply on God’s kind, generous, and loving Fatherhood and through that to have the counterfeit fatherhood erased and the true fatherhood to transform her. And it did.

This theology is transformational for those who are weak because it enables them to begin living by Christ’s strength rather than their own, to exercise His supernatural love for the unlovable rather than their own, to expect greater things from God than we can possibly do on our own. I’ll just read those verses without comment - though they deserve hours of comment. Beginning at verse 16:

16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, 17 that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height— 19 to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. 20 Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, 21 to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

I think it is impossible to read words like that without having your heart melt to some degree. Those are words that give me hope and faith. But certainly all glory goes to Him because He provides everything that we need for life and godliness. He provides it for the individual and He provides it for the church. These first three chapters are a call to quit living below the privileges that we have in Christ Jesus. We have resources at our disposal that we have barely touched.

## **Our earthly walk in Christ (4:1-6:24)**

And in chapters 4-6 he spells out what this theology could look like when it is lived out in a rubber-meets-the-road fashion. That’s Paul’s typical approach - to give doctrine then to give the practical application.

### **Serving together (4:1-16)**

In verses 1-16 of chapter 4 he says that when you really grasp this theology and begin appropriating the grace that we have in Christ Jesus, it ought to enable unity to happen in the Spirit where the flesh does not want not want unity. Wherever you see discord, lack of unity, divisiveness, attacks, etc., it is an indication that we are living below our calling and below our resources. Gary preached on these verses already, so I will only summarize.

#### **o Team spirit (4:1-3)**

In verses 1-3 we see the fruits of the Spirit needed if we are to have a team spirit.

Eph. 4:1 I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, 2 with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, 3 endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

#### o Unity of faith (4:4-6)

In verses 4-6 we see a call to press toward more and more unity in the faith - not just institutional unity, but a unity in the truths of Scripture. Any unity without truth is a fake unity.

#### o Diverse Gifts (4:7-11)

In verses 7-11 he says that He has provided everything that we need to be able to achieve our high calling. He's already distributed it. We have the apostolic and prophetic Scriptures. We have officers. We have gifts.

#### o Design of church (4:11-16)

In verses 11-16 he points out that it is not our past that determines us. We are not chained to the past. It's God's plan for the future that determines us. Those predestined blueprints for the church will one day be completely built. That future goal of a unified church that is no longer tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine is a stabilizing truth. The apostolic age is not the age we should long for. That was the age of infancy, doctrinal heresy, people being fooled by the trickery of men. What the church needs to do is quit longing for the good old days and begin preparing and working for the good future days. That is the church's destiny. But the unity promised by the modern ecumenical movements is a counterfeit. It's not a unity based on truth. It is a fake unity that ignores truths don't guarantees the perpetuation of false doctrine.

#### **Put offs and put ons (4:17-32)**

How do we achieve the kind of progressive unity that Paul calls for? Well, verses 17-32 give us a series of put offs and put ons. And I will just give you three samples of what you are to put off and put on.

We are to put off lying and begin to be vulnerable with each other and transparent, since we are members of one another (verse 25).

In verses 26-27 we are to put off anger with each other and to put on the realization of who our real enemy is - Satan. Start fighting Satan, not each other. When you start getting mad at each other, put that off and start getting mad at Satan.

In verse 28 we are to put off stealing and to put on a love for hard labor and generosity.

So in verses 17-32 he gives a whole series of things to be put off and put on. And each of these gives us much deeper character change than any Pharisee can accomplish. I'm going to cut out some practical examples of how to do this for time.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I'll just give one illustration. [This is material I cut out of the sermon.]

A guy came to me with two problems: Bulimia and what he called Kleptomania. Over the course of the past few years he had shoplifted hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of merchandise. He had seen many psychologists. And he wanted desperately to conquer his sin habits.

First of all, we relabeled his sins the way the Bible does. I told him, you are not a kleptomaniac, you are a thief. It is not an illness, it is a sin. God doesn't guarantee you will be healed of all diseases, but He does guarantee that you can conquer this sin. So let's call it a sin.

We began a plan for how to tell the stores what he had stolen and how to pay off the stores. I was the intermediary. We dealt with spiritual warfare and there were some other Biblical steps that we gave to him. But at the heart of what we did, were the two steps in verse 28. For every sin there is a put off and a corresponding put on.

In this verse Paul reinforces a lifestyle that takes away the motivations for theft. Paul was getting behind the sin and showing what can be done to weaken the motivations. One motivation is laziness (wanting something for nothing). Another motivation for thieves is greed (not being satisfied). Another motivation is covetousness (wanting what someone else has). And all of those motivations are eroded and eventually broken down when a habit such as Paul recommends is developed.

And there were two steps to Paul's plan here: 1) a certain kind of labor and 2) a certain kind of giving. First, the labor. Paul says, "but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good." The word for labor (κοπιᾶτω) is a word that means strenuous labor that produces fatigue (cf. Foulkes p. 134). It's a sweaty difficult labor. And to make sure that we do not miss the point Paul says, "*working with his hands that which is good.*"

The second part of the equation is giving away (to those who have need) the very things that you have labored so hard to purchase. Not giving away something you have stolen. That is too easy. Instead, it is giving away something you value because you have worked so hard to gain it.

I asked the young man what job he found to be the most distasteful and difficult for him to do. He immediately said that it was mowing the yard. His wife vigorously nodded her head and agreed. So I told him, "Every time you are so much as tempted to steal something from a store, I want you to go to your neighbors and friends and mow their yards until you have earned up enough money to buy the merchandise you wanted to steal. If you need the names of other people whose lawns you can mow, I can provide those. The whole time you are mowing, I want you to meditate upon the Scriptures that I have given you to memorize,

## Living holy lives (5:1-6:9)

### o Call of Love (5:1-2)

I won't take the time to dig too much into the next sections, but let me quickly outline them for you. Chapter 5:1-2 is a call to love. But it is call to love *as Christ* loved us. It's a God-centered measure that requires supernatural grace. You can't love as Christ loved without supernatural grace. That was Christ's point in the Sermon on the Mount. He was making it clear that Pharisaism is not enough. We must be able to do what no unregenerate man can do. To love those who hate us, to bless those who curse us, to do good to those who are mean to us?!! That takes grace. It is loving as Christ loved us. These are the kinds of evidences that we possess the real thing and not a fake Christianity.

### o Need of pure living (5:3-4) Overcome lusts

In verses 3-4 we are called to pure living. Even the smallest areas of speech that are tainted by the world are to be put off. We are to ask God to conquer even the hidden ungodly sins of the heart. Wow!

### o Seriousness of pure living (5:5-7)

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and pray that God would quicken those Scriptures to your heart. Thank God for the work, thank him for the privilege of giving to the needy, and pray to God to give you a hatred for stealing and a love for giving. Then once you have the money, go to the store, buy the merchandise, and immediately give the merchandise away to a needy person."

Oh, my. You would have thought that I had asked him to jump off the Empire State Building. He said it felt like his heart was being ripped out. But he did it. Initially he did it rather skeptically. But he did it.

Because the temptation to steal was so strong initially, he was mowing lawns continually, meditating on the Scriptures that speak of the value of work and the glory of generosity, and praying that God would internalize those verses. Every time he did this it felt like something was dying on the inside.

But over a period of weeks he reported that the homework was finally giving to him a new appreciation for labor, a new hatred for stealing and a new compassion for the needy - needy people who were excited to receive these gifts. I remember one week he was finally finding joy in doing this. I won't share how he overcame his Bulimia, but for the first time in this man's life, he gained complete victory over laziness, greed, covetousness and theft. Having conquered those seemingly impossible habits, he now had renewed hope for holiness and zeal for holiness in other areas of his life. For the first time, he began to appreciate the resources and power of Christ that was his heritage. He could see it actually transforming his life. By faith he was appropriating what was his in the heavenly places. That's what Ephesians is all about.

In verses 5-7 we are told the seriousness of pure living - that no one who does the things listed in those verses will inherit the kingdom of God. Now, let me clarify that true Christians are not perfect Christians, but they have abandoned these things and are walking (however stumblingly) in a new direction. As Kevin Swanson is fond of saying, "It is direction, not perfection." But he is quite clear that if you heading the wrong direction on any of those sins, or if you have given up going in the right direction on any of those sins, you are not a believer however much you profess to be a believer. If you are not fighting against sin, you are not showing the evidence of a new heart. You are acting like a pauper.

#### o Walking in the Light (5:8-14)

In verses 8-14 we are called to walk in the light and to expose the deeds of darkness. Note both sides of that antithesis. We don't just draw the shades on our windows so that no one can see your light and so that we don't get into trouble. No. We let our light shine so that antithesis happens. But exposing evil in society draws fire from the enemy and Christians fear that or at least they don't want the inconvenience. But Paul says, "Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light." The implication is that if we aren't willing to let the light of Christ shine through us, we are still dead in our sins.

#### o Living by the Will of God (5:15-17)

In verses 15-17 we are called to live by the will of God, and that requires stewarding our circumstances, our time, and our thoughts. Wow! Stewarding even our thoughts means day dreaming is out and disciplined thinking and discipline relaxing is in. So you can see that the implications of the doctrine in the first three chapters is far reaching. If God has resourced us with as much as those chapters say that He has resourced us, then it should impact how we live. For Paul, doctrine is never theoretical; it is transformational.

#### o Being filled by the Spirit (5:18-20)

Another area that should characterize the new man is being filled with the Holy Spirit (verses 18-21). In fact, that is the only way we will have the power to live out these things. But being filled with the Spirit will result in worship and godly submission to God's chain of command.

Think of it this way: if we are filled with the Spirit, some of His characteristics will rub off on us. The Spirit moves us to worship and glorify the Father because the Spirit is passionate about glorifying the Father. The Spirit moves us to submission because the Spirit gladly carries out the will of both Father and Son. He is just producing in our hearts what is characteristic of His nature. So lack of submission is an indication of lack of being filled with the Spirit. Lack of desire to sing or to worship is an indication of a lack of being filled with the Spirit. Those who are filled will take on the Spirit's passions.

#### o Submitting to the various God-ordained structures of authority (5:21-6:9)

But let's think about this issue of submission a bit. Keep in mind that submitting to one another in verse 21 is the *heading*, and the rest of chapter 5 through chapter 6:9 shows *how* how we submit to one another. It's not children and parents mutually submitting to each other. That's a contradictory interpretation that modern anarchists have given. That makes

no sense. Paul says that it is every person submitting to leaders through the God-ordained chains of command. He starts with wives submitting to husbands, not husbands submitting to wives. He then moves on to a discussion of the church, then children submitting to both parents, then men submitting to their masters. Everyone is in some role of submission. Why? Because we are filled with the Spirit and the Spirit makes us delight in the same submission He has to Father and Son.

But all through these sections are amazing metaphors of the wonderful privilege that we have as a church of being united to Jesus. Don't think that the husband-bride imagery in that section is the only imagery of the church. Too many people think that the church is only characterized as feminine. But that is to ignore the images of warfare that the church is called to. The church is called Jacob (he is hardly feminine), and is called an army, a flock, a loaf of bread, a vineyard, a brotherhood, a city, a household, a temple, an army, an olive tree, a building, etc. Each image gives a different aspect of what the church is all about. We tend to focus almost exclusively on the bride imagery, when in reality there are many masculine images such as a warrior, ambassadors, citizens, an army, etc.

But having said that, the images that Paul chose in this book are particularly powerfully in showing the enormous privilege that we have of union and communion and privilege in our relationship with God. Paul picks the images of a body (with Christ as the head), a temple (with Christ within that temple), a building (with Christ as the foundation), a commonwealth (with Christ as the king), a bride (with Christ as the husband), and a kingdom (with Christ as the king). There is such closeness and privilege that it is scandalous that we are tempted to think of ourselves as paupers, helpless, or hopeless. That is the enemy's tactic to get us to quit living by faith. Even the image of Christ on the throne has us *with Him*. Flip back to chapter 2:6. We kind of skipped over that verse. It says, "and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus..." We are kings and queens with Jesus, seated with Him on His throne. He has ushered us into enormous power.

And the next verse (verse 7) gives the purpose of this tremendous authority and privilege - "that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." That's the destiny for planet earth, and we have a role to play in taking earth there. But it can only happen as we pray and act with the authority that we have in Christ Jesus. Are we showcasing the exceeding riches of His grace to a helpless world? Are we praying by faith from that throne? That is the kind of authority that results in victories in the spiritual battle outlined in the last section of the book - chapter 6:10-24.

### Engaging in spiritual battle (6:10-24)

#### o Two Commands; One Battle (6:10-11)

Verses 10-11 give two commands, but both relate to the same battle. Verse 10 makes it clear that it is Christ alone who can win these battles through us: "...be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might." And it is in His strength that we can fulfill the command in verse 11: "Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of

the devil.” And as many commentators point out, putting on the armor really amounts to putting on Christ and His provisions.

#### o Understanding the Battle (6:12)

In verse 12 Paul wants us to understand the nature of the battle we are in. We are aligned against demonic powers that are controlling America and controlling other facets of this world. We are commissioned to wrest this control from the demonic hands by resisting those demons through Christ’s power and strength. I need to learn how to do that better. The church as a whole needs to learn how to do that better. As Revelation 12 words it, “They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony.” Christ’s blood redeems, cleanses, and empowers. And Christ’s word on our lips tears down and builds up just as Jeremiah’s commission says. I don’t have time to deal with the armor in depth, but in brief:

#### o The Full Armor (6:13-20)

Without the belt of truth, none of the other pieces of armor stick together. And that belt is not truth as we define it. It is putting on the truth of Christ - the Scriptures. Jesus said, “Thy word is truth.” We must start and end our days with the truth. We must teach the truth of Scripture to our children. We must apply it to all of life. We must not let the enemy convince us that the Bible is only relevant to a small area of life. That would amount to taking off the belt during most of the day.

Without the breastplate of righteousness we are vulnerable and our vital organs are exposed to the enemy’s attacks. But its not *our* righteousness. It’s the righteousness of *Christ*. His imputed righteousness makes us secure. His imparted righteousness gives us power. We are putting on Christ.

Without the sandals of the Gospel of Peace we will grow weary of the walk and want to stray from the path. We must preach the Gospel to ourselves every day and share that Gospel with others and allow the Gospel to saturate all that we do. It is after all the Gospel of the Kingdom.

Without the shield of faith, we won’t make advances. And I want to end the sermon by spending more time on this shield because it is often misunderstood.

The Greek word for shield is *thureos*. Most pictures of this armor don’t picture the correct *Thurios* shield. Why is that important? Roman soldiers had two types of shield. The first type (the *aspis* shield) was the common shield for hand to hand combat that was round, light and two feet in diameter. But the *thureos* shield covered the entire body. It was made of a solid piece of wood covered with metal or in some cases, heavily oiled leather. The soldiers who carried these shields were in the front lines of battle and almost always the *thureos* shields were used side by side to form a huge shield, sometimes a mile long. So don’t think of this as a defensive weapon. This was used for advancing against the front-lines of the enemies. The archers would crouch behind the men who held up this solid wall to avoid the oncoming arrows. So there is an aspect of defensiveness to it, but it is a defense as you are corporately advancing the front lines. So this speaks not only of individual faith,

but corporate faith in what God can do. Some of you have read about the Roman tortoise shell which was many of these held side by side over their heads and on all sides. But it was always corporate.

When the church as a whole has an atmosphere of faith, there is nothing that can penetrate its defenses. It is an extremely effective faith. He says here that this corporate shield “will be able to quench [not just some, but] all the fiery darts of the wicked one.” That’s impressive. Now you may not have thought of corporate faith being any more effective than individual faith, but it is. It’s lack of corporate faith that gets many churches in trouble.

Let me illustrate: Matthew 13:58 says about Jesus, “And He did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief.” Mark words it “Now He could do no mighty work there, except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them “ Now what kind faith was lacking? Individual faith was indeed present. That was not lacking. The disciples had faith. Christ had faith. Yet there was lacking this *thurion* shield of corporate faith. Where a whole congregation evidences faith in God’s power, far more awesome things happen than when we do things alone. Healing for example takes place far more frequently in congregations where there is corporate faith that believes in healing. I think that is one of the reasons a theologically deficient church that has incredible faith can sometimes achieve so much more than we can. So let’s just look quickly at how expressing our faith *together* gives a synergy and strengthening of individual faith and is critical to battle.

One of the scariest weapons in ancient warfare was fire. The enemy would wrap the tips of their arrows with cloth, dip that into pitch, light the pitch and shoot the arrow. The pitch burned fiercely and when the arrow struck, blobs of the burning pitch would splatter for several feet setting fire to whatever was flammable. I’ve had burning pitch on me, and you can’t get it off your skin. It sticks, and keeps burning. That’s where these shields came in. When approaching a city to try to scale a wall, or to try to pound down the gates with a battering ram or when building a siege works near the walls, soldiers would raise these *thurios* shields over their heads and over the heads of the other workers to form a huge tortoise shell.

In a minute I’m going to read Scripture which talks about God walling us in and shielding us above, before and behind - surrounding us. In terms of the physical shields, short of dropping boulders or boiling oil on this canopy, you couldn’t touch the soldiers. It was very effective. It dealt with all of the fiery darts.

And I’ve already mentioned that this shield was used during the offensive periods of battle. It was too heavy to haul around otherwise. This is the shield we need when we go to the abortion clinic and ask God to do mighty things. We need corporate faith on the front lines of the battlefield. This is the kind of shield we need when we talk to senators about Ending Abortion Now type bills. This is the kind of shield we need when going downtown to evangelize.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> I cut the following out of the sermon: “It is as we see people advancing that the apologetic tools, the prayer, the shield of faith and our strategizing together will take on huge



In Genesis 15:1 God told Abraham, "I am your shield." When Abraham had faith in God, God Himself shielded him. Now that's encouraging. Faith provides us an infallible shield - God Himself - that can quench all the fiery darts of Satan. David said in 2 Samuel 22, "The God of my strength, in Him I will trust, My shield and the horn of my salvation." Psalm 5:12 says that this is an all encompassing shield: "You will surround him as with a shield." But all these passages and many others which describe God as shield say that it is only as we put our faith in God that He shields us. Psalm 18:30 says, "He is a shield to all who trust Him." The shielding is not automatic. We must trust. And as our trust is focused jointly on issues, it is far more effective.

I won't go over any of the other weapons except to say that prayer is a weapon.<sup>3</sup> Paul considered prayer to be critical to the success of Ephesus and critical to his own success. We must become a praying church if we want to see demons scattered and Christ's kingdom advanced.

#### o A Closing Word (6:21-24)

Paul closes by telling them that Tichicus will fill them in on what has been happening to him. There are very few details about Paul in this letter. And that is because Paul is so consumed with a passion for God and His Church that not too much else captures his imagination. May we catch some of the fire of his passion from this book. Amen. Let's pray.

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significance. God has not called his church to hole up in a fort and wait to get bailed out. He wants us always conquering new territory; always advancing those shields; willing to go where the battle is hottest. Christ's promise is, "I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." If we are to batter down the gates of hades in Omaha, we will need this protective covering of the *thurios* shield of faith. Satan pulls out his worst weapons when we are doing real damage to his kingdom. So don't be surprised if opposition starts heating up when we begin new ventures. Don't be surprised if Satan throws everything that he has against us. We are invading new territory, and this call to put up the shield of faith is critical."

<sup>3</sup> You might liken it to the oil needed for all the weapons to function. And he calls us to be "praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints - and for me, that utterance may be given to me..." etc.