

The Epistle to the Ephesians

A Commentary

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Chapter 1

1. It is by no means certain that Paul actually penned this letter; scholars are divided. It could be that someone who was steeped in Paul's thought wrote this to preserve and stimulate interest in his teaching. Today, we regard it as reprehensible that someone should use the name of another in this way. At the time this letter was written this would not be so. It would be accepted as a distillation of Paul's writings. What is important is not so much who wrote it, but is what is written a true representation of God's will and purpose? Down the years the Church has held that it is.

Paul was very clear about two things: one, he held an office of authority, and secondly he did not earn or merit that office; he was called and appointed to it by God. Many today have these truths the other way round. Leaders have a false humility and are reluctant to speak out against the wrongs of society with authority; yet, at the same time, seek to enhance their personal importance. We are, each of us believers, a child of God endowed by the Holy Spirit with gifts to accomplish God's plan and purpose and we have been personally called and selected by him. Paul was an apostle – someone sent by Jesus to represent him. We may not have such a public profile as Paul, but we have the same task.

It is doubtful if the words "in Ephesus" were in the original. It seems that this is a general letter addressed to believers in different areas. A number of copies may have been made and the name of the town inserted as appropriate. Perhaps it was the copy to Ephesus that has survived. Certainly, unlike most of his other letters, Paul does not here refer to any problem raised by, or specific to, any particular church. The word 'saints' did not at this stage denote holiness, rather simply "belonging to God"; although that very condition requires that they should seek holiness. So every believer is a saint and, because we belong to God, we should seek to be holy as he is holy. Again, the 'faithful' does not imply that after testing they have proved their worth, they are simply 'believers in Jesus'. However, there are deeper meanings to the word 'in'. It isn't only that they believed in Jesus but that as believers they were, therefore, in Christ. The biblical term 'in Christ' conveys a truth which has no parallel in the material world; it is entirely spiritual. It is, therefore, difficult to explain in physical terms. It is similar to being in the Kingdom of God. Temporally and physically we exist in the material world, but we live not only for Christ but in him. We have different values and purposes now. To take this thought further; God's purposes were fulfilled in Jesus Christ. He has returned to his Father's side in heaven. If we accept him as our Lord and Saviour, then we align ourselves so closely with him that spiritually we become one with him and enter him. We are, therefore, raised with him. As he is accepted by the Father, so his Father becomes our Father, and along with Christ we are accepted in him, the beloved.

God's intention as to what is people, Israel, were to do and to be corporately in the Old Testament, became narrowed down, focused and fulfilled, in one person – Christ. That purpose has now widened out into a new corporate people – the Church, which is described as the Body of Christ. The work of Christ is carried on today through his Church. As part of that Body we are 'in Christ'. It is this truth that is to be explained in this letter.

2. At one level, this is no more than the common greeting at the beginning of any letter written at the time; much as it is our custom to begin with "Dear...", even to people we have never met. It was the Greek custom to use 'greetings' which has the same root as the word 'grace', and the Jewish custom to use 'Peace'. This, therefore, combines Greek and Jewish cultures.

However, more is conveyed than conventionalities. Grace is often defined as the unmerited gifts of God towards human beings. That is true but it implies some separation from God as though Grace is an attribute which can be detached from him and given to us. It is preferable to regard it as being God himself – all that he is – in so far as human beings are capable of our receiving him. It is as the sunshine is to the sun. It is impossible to break off a piece of sunshine; sunshine is the sun itself as it is received on earth. The grace of God is God expressing himself towards us with all that he is. It thus involves his choice or calling of us, his love, his favour, his purpose, his salvation, his revelation – all that we know of him.

Peace is almost tangible. Life is so complicated, so hectic and so stressful. Peace is a sense of well-being, contentment, fulfilment deep within. This involves a right relationship with God himself and also with all creation. For there to be peace with God, of course, the initiative must come from him; we need to know we are acceptable to him. So this comes to us from him whom we may know as Father. Although this, both Grace and Peace, is the self expression of himself, it has been brought to us in a special way, a way that enables us to receive it, by and in Jesus, the appointed and anointed one who, if he is to be received at all, can be received only as Lord.

3. Literally it is, “Blessed be God”. Blessing here means “due appreciation be given”, and that obviously includes gratitude, so the NIV translation correctly conveys the sense. There is a clear distinction here between God the Father and Jesus. In his earthly ministry Christ never ceased to be God – he couldn’t because that is what he eternally is in his essential being. Nevertheless, he truly became man and, as man, was totally dependent upon his Father who was his God also.

Although the same root word ‘blessed’ and ‘blessing’ is used here as for the word ‘praise’ at the beginning of the verse there is a difference in the effect. When God blesses us we receive some benefit which affects our situation. When we bless God, it does not affect his situation nor does he receive some benefit, we are simply recognising who he is and giving him his due. The NIV translation makes it clear that we are blessed in the heavenly realm; other translations read that we are blessed with spiritual blessings which are in the spiritual realm. The latter implies that God has a storehouse in heaven from which he supplies all the spiritual blessings we need on earth. In fact, the difference is unimportant for the truth is that we who believe live in two realms. We have been transferred from the kingdom of this world to the Kingdom of heaven. We have changed our allegiance and we are now citizens of heaven. However, at the moment we have to live out our lives in this world. We do so as strangers or aliens because, although we are in it, we are not of it; we belong elsewhere. So we are both in this world and (as we shall be reminded in 2: 6) already raised with Christ to the heavenly realms where we have access to every spiritual blessing. This is because we are ‘in Christ’ (1: 1).

4-5. Here we have the doctrine of election. It is a mystery which we will never fathom in his earthly life, but it is one which we may know and enjoy. Every true believer will have had the experience of choosing to belong to Christ; a surrender of his or her life to make Jesus Lord. It is a definite decision, an exercise of our free will. This was so of the original disciples, yet later Jesus said to them, “you did not choose me, but I chose you” (Jn. 15: 16). So it is with us; we know within ourselves that we belong to him only because he first chose us. It is fruitless to pursue what would seem to be the logical argument that unbelievers were, therefore, not chosen by him and were consequently

created for damnation because Scripture makes it clear that if a man rejects Christ that is his own responsibility. We cannot reconcile these truths in our human understanding.

Nevertheless there is a wonderful practical comfort in the fact so clearly stated here that before this world came into being God decided to create 'me'. For each one of us it isn't that 'I' happened to be born and then, for some reason, God's elected me to be his. No, he chose 'me' before the world existed. 'I' have not been fitted into his plan; 'I' am part of that plan. It is because we are part of that plan and that plan has been focused and fulfilled in Christ (see note on v.1) that we were chosen 'in him',

"The word 'holy' is that translated 'saints' in v. 1. It means someone set apart for God's use. We were not chosen because of ourselves; we did not exist when we were chosen. We were chosen for him; to be available to him to love (Paul will return to this later) and to use. 'Blameless' is a necessary consequence of being chosen; it is a word associated in the Old Testament with sacrificial animals, which had to be without blemish.

The key here is that our holiness is to be in his sight. It isn't important what the world thinks of us, in this context. We may put up a front of respectability in the eyes of others, but God sees our heart. How do we stand before him?

We meet a textual problem with the next words, 'in love'. Do they relate to what has just been said or to what is about to follow? Scholars and translations differ. If they are a continuation of what has just been said then they are speaking of our love for God and for others. Our blamelessness is not to be a cold avoidance of wrong, but a warm and positive outgoing of gratitude and self giving. If, however, the reading should be as NIV has it, in love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, then it is referring to God's love for us. The motivation for God's choice of us before we had any opportunity or ability to choose him was his self giving love.

Whilst it is true that everyone is created by God and in a very general sense he is, therefore, the 'Father' of all, that is not what Scripture means by the term. It is only those who choose to receive Christ and put their trust in him who become children of God (Jn. 1:12) and know within themselves that this Almighty Being is their 'Abba' , Father (Rom. 8:15, Gal.4:6). It is right that we are described as 'adopted' children because we are not naturally so. Although we were chosen before the foundation of the world, we are born aliens to the Kingdom of heaven. We have to be born all over again, as it were, with the contamination of sin removed.

God has done all this in accordance with his pleasure and will. Once again the stress is on the fact that our election to salvation is totally due to God, the Being he is. The heart of the meaning is best summed up in the Living Bible translation which says simply that God did this "*because he wanted to*".

6. If this letter had been written to be a literary example this rather cumbersome sentence would have been rephrased. However, the author is overcome with the wonder of what God has done for us. We are to live, like Israel of old, in such a way that it brings glory to God. In fact, he is already glorious. Glory carries with it a sense of burning light but the source of it is the character of God. It is the expression of sacrificial love. (For 'grace' see note on v.2.)

Again we are reminded of the essential centrality of Jesus. This grace is made available to us only through him. He is the Son who is the beloved, as the voice of God made plain at his baptism and on the Mount of Transfiguration.

7. Part of the tragedy of the fall is not only that humankind is in need of redemption but that it does not realise it. We are not free but we think we are (Jn.8:31ff.). We are held hostage to sin and Satan. Jesus has set us free. There was a price to pay, an incredible price; the very life of the Son of God. We must be careful here because we must not think that the price was paid to Satan; it was not. We are dealing with spiritual truth here, not market trading. It is not that the price was paid to anyone; but righteousness was satisfied.

The reference to the blood of Christ links his sacrifice on the cross to the sacrificial system of the Old Testament. The people were well acquainted with the fact that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins (Heb. 9:22). The whole structure of animal sacrifice takes its meaning from the death of Christ to which it points and following which no further sacrifice is needed.

Once again there is reference to God's grace, that self expression of his nature as it is received by us and which is so full and varied. It isn't something he gives us out of his nature, as though his supply is reduced by the amount he gives; but in accordance with what his nature is.

8. Translations vary in the way they link these words. Is it in his wisdom and understanding that he has imparted such grace, or does his grace impart to us such wisdom and understanding? The latter seems preferable. There is little difference between the two words, perhaps one amplifies the other. Not only does God, through his Holy Spirit, give us knowledge of the facts, the true reality, but also the ability to know how to act upon them. The reason why we have this ability is now explained.

9. Many religions had, and some still have, a secret which is only revealed to those who become initiated and promise not to divulge it. The word 'mystery' refers to this sort of secret. The point here, however, is that the plan and purpose of God is no longer a secret. It has been both revealed and accomplished in Christ. Indeed, it never was deliberately kept a secret; it is simply that it could not be understood until Christ had completed his work. Of course, those who do not believe in Christ do not understand God's plan, but that is not because the truth is deliberately kept from them but because they choose not believe it. Again, this is in accordance with his good pleasure (cf. v.5); God wanted to do it.

10. This eternal plan of God will indeed be fulfilled; history is going somewhere. It is not all some blind, indiscriminate fate. The time has been set when things will be as God has always intended they should be. At present there is a lack of cohesion and we do not see how all things interrelate. But, in fact, there is an over all unity within creation and all divisions are false: divisions and enmity between man and beast, between man and man, nation and nation, sacred and secular. Everything has its purpose and meaning in its Creator who is also its Redeemer. Christ was intimately involved in creation and so he is the one in whom its recreation will be accomplished.

It is not enough to understand this; the point of the revelation of God's purpose is that, now that we see it, we should live in accordance with it. We must live out this unity, and this cohesion. We need to be at one with nature, with our fellows (and this is the strong message of the whole of this letter) with God. We are now part of this plan.

Nations have not only different languages but different thought forms; ways of looking at things and methods of reasoning. Words evolve or are created in order to express these national or cultural peculiarities. It is often the case, therefore, that in translating a word from one language to another the translation does not conveying the thought in quite the manner intended in the original. It is often necessary, therefore, to expand one word into a phrase or to alter the order of the words so that the true meaning may be better understood. The problem with doing this in the case of the Bible is that the verses have to be numbered and so, in altering the order of the words, adjoining verses may be intermingled in a new translation. This is the case in the next two verses.

11-12. Again, the stress is that all the blessings of God are ‘in Christ’; he is central in all the writer’s thinking. Until now the benefits have included all believers, both the writer and his readers. Here, however, there is a distinction. The word ‘we’ is the writer and those linked with him. In verse 13 he will refer to ‘you’, his readers. He says “*we who were the first to hope in Christ*”. It seems that he has in mind that the first believers were Jews, the chosen people of God under the Old Covenant. The NIV says that they were ‘chosen’. The particular word behind this implies an inheritance and it is not entirely clear what the writer intends to convey. In the Old Testament the Hebrews are described as “*the people of the Lords inheritance*” (Deut. 4:20). They were the ones who belonged to God and, if that is what was in the writer’s mind, the NIV is correct. However, it may be that he is saying that in Christ believers had been given an inheritance or share – we inherit with him.

Again, there is reference to God prior choice (cf. v.5) of us, although in this verse that may be linked specifically to his election of the Jews. All this is because God is working out his purpose and plan. That does not mean that every event is predestined to happen exactly where and how God ordains, for that would imply a mechanistic creation without human beings having free will. It is more like a yachtsman using whatever wind there is to reach his planned destination. At times, with a following wind, he may run straight for it; at others, with a head wind, he may have to tack.

God chose the Jews to be his people. It was the Jews who were the first to believe in Christ. As we shall see, God’s grace also embraced the Gentiles; but it is all for the praise of his glory (v.6).

13. ‘You’ obviously refers to the recipients of the letter who had come to faith because of the testimony of those who were the original believers. The latter were Jews; the more recent believers were mainly Gentiles. They put their trust in Christ when they heard about him, recognising it to be the word of truth, that which explained and conveyed to them what the reality is which lies behind everything. It is also a word which offers everyone the opportunity to become part of that ultimate reality, so it is the ‘good news’ (the gospel) of salvation. Admittedly that reality, being eternal, lies mainly in what to us, who are living within time, is the future; but, because it is eternal, it may be entered now.

When a merchant bought a sack of grain in the market a large wooden seal would be pressed into it. This was both a mark of ownership and would also ensure that no one could scoop some out before his servant came to collect it. The moment we respond to Christ and his offer of salvation by making him our Lord he claims us as his own. In the spiritual realm this ‘mark’ or seal of ownership is immediately recognised. Those people who are involved with the black arts of witchcraft and satanism claim that they can recognise Christians because an aura surrounds them. This seal is the Holy Spirit. He was promised in the Old Testament and by Christ himself shortly before his death and

again immediately before his ascension. He is also the Spirit of promise, and some translations prefer this meaning, because, as v.14 makes clear, he guarantees to us our future inheritance.

14. The word 'deposit' is a first instalment, a down-payment, giving evidence of intent and the guarantee of completion. In modern Greek it is the word used for an engagement ring. To the Jew under the Old Covenant the inheritance referred above all to the land of Israel, given them by God as an eternal possession. To the Christian believer, Jew or Gentile, the inheritance is heaven itself. After Christ's Ascension, there is no further reference to the inheritance being the land.

But what is this reference to redemption in the future? Are we not redeemed already? Yes, in that we already belong to heaven; our citizenship has changed from that of the world to that of heaven. However, we do not yet live in heaven; our allegiance to heaven has to be lived out in the world, but we already belong to God because he bought us at the cost of the life of his Son.

As with every other blessing already listed, this is all to the praise of God's glory (6 & 11).

We cannot leave this verse without considering how the Holy Spirit is a guarantee or first instalment of what awaits us in heaven. First, he is the one who gives us the inner assurance of the truth of the gospel and enables us to recognise it (Jn. 16: 13-15). He assures us that we really do have a relationship with the Father and belong to him as children (Rom. 8: 15-16). He begins to change us into the people we were always intended to be by producing fruit in us (Gal. 5: 22-23), and enables us to live as citizens of heaven, giving us authority (Jn. 20: 22-23) and power (Acts 1: 8) which involves the gifts we need (Eph. 4: 11-13, Rom. 12: 6-8, 1 and Cor. 12: 7-11).

15-16. "*For this reason*" – presumably the fact mentioned in the previous two verses that they were now included in Christ and had received the Holy Spirit. They already had faith and had begun to show the fruit of the Spirit; love being the first and greatest. True faith is bound to change the believer. Love, of course, in the Christian sense does not depend upon feelings but on the will; the desire to do and to be right and to please God.

If this letter was not written by Paul but by one of his admirers as a distillation of his thought, then verse 16 is much more than such a distillation. The writer was personally concerned about these believers and was actually praying for them. Why should it not be Paul himself? Remembering or making mention of them is not some quick reference to them on a monthly prayer list. He understood where they were in their spiritual experience and he thanked God for the progress they had made and the people they had already become. However, in the Christian life there is always more yet and so he continues...

17. Scripture keeps a careful balance in declaring that Jesus is himself God (that is his essence) yet, within the Godhead, it is the Father who is eminent and the Son delights to serve him. During his earthly ministry Jesus emptied himself of his own authority and power and he became a channel for his Father to use; aligning himself totally with what the Father was desiring to do through him (Jn. 14: 10). In that sense, therefore, God is the God of Jesus Christ. He is Christ's Father because Christ is the Son, yet he is the Father also of every believer who thus is his child. There is a difference in relationship which Christ recognises because he is always careful to refer to 'my' Father and to 'your' Father.

Paul was always bringing the churches before God in his prayers, and the particular petition here is that they may receive wisdom and revelation so that their knowledge of God, which they have already, may continue to grow. There is a difference of opinion as to whether the reference is to 'a' spirit or the Holy Spirit. What Paul would not doubt is that the sort of wisdom and revelation he desires is not an increase in human knowledge but a gift from God conveyed by the Holy Spirit. True spiritual wisdom is to see things from God's perspective. The more we can enter into Christ and his thoughts, the greater will be our wisdom of understanding. But this works in reverse; the direct gifts of the Holy Spirit of wisdom and revelation help us to grow more and more into Christ and his mind.

18. The heart refers to the person we are, who lives within and expresses itself through the body. It embraces not only feeling but understanding and will. Until we are born of the Holy Spirit we cannot even see what the Kingdom of God is (Jn. 3:3), let alone enter into it. In order to see and understand it we need supernatural light.

'Hope' is a special term in Scripture. It does not refer to something which we would like to happen in the future but we are not sure that it will. It is as certain and sure as an event in history which took place in the past; it is simply that it has yet to take place in the future.

We have seen already that we have been chosen (4 & 11), here we see that we have been called – that is the next stage. Our part, of course, is to respond; but the initiative is always God's.

The hope to which we are called is "*the riches of his inheritance in the saints*". Linguistically this could mean what God inherits in believers. However, that would be an entirely new train of thought in the argument. The emphasis is on what God has given us. It is that by entering into the relationship we have with Christ we receive what is his; we share his inheritance. Some of this we will experience fully in the future, but we enter into it now. It is not primarily an individual experience; it is corporate as we joined the company of the people of God. The Christian life reflects the fact that its Creator is a Trinity; a social entity.

19-20. There is no doubt that God has great power and something of the extent of that power will be described and illustrated in what follows. An important point here is whether that power is 'for' us or 'in' us. Different versions translate this in different ways. Did God use his great power on our behalf by sending Christ to be our Redeemer and, as our Champion, raised him to heaven above all things and appoint him as head of the Church? Or is it that having done all this God then made that power available to us, giving us the opportunity to use it and setting it within us? In its context there seems little point in describing what the power is like unless it is available to us. The whole emphasis is that having spent so much effort in creating, electing and saving us, God wants to use us and so he has made his power available to us (cf.3:20).

The power has already been described as incomparably great and now three further similar words are added. 'Working' is in the sense of 'energising' and this is qualified by the terms of might and strength. It is unfortunate that the translators have used the word 'like'. The power available to us is not like that which he used to raise Christ; it is the same power because it is from the same source. The old-fashioned "according to" is nearer the mark.

Elsewhere, the reference to the Resurrection and Ascension of Christ is used to demonstrate that these show that he was approved by God. Here, that is assumed and the point is, to put it crudely, the power which could bring to life a dead body and get it off this earth and into heaven is the very power now available to us.

Having said that, we are not to think of “of the right hand” of God as being some physical area in space. It is imagery to convey a spiritual truth. A human king would have his chief executive and trusted counsellor at his side.

21. Although the point of the argument is to illustrate just what the extent of this great power is, having mentioned Christ and his exalted position, this thought sends him, in typically Pauline fashion, into a further glorious explanation of what God has done. He has put Christ above every other power or authority, every title or honour whether on earth or in heaven, past present or future. Christ is supreme.

22. This verse takes up the theme of Psalm 8 which is a meditation on the place of man in God’s plan.

You Made Him Ruler over the works of your hands;
You put everything under his feet:
All flocks and herds,
And beasts of the field...

Adam had been given authority which he failed to use rightly. Jesus, as the last Adam, perfectly fulfilled the will of God and was exalted to a throne in heaven. He has assumed dominion not only over the earth and all that is in it but in the heavenly and spiritual sphere also. As the supreme and perfect man he has been appointed head over the company or fellowship of all those people who have pledged their allegiance to him, that is the Church. We have a head, therefore, who has authority over every power that exists. So the power which we have been thinking about is that which belongs to and is supported by the authority of our head. The Church has the authority of Christ as it goes about its task.

23. In his earthly ministry Jesus had a human body. He was, therefore, limited to being in one place at any one time. When he ascended to heaven with his transformed body, the work he had started on earth did not cease; it continues, but now through his Church which is made up of many individual bodies. So the work is no longer limited to one place at a time. Wherever people who belong to him are open to that power of God which we are discussing (19/20) the work will go on because it is the same power which was in Jesus. However, as the previous verse made clear, Christ is the head and he must be allowed to direct the whole of his body.

The phrase “*the fullness of him who fills everything in every way*”, has caused problems down the years and no one can be absolutely sure what it is intended to mean. Without going into great detail, the difficulty springs from the fact that ‘fullness’ can mean either ‘that which fills’ or ‘that which is filled’. The consequence in this case is that the meaning may be that Christ fills the Church, or that the Church fills up or completes Christ. The latter is not as blasphemous as at first it may appear. It would mean that without the Church Christ would have no body on earth and would, therefore, be greatly hindered in continuing the work he began in his earthly ministry. In that sense the Church completes or fulfils Christ in his ability to continue his purpose. On the other hand, it is said of Christ that in him “all the fullness of the Deity lives in *bodily form*” (Col. 2:10), and so this text may simply be extending this thought to the Church, in line with the

teaching of Christ in St. John's gospel. There Jesus said that the Father was in him and he was in the Father, and then he goes on to say of believers that both he and the Father would come to them and make their home in them (Jn. 14:23).

We have already seen in this chapter how important it is that we are in Christ; it is equally important that he is in us. Without getting lost in nuances of meaning we can say confidently that "Christ is all and is in all" (Col. 3:11).

Chapter 2

1. The conclusion to which the writer is working is the unity of all believers and their corporate life in the Church. He lays the foundation by explaining the basis of that unity – the only way of salvation which is, therefore, common to them all. So he begins by restating the need of salvation. He reminds them of their life before they knew Christ. The NIV follows the original text more closely than the older versions which borrow the verb ‘to make alive’ which in fact does not appear until verse five.

It is only when we know Christ and the new life he gives that we are able to recognise that before then we only existed rather than lived. Practically, and certainly spiritually, we were dead towards God and the life he has planned for us.

There is very little difference between the two words, ‘transgressions’ and ‘sins’. If we must seek to differentiate, the first denotes a wandering from the right way – maybe deliberately; the second refers to falling short of the standard or missing the mark.

2. One helpful attitude is to assume the best in people who will then very likely seek to live up to the view we have of them. Paul here assumes that his readers have finished with their old way of life which was sinful. They are walking in a new direction – a fresh path.

Sometimes Scripture uses the term ‘world’ in a neutral sense - as that which God created and loves. More frequently, however, it refers to human society with God left out, which is its meaning here. Believers live in that society and are to be the leaven. However, all too often we are influenced and pressured by society to conform to its values and ways. It is not only society which exerts pressure on us, there is also the power of direct evil, personalised as Satan. In chapter 1 v. 21 there has been a reference to other powers and authorities. Here it is made specific and in 6: 11ff. there will be further details. Jesus called the devil the “Prince of this world”; here he is the prince or ruler of the power of the air. This is probably not implying that the air itself is an evil realm, but simply that these are powers which are immaterial and unseen. The description is qualified as a spiritual force or power, indeed a being, working in those who are disobedient to God. The NEB refers to them as God’s rebel subjects.

Although this letter is written to Gentiles, it seems that in reminding them of their sinful condition prior to their conversion, Paul suddenly appreciates that it may sound very patronising, so he associates himself together with all Jews with them.

3. The words ‘sinful nature’ are ‘the flesh’ in the original. This may sometimes refer to the human body e.g. Christ ‘took flesh’ in the incarnation. Often, however, and particularly with Paul, ‘flesh’ is a technical term, a form of shorthand. It refers to the human state before being born of the Spirit, which is a fusion of body and soul: the body with its physical properties and the five senses, and the soul – the person we are who thinks, feels and decides. Thus with our fallen nature and without the guidance and strength of the Spirit we do indeed follow the cravings, thoughts and decisions of ‘the flesh’.

There is no difference (as Rom. 3:22/3 reminds us) “*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*”. The text does not state that it is God’s wrath, although that is so and various translations do add that. It does not necessarily imply God’s personal anger against each individual; rather that God has designed everything to work in a particular and perfect way to a holy end. He (and the whole basis of what he has created) is

steadily and implacably set against everything and everyone contrary to that divine purpose. In our natural state, we are not in line with God's will and thus lie under his condemnation and wrath.

4-5. Very often in Scripture the word 'but' has great significance; this is such a case. The picture has been painted of all humankind rushing like Gadarine swine to destruction; all seems lost. Suddenly, however, a new element enters the situation... 'but God'. God acts! The cause of his action, the motivation, is love. Our minds cannot comprehend what that love is. Certainly we do not possess it. Even the intense love which a human parent may have for a child is only a reflection of the far greater love of God for us. Alongside that love and motivated by it is his mercy which is limitless. God, who must be just, is constantly searching to find a way in which his desire towards us can bring us to his side whilst maintaining his justice. So, even when we were dead in our rebellion and sin, he acted in love towards us. This does not, of course, mean literal physical death; but it does mean literal separation from God who is the only source of life. It is like a diver cut off from his air supply.

This action of God in love was to set us within Christ's resurrection. The event is described in various different ways in the New Testament – 'born again', 'a new creation', 'having life' etc. It is difficult to put into words because it is a spiritual fact and experience; but this does not mean it is theoretical – it really happens and the believer knows it. He or she is different.

Surely, after all he has said already about God's prior choice of us and that our salvation is the work of God alone, no one could still believe we can achieve our own salvation or merit it in any way. Just in case we might do so we are reminded again, "*it is by grace you have been saved*".

6. We have already learned that Christ was raised to the right hand of God above every other power (1: 20/21). So, being united with Christ, we have been raised with him. Physically, of course, we live on the earth and in the world, but spiritually there has been a fundamental change in our position. We have access to the Father who is on the throne. What is more, we have the authority of Christ over the devil and all his minions (2:2), who still seek to exert authority over us (6:12).

7. This sentence which seems comparatively simple raises considerable difficulty: what are "the coming ages"? Paul does not normally concern himself with a number of future dispensations on earth. For him, there is this present life and the life to come. Were it in the singular, "the coming age", there would be no problem; he would be thinking of heaven. He will be taking up a similar but not identical theme in 3: 10ff. where the emphasis is not on when or for how long this will be demonstrated but to whom. Some translations avoid the literal word 'ages' and say "for ever".

What is clear, however, is that God's choosing us in Christ and raising us with him has a wider meaning and effect than just our salvation. It reveals something about God – his abounding grace and kindness expressed towards us; and that revelation is to others than those who currently believe.

8. The reason why the salvation of humankind gives glory to God is that that salvation is totally the work of God; human beings themselves could not possibly achieve it.

There is some doubt about what the second 'it' refers to. Is it the grace which affords salvation which is God's gift, or is it faith which is the gift? Every believer faces this

paradox. We do have something to offer God, because he has allowed us free will; we may reject him or open ourselves to him – the latter is faith. However, why do I see the truth so clearly and respond to it when someone else does not? In some way my response is God at work in me. Even my faith is somehow the work of God. Probably Paul is not going into such fine detail here; he is making the general statement that humankind's salvation is God's work not man's and he makes that clear by adding...

9. *“Not by works, so that no one can boast.”* For the Jew, “works of the law” were the way of salvation. It depended totally upon the individual keeping the law; God had provided the way but it was the individual who won his own salvation by walking in that way. Paul had come to see that that is false. Human beings cannot earn their own salvation. With regard to the Gentiles, “works of the law” would not have the same significance, so he simply uses the one word ‘works’ i.e. what we do. There is nothing we can do to earn our salvation.

Within each of us there is a feeling that we are not too bad; we are really rather decent people. This is a defence mechanism, because if we really face just who and what we are we would be in a constant state of extreme depression. Indeed, some people are in just such a state and are emotionally paralysed, requiring psychiatric help. God's way is more truthful and brings healing. It means facing the fact that we are not rather decent people; we are self-centred and fatally flawed. We are, each of us, very unpleasant and unlovely. But, even as we are, God loves us and accepts us. He knows everything about us but loves us infinitely and has found a way to transform us. It isn't that he loves us and leaves us as the despicable people we are, as though that doesn't matter (that would be deceit because sooner or later we would know we were living a lie; we are not righteous and even God could not, indeed must not, pretend we are). The wonder is that, accepting us as we are, God sets about changing us. He doesn't wait until we are lovely to love us, but in his love he makes us lovely.

So there is no room for self-congratulation (boasting). We have done and can do nothing to deserve or earn salvation; it is entirely God's free gift.

10. Not only is salvation God's free gift to us, we have been worked upon, fashioned, remade by him. It is not our original creation which is in mind here – although that was important to give us existence – but our recreation in Christ. This is a reference back to v.5, to our being made alive. Again, this is attributed to God not to ourselves.

Having made it clear beyond all doubt that we cannot be saved by good works, Paul now makes the point that we are saved for them. If there is no change in the life of a believer after his or her commitment to Christ, then we have a right to question the reality of his or her belief.

It is interesting that Paul does not leave the matter there. He goes on to qualify the “good works” by saying that God prepared them beforehand for us to do. Commentators may state that this does not necessarily imply that there are specific deeds which God has for us to do, simply that God intended before our conversion that after it we should lead a good life. However, that does not do justice to the phrase. At the very least it must mean that God had a purpose in mind in creating us, beyond just having someone else to love. We all need not only the security of knowing that we matter to someone – especially to God, but also that we are significant; there is some purpose we can fulfil, some contribution we can make within creation; life is not entirely worthless. Before his fall, Adam was commissioned by God to fulfil certain tasks; he had a key role in tending his creation. It is not that now we are in the Kingdom of God he will try to find

something for us to do, but that there is something he needs done and he created us to do it.

11. Paul is moving the argument along. Although he has been speaking of a group, each member of it has come individually to salvation. Now he writes to them as a group.

The Jews despised the Gentiles. The term 'uncircumcised' was a term of derision and, of course, the Gentiles would be aware of that. Paul brings this into the open because he is about to show that this great barrier between Jew and Gentile no longer exists (and remember that he speaks as one who, himself, despised Gentiles in the past). There seems to be a gentle rebuke here to the Jews because he says that those who call themselves 'the circumcision' (which is the sign that they are God's chosen people and therefore superior to all other peoples) should remember that circumcision is "*that done in the body by the hands of men*". Salvation is the work of the Spirit of God not humankind, and it is wrought in the inner being, the soul, not the physical body.

12. Although Paul began this section with the call to remember, he digressed and has not yet stated what it is they were to remember, so he repeats the word, it is that without Christ they were nothing.

Although he had come to see that Christ is the only way to life, Paul never undervalued his heritage as a Jew. For him, Christ fulfilled all that had been promised to the Jews. The Jews were God's chosen people and the revelation of God given to them was beyond comparison with any other nation. God had bound himself to the Jews with a number of covenants confirming promises made to no other people. Christ had revealed God far more fully, but the God he revealed was the one the Jews had known and worshipped, however imperfectly, down the years. The Gentiles were outside all this; they did not belong to the chosen people and had been given no promises. God had a plan for them and had informed the Jews that he had such a plan, but the Gentiles did not know of it. The future was unknown; in fact, without Christ, they had no future. What is more, even in this life they did not have the only God there is.

13. Having explained what the Gentiles had been missing, Paul says that they are now included. The phrase 'brought near' would be familiar to a Jew, especially to a Pharisee (like Paul). It is a quotation from Isaiah 57:19 where the prophet speaks of those who are far off being brought near. The rabbis used this phrase of Gentiles who became Jewish proselytes. Here, of course, Paul does not mean that Gentiles had become Jews, but that both Jewish and Gentile believers in Christ were the ones who were truly inheriting the promises made to the Jews of old.

The uniting force was the death of Christ, signified by his blood which alone, for Jew and Gentile alike, can atone for our sins.

14. Paul is saying more than that Christ brings peace; it is he himself who is that peace. It is not simply Christ's teaching nor his example; only as we are in him are we truly united with everyone else who is in him. There was a literal wall on the temple site between the outer court of the Gentiles and the rest of the temple. No Gentile might pass beyond that on pain of death. Paul may have had that in mind as he wrote, but that was only a physical expression of the barrier in the thought and behaviour of Jew and Gentile towards each other. To Paul with his extreme orthodox background it was a fundamental change of understanding and basis of his faith to proclaim that the two were now one.

15. What is the meaning of ‘in his flesh’? Is it referring to Christ’s death? That is certainly involved, but it is more than that. The law was given to show God’s people how they should live in order to please him. That law was expressed in wide terms in the Commandments which were then broken down into detailed regulations. Some of these regulations could be generally accepted as just and moral, but others, relating to diet and the sacrificial system, would be meaningless to Gentiles.

Jesus came as a human being and showed how we should live in order to please God. He, therefore, perfectly fulfilled what the law had been designed to do but failed – as any written law is bound to do because it cannot provide the power required for its fulfilment. He also provided in himself the perfect and complete sacrifice. Therefore, he provided a new way of living for both Jew and Gentile; not by following rules but by following him. It can be seen, therefore, that *“his purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace”*.

That is to say, there is no longer the Jew who can get to God by keeping the law, nor the Gentile who has no access to God at all, but an entirely new group all of whom have access to God through faith in Jesus – which involves following him. This access, of course, means that we have peace with God and also brings peace between all who come this way, both Jew and Gentile who form one body.

16-17. Christ has overcome the hostility between Jew and Gentile.

There is a difference of opinion amongst scholars about when Christ preached this peace and to whom. It is an unnecessary and fruitless argument. Obviously he had to preach that peace before he had actually accomplished it because, in order to accomplish it, he had to die. But the point is that the peace, once won, has to be made known. The message is still being preached today and that message is the very one preached first by Jesus.

18. Paul clinches his argument about Gentiles and Jews being united in a new body, the Church, by saying that it is through Jesus that we are both given entrance into the presence of God. But this is developed by use of the term ‘Father’. It is more than access; it is a relationship between father and child. What is more, this is the work of the Holy Spirit.

Paul argued in chapter 1 that we were chosen and called of God before the foundation of the world. The sense of that calling is conveyed to us by the Holy Spirit working upon us and then, as we respond, assuring us from within that we are in indeed God’s children (Rom. 8: 15/16).

19. Although the Jews were in a special relationship with God, they were looking forward to the ‘Day of the Lord’, when he would set up his Kingdom. By saying that the Gentiles were no longer strangers and sojourners in a land, residing there but with only the very minimum of rights, Paul is not claiming that they have now entered the Old Covenant, rather that the Kingdom promised to the Jews has only now been opened and it can now be entered by both Jew and Gentile. There is a New Covenant which fulfils the Old. The Jews have not ceased to be God’s people, but they are no longer exclusively God’s people. Together, under the New Covenant, Jews and Gentiles make up God’s family.

20. This does not refer to the prophets of the Old Testament but to the prophets of the early Church. So the Church must have been in existence for some time when this letter

was written. The apostles referred to here were those who knew and passed on the teaching given by Christ in his earthly ministry. The prophets were those who, by the Holy Spirit, received and passed on the guidance and commands of the ascended Christ. These apostles and prophets were the foundation on which the Church down all the ages has been built. The most important brick or stone in the foundation was the first to be laid. Set at a corner, all the other stones, horizontally and vertically would take their line from that. In the symbolism of the Church as a building, Christ himself is that cornerstone.

21. The literal translation is “*every part of the building*”; which would allow for different structures within the whole. The point being that not every branch of the one Church must follow an identical pattern. However, there is an essential unity, provided each is based upon and living in relationship with the one Lord. The analogy of a building cannot be taken too far because stones are inanimate: congregations and the people who form them are alive.

So often, denominations and groups accentuate the differences between themselves and everyone else. If only we would keep our eyes of the foundation stone and align ourselves with him, we would rediscover our essential unity. More than unity is needed to build the Church of God but certainly it cannot ever be a Holy Temple without it.

22. This could mean that it is by the work of the Holy Spirit that his readers are made part of this dwelling place for God, or, as the NIV translation implies, they are part of this building in which God lives by or in his Spirit. Within 40 years of Christ’s death the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed and has never been rebuilt. God has no further use for it because he has us, his Church, in which he lives and through which he works on earth.

Chapter 3

1. The 'reason' must be the whole of what Paul has written already and not anything specific to the immediately preceding words. It is the wonder of God's plan of salvation and the fact, not that the Gentiles have a part in the Old covenant with the Jews, but Jews and Gentiles together are within a New Covenant.

Paul was a prisoner of the Romans but he had given his life to Christ and so, if he was in prison, it was because Christ would be served best in this way. He says it is for the sake of the Gentiles because the opposition to his preaching, which came principally from the Jews, was not only that Jesus had risen from the dead but that the salvation of God first promised to the Jews was to include the Gentiles also.

2. Paul's train of thought is broken and he does not return to complete it until v. 14. It is broken by his reference to his ministry to the Gentiles. He is overwhelmed again by the fact of the Gospel and that God has allowed him to see the truth. Commentators see a problem in the opening words of this verse. Paul had spent some time in Ephesus and was well-known there. Why, then, should he say, "if you have heard" or "you must have heard"? Some see this as evidence that someone other than Paul wrote this letter. Or it may be that it was a general letter and one copy of it was sent to Ephesus (see 1:1). Or it could be that Paul had heard that there are new believers who did not meet him when he was in the city.

The NIV takes the view that God has given Paul the task of administering or dispensing, as a steward, God's grace. Other translations say that God's grace was dispensed or assigned to Paul for the benefit of the Gentiles. What is abundantly clear is that Paul does not see his understanding of God's way as a gift for himself alone; he has to share it; it is for others.

3. Paul has already spoken of the mystery (1: 9/10). It is God's plan for humankind put into effect by Christ. Paul, with his fanatical belief as a Jew, could never have reasoned this out; it was a gift from God by direct revelation. He has spent most of the letter so far explaining what the mystery is, but he claims that is a brief description.

4. Having explained that his understanding of God's plan was not due to any skill or ability of his own but as a gift by revelation, Paul feels free to claim authority. As they read his letter, these Christians will be able to appreciate Paul's grasp of the purposes of God..

5. The very meaning of a 'mystery' is that it is something hidden. In the Old Testament there was clear reference to the Gentiles being given light. However, there was no indication that they were to be united with Israel as joint heirs of God's promises.

Paul is not the only one to whom this has been revealed. The other leaders of the Church had been given this truth by the Holy Spirit. All believers are holy in that they are set apart for God. It is not that their leaders are more holy but, because of their position, it is even more important that they should be holy.

6. At first sight it is confusing that Paul gives different explanations of God's 'mystery'. In Colossians 1:27, it is that Christ actually indwells the believer. Here, as we have seen, it is that Gentiles and Jews are united (note the recurrence of 'together' in this verse). In 1: 9/10 it is that all things are to be united under Christ. However, it is probably best understood as it appears in Colossians 2:2 - "*the mystery of God, namely Christ*". Christ

is God's great secret, now revealed. All God's purposes are effected in him. He is the way to God and the way God works in and upon creation. Everything about God's dealings with creation is channelled through Christ. Here we see also the work of the Holy Spirit who, Christ promised, would take of what was his and reveal it to the believer; and everything the Father has belongs to Christ also (Jn. 16:14/15). The 'mystery' is Christ and it is the task of the Holy Spirit to reveal this to us.

7. In this letter Paul comes at each truth from many angles. In v.3 he has explained that his understanding of God's plan was not due to his own ability to reason; it was a gift of revelation from God. Now he says that his calling to share that understanding – to be a minister of the gospel – is also a gift of God; it is due to his Grace. To tell others the good news was not just a duty, nor a burden; it was a privilege. The reference to God's power may mean that only the power of God could have changed Paul from the fanatical, arrogant Pharisee into the humble minister of Christ. Or it may mean that it is only by the power of God that he is able to be a minister.

8. This is no false modesty. Paul was fully aware of, and was willing to use, the authority he had been given by God (1:1). However, he never ceased to wonder that God had chosen him. Why should he have this honour? Few Christians today show that humility. We sometimes look down upon non-believers and those of other Faiths, as though it is some achievement of our own that we have seen and responded to the truth.

Paul shared the gospel with all, but he had a particular ministry to Gentiles – those who were strangers to the only true God. What he preached was first and foremost Christ; not doctrines or regulations. When a person is captivated by Christ he is satisfied – except that he or she desires more of him. There is always more to discover. The riches of the world do not satisfy.

9. There is a difference of opinion about the meaning of the word translated here as 'administration'. It is the same as in v.2. In 1: 10 NIV translates the same word as "to be put into effect". However, many translations prefer to translate it here (and in 1: 10) as 'plan', which does make more immediate sense. The point Paul is making is that Christ is not suddenly introduced as an afterthought. He has been involved with the Father from the very beginning. His incarnation, death, resurrection and ascension, with all that this accomplished, was the plan of God from before creation. However, it had, until now, been kept hidden. Now that it has been revealed Paul's task was to explain it, to bring it to light.

10. There are spiritual as well as human beings. Some of these spiritual beings, created by God, have rebelled against his rule and do all they can to disrupt God's order and bring division. We have seen that God had a secret plan, a 'mystery', Christ himself. Christ, together with the plan, has now been revealed. In Christ all things are to be reconciled (1: 10). The Church, Christ's body on earth, is to be the means of bringing that reconciliation into being; not only by its preaching but by its demonstration in its own life and witness. This is why Paul has gone to such lengths to explain the unity of Jewish and Gentile believers. The Church, by what it is, declares the multicoloured, comprehensive, many-faceted wisdom of God. This is seen and recognised by the spiritual beings in the heavenly, as distinct from earthly, realms.

11. It is all part of the eternal plan. Christ was involved with formulating that plan and was himself the Agent through whom it was realised. He is the appointed and anointed Saviour of whom we are willing servants.

12. Paul has already referred to the fact that believers have access to God (2: 18), but now that is amplified. He speaks of freedom and confidence. This is not theoretical but practical. God is great and it is right that we should have a reverent awe of him; but he created us for himself so that we might be in relationship with him. He really does desire us to come freely as a child with his father. Christ has changed the relationship between God and the believer; we are children of God. We must get rid of any fear of how God may react to us. He may have to correct us and we may hurt him by what we do, in which case we have to repent; but we never lose the right to come into his presence and have personal dealings with him.

13. In the light of the wonder of the gospel which Paul has just explained, Paul is not dismayed by the fact that he is in prison for preaching it and he does not want the believers to be discouraged either. The sufferings can be described as being for Christ because Paul is fulfilling Christ's commission (Acts 9: 16), but they are also for his readers because it is due to his bringing the gospel to them that he is imprisoned. The heroism and zeal of Paul can challenge and encourage others to the same endurance.

14. Remember that vv.2-13 are a diversion and so the 'reason' does not refer to those verses. The words simply repeat those of v. 1 and the reference is therefore to all that has been said in chapters 1 and 2. It was the normal custom to stand to pray, although Jesus knelt at Gethsemane. Kneeling was a sign of homage. Perhaps Paul is indicating both his awe and gratitude at what God had planned and his earnest concern for the believers as he prays.

15. There is real difficulty in translating this verse and in understanding just what it means. There is a close link between the word pater (father) and patria (family) which is obvious in the original but is lost in English. It seems that the point is that a family is only a family because it has a common link. That link is that each individual has the same father, so the other members of the family are brothers and sisters. In its context, this comment is apt, because Paul has been speaking of the unity of all believers in the Church.

A consequence of this understanding is that we seek to picture God as Father, based on our own experience of human fatherhood, which may be good or bad. This verse stands that reasoning on its head. All true fatherhood should reflect the perfect fatherhood of God.

16. It is unfortunate that the NIV says "out of" whereas the true meaning is "according to". A rich man will give 'out of' his fortune, but it may be a very small sum that he gives. Whereas, if he gives 'according to' his fortune, this implies a far greater sum. God's riches are limitless, therefore he will supply all we ever need. Paul's prayer is that his readers will be strengthened with power. That is a form of doubling up with words because strength and power are so similar in this context. But this is not physical strength; it is possible to be physically very strong but a weak personality. Paul is thinking of the person each of us is, the one who inhabits the body. The only sure way of reaching this person is through the Holy Spirit.

17-18. Although Christ and the Holy Spirit are distinct persons of the Trinity, it is not possible to separate them in their dwelling within us, nor does Scripture attempt to do so. The Spirit delights to glorify Christ; he takes what belongs to Christ, who he is, and reveals that to believers (Jn. 16: 13/15). It is through the ministry of the Holy Spirit that Christ enters a man or woman. It is not a temporary presence; Christ comes in to stay.

However, he does not force his entry; it is by invitation and by faith. This is not a doctrine to be accepted but a wonder to be experienced.

God is love and if we are to understand and experience him and his ways we need to enter into that realm of love. No one can appreciate music if he is tone deaf; no one can enjoy an art gallery if he does not appreciate beauty. In the same way love is the key to appreciating God. Paul's prayer is that believers may have roots and foundations set deep in this realm of love. To say, "*together with all the saints*", may mean no more than that Paul wants everyone to experience this. However, love cannot be practised or experienced in isolation. We need others if we are to love and be loved. The Church is the sphere in which this love is to be experienced and demonstrated.

It is pedantic to point out that there are only three dimensions and not four. Paul is poetically expansive, rather than literally correct. He himself is overwhelmed with the love he sees and has experienced in Christ and he longs that his readers should know this also.

19. As a teenager I purchased gramophone records which I played on old acoustic equipment. One day I purchased an electric record player. It reproduced sounds I had never heard before: they had always been there on my records but the old equipment could not pick them up. Christ's love, says Paul, actually surpasses knowledge. As human beings we cannot grasp its fullness. Nevertheless, he prays that their knowledge and experience of it will grow and go on growing. It is obviously true that the human body, soul and spirit cannot fully contain God. However, God does not reduce his fullness to fit our capabilities, any more than the orchestra omitted certain instruments when making the recordings I owned, in order to match the limited capacity of my equipment. Paul wants believers to have all that God is dwelling within them, just as he did in Christ (Col. 1: 19). The expression of this fullness depends on how open, how surrendered, we are to God. In the person of Christ it was complete.

20. This is obviously a drawing to a close the first section of the letter. God is, and has done, so much that Paul bursts into praise. God continually surprises us with all that he does. Not only can we not ask too much, our imagination cannot embrace all that he is able to do. He does all this through his power at work in us in the person of his Holy Spirit. (See note on 1: 19 and also Acts 1: 8.)

21. It may seem strange that the Church should be mentioned before Christ. However, Paul is no doubt thinking of progression here. He has been thinking of the power given to the Church; therefore praise should be offered here and God's glory be shown. This will glorify Christ who, in turn, glorifies the Father who is all in all (1 Cor. 15: 28). The glorifying of God is to be eternal.

Chapter 4

1. Paul has explained something of what the Church is to be. However, it can only be that if the individuals of whom it is comprised live out God's plan and intention. He has already said that we are chosen (1: 4) and predestined (1: 5), marked with the seal of the Holy Spirit (1: 13) and created for good works (2:10). So, says Paul, we have been called. We must now lead a life which fulfils that calling. Paul can urge this because he is himself an example to follow, he is suffering for his faithfulness – he is in prison.

2. Paul now sets out the qualities which believers must show to one another if the Church is to be a fellowship and demonstrate to the world what the life of the kingdom is. First there is humility. There is a deep-set need in each of us to be important. Why do we find it so difficult to believe that we are? The Holy Spirit does not seek to glorify himself but Christ. John the Baptist, who was filled with the Holy Spirit from conception or birth, said of Christ, "*He must increase but I must decrease*". If we are filled with the Holy Spirit we will be sure of our standing with God and will delight at the working of God in others, even when this puts us in the shadow.

This quality leads on to the next, meekness (here translated 'gentleness'). This is not weakness; it can be very strong – for the welfare of others. It is the ability to control our passions; to be self-disciplined. Therefore meekness may involve anger at injustice which will drive us to action; but always it will be controlled anger.

Patience here includes the sense of perseverance. It is easy to be a Christian when everything is going well; we are fit and other people are kind and pleasant. It is difficult when things are against us. However, the believer's conduct and attitude is not to depend on circumstances outside him or herself, but on the Holy Spirit of truth within him or her. So we never give up; we hold onto the truth even in darkness. We bear with the difficult person in unshakable love; not because of who or what they are, but because of who and what we are in Christ and with Christ in us

In our natural state love is drawn from us by the one we love; perhaps because they love us or there is something in them which attracts us. When the Holy Spirit is in us love flows from us, irrespective of the qualities of others. That is how God acts towards us and John recognises our reflection of that love as proof of our having passed from death to life – "*because we love our brothers*" (1 John 3:14).

3. Jesus, in his high priestly prayer (John 17) asked his Father to bring all believers in him into a unity. It is unthinkable that a prayer of our Lord's should not be answered, and so that unity has been given. We do not need to seek it but we do need to keep it. Paul uses a strong term here; it implies sustained effort. The reference to the Spirit could possibly refer to a human spirit of fellowship, but is almost certainly correctly shown in the NIV with a capital 'S' as the Holy Spirit. The same Holy Spirit is in all believers, thus creating unity.

Throughout this epistle Paul has been showing how Jew and Gentile have been brought into the same body by the same Lord. They must work at preserving this unity. They are linked, bound together, by the attributes, commended and commanded in the previous verse, and the result is peace.

4-6. Here Paul sets out the basis of the unity of all Christians. He has already referred to the Church as the body of Christ (1:23). The work Christ began in his earthly body, now transformed into his resurrection body and taken up into heaven, is to continue through

the Church. This is his body on earth now. It is made up of individuals but there are not lots of different churches; there is only The Church. It may be situated in different places – the Church at Ephesus, the Church in Wales – but it is one body.

Also, there is only one Holy Spirit who energises every individual Christian. The power, the wisdom, the authority of each believer comes from the indwelling of the same Spirit. How can there be anything other than unity of the Spirit therefore (4:3)?

There is also only one future for every believer – heaven. We will have to get on with each other there so let's begin by getting on with each other here, while we look forward to that certain hope. The way Paul phrases it brings out a further cause for unity; every believer is called. Jesus told his disciples that they had not chosen him but he had chosen them. So it is with us, although it is not totally one sided; we may choose whether to respond, but every believer knows that if he or she is indeed a believer it is because we have first been chosen and called by God (1:4). As the one who called me is the same one who called you there is a bond between us whether we like it or not. We may be called to different tasks because we have different gifts and personalities but we are called to one calling because we are called by and to the one Lord.

That is the next point Paul makes. There is only one Lord. That is the simplest creedal statement and was, apparently, the earliest. Who or what is it that has your allegiance? Your king, your employer, your job, your hobby or yourself? If that which rules your life is Jesus, then you have a unity with everyone else who is equally committed in making the statement, "Jesus is Lord".

'One faith' is not easy to understand. Is Paul using the word in the sense which became common later – 'The Faith' i.e. a set of doctrines or facts which make up the Christian Faith? Or is he saying that all Christians have to make the same self surrender i.e. they have to take the step of belief rather than rely on deeds? Paul has already stated that such faith is a gift (2:8) and as it is the same God who gives it this is yet another basis of unity.

One baptism; baptism is visible and it is public. It is the one method of Christian initiation. It is the sign of commitment to Christ; we are baptised into him. It is, therefore, the sign of entrance into the fellowship of Christ's body, the Church. We are baptised into the universal Church, not any particular denomination. Therefore, our common baptism is yet another ground of our given unity.

Paul then comes to the deepest cause of our unity – there is only one God. In a very general sense this means that there is a unity of all humankind – indeed of all creation, because everything comes from the same source. This is true, of course, and we need to recognise that unity far more than we do. We would then realise the blasphemy of war. However, that is not in Paul's mind here. His whole argument is the unity of believers.

The unique claim of Christianity is to know God as Father. There had been hints of this in the Old Testament, as when God called Israel his son (Hosea 11:1) but it was Christ himself who taught his followers to call God 'Father'. If Christians have a common Father, then we are related. Every other believer is our brother or sister.

In speaking of the Father being over all, through all and in all, it is impossible to know whether Paul meant all things or all people. The fact that God is above all preserves the truth that he is separate from creation. If we burn a tree we have not destroyed part of God – as an animistic faith would hold. God upholds creation but is separate from it.

Nevertheless, if God ceased to be, creation would disintegrate. He works through all and is able to use everything to his purpose.

When we come to the phrase ‘in all’, it is best to assume that Paul is speaking of people i.e. believers (as he is probably doing in each use of ‘all’ here). Christ promised that he and the Father would come and dwell in believers (Jn. 14:23) and that the Holy Spirit also would be in them (Jn. 14:17).

Everything Paul has mentioned combines to create the unity of all Christians.

7. Having explained in such great detail the unity of all believers, Paul now shows that this does not imply uniformity. The Christian community is not a drab monochrome of identical personalities pressed from an identical mould. We are a many-splendoured group bringing our varied gifts and personalities to contribute to the glory of Christ in the Church. Every believer, “each one”, has some gift and this is not simply chance or natural selection, it is dispensed personally by Christ. Paul develops this in greater detail in 1 Cor. 12. Everyone is needed and the contribution of each enhances the whole.

8. This is a problem verse because it is a misquotation of Psalm 68:18 and the misquotation is the very purpose of referring to the Psalm at all. In the ancient world it was the custom for a successful general to have a victory parade through the streets of a capital city. Here he would lead the general and senior officers of his defeated foe. He would also display the booty or ransom he had received.

Psalm 68 pictures God as the victorious General of his people going up into Zion leading his captives and receiving gifts from men. Paul has just made the point (7) that Christ gives gifts to believers and in order to back up this statement he quotes this Psalm as being fulfilled in Christ. Obviously our Lord’s ascension into heaven neatly fits the reference to “ascended on high” but Paul (or possibly someone else before him) makes this major alteration and changes ‘received’ to ‘gave’ gifts. It is a wonderful truth and an exciting amendment that the victorious Lord gives rather than receives in his dealings with us. If Paul did it deliberately it is a bold and thrilling move. But it is strange to have to alter the text in order to support your argument.

9-10. Quoting the Psalm which refers to ascending, Paul is reminded afresh of Christ’s Ascension and briefly rehearses the facts that Christ existed before the incarnation. He had to leave heaven when he became man. The reference to his descent to the lower earthly regions is not clear. Does Paul refer only to the fact that Christ lived on earth? Does he refer to his going to the place of the departed between his death and resurrection? Or is it a reference to Christ’s proclamation of his victory to the imprisoned spirits (probably fallen angels – not human beings) mentioned in 1 Pet. 3:19?

Whatever he had in mind, his point is that it is the Christ who was confined to one body on earth who is no longer restricted. He has left the earth in one form – his human body – but he is present now throughout the whole universe.

11. There are other passages of Scripture which refer to gifts, notably Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12, but usually these refer to different abilities. Here Paul speaks of people as being the gifts. However, it is the abilities they have been given which equip them for the office they hold or role they perform.

Not all gifts of the Spirit lead to the recipient holding a recognised function or office within the Church but Paul concentrates here on those that do. As they are given by

Christ it is not solely the choice of the individual as to whether he responds to the call to exercise the role for which God has equipped him. The Church is the poorer if it is deprived of the ministry of someone Christ has called and empowered.

At the head of the list Paul puts apostles. The original apostles were unique and their calling can never be repeated. The office extended beyond the original disciples appointed by Christ but a qualification was that they had to have seen the risen Lord and been sent by him.

Obviously, the original apostles died. Does this mean, therefore, that their office and function ceased? So far as the title goes, yes that did cease. Some denominations have sprung up which have attempted to revive it, but not the main-line Churches. But what of the function? The term 'apostle' literally means 'a messenger', but in that sense we are all to be apostles; we are all to carry the message of Christ into the world. But what was the function of the original apostles? Certainly many of them travelled; but it seems that they exercised an oversight. They sought to preserve true doctrine. As the truth spread and Churches were formed in different areas, it was the apostles who checked that heresy was excluded and who, therefore, were a focus of unity. In this sense Bishops, Moderators and other appointed leaders, exercising an oversight of the Churches are fulfilling at least part of the role of an apostle.

A prophet is one to whom God reveals at least something of his purposes. It is not primarily a matter of foretelling the future (although, because God's purposes are to be fulfilled in the future, this may be involved). Rather it is a matter of interpreting events of the time: "This is happening to us now because God is doing such and such and requires this and that". The role of the prophet is greatly undervalued; so much so that we no longer recognise their office. We need them if the Church as a whole is to exercise its prophetic role to the nation and to the world.

Evangelists have a special gift of sharing the truth about God so that many of those to whom they speak respond and believe. Not many are public or platform speakers, although these are the ones we hear about; most evangelists simply share the truth with people they meet. The fact that some believers are gifted as evangelists does not relieve the rest of us from sharing the good news whenever we can. However, some have a particular ability to win others to Christ. It is interesting that, although they are mentioned here as one of Christ's gifts to his Church, there are only two people recorded as evangelists in the New Testament: Philip (Acts 21:8) and Timothy (2 Tim. 4:5).

Apostles, prophets and evangelists are gifts to the wider Church but pastors and teachers are normally linked to a particular fellowship. They may represent a single office because their task is to encourage and to mature believers in their walk with the Lord. To do this they must obviously understand the faith themselves and be experienced in keeping it in their own lives.

12. The word 'prepare' is translated differently in various versions of the Bible; some use 'equip' or 'perfect'. It means to bring something to the state or condition for which it was created and intended. God had a purpose in creating individuals and the Church. The gifts of the office bearers Paul has mentioned are to bring the members of the Church to that state of maturity which will enable them to fulfil their intended function.

It is obvious, therefore, that it is not the task of the office bearers to perform, alone, the tasks of the Church. That is the role of the whole Church and of every individual member of it because each has some gift (7). Fortunately, the shortage of money to pay

full-time office bearers often forces the Church to release the gifts of all its members and thus fulfil Christ's original intention for his Church.

The work is the work of ministry or service. When we look at the particular list of office bearers Paul mentions, it seems that most of the ministry is within the Church; although, of course, evangelists would reach out to commend the faith to others. However, it does seem that it is Christ's intention that the main sphere of ministry is within the Church. Of course, we seek to meet the urgent needs of all when we know of them; but these needs are too great for our resources. However, if we can bring the needy within the Church then their needs are far more likely to be met from the resources of their fellow believers. What is more, because they themselves will receive at least one gift from Christ, they will become a resource to meet the needs of others. In this way the body of Christ will be built up.

13. The previous verse is insufficient in itself. If I am here only to serve you and you to serve me, why are we both here? And if the Church is to be built up, what is it to be built up for? Here Paul spells it out.

First there is unity in the faith. That does not mean we all have to hold to the same rigid doctrine, although some basic facts are essential to our faith – the birth, death, life, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, for instance. But the method and manner of baptism, the place of ritual in worship and countless other matters involved in the practice of our faith, may differ. What is vital is that all who hold to faith in Christ accept and love one another. Belonging to him we belong to each other.

Even the essential facts of our faith are almost peripheral to the centrality of the experience of the personal knowledge of Jesus, the Son of God. The people of a nation may read facts about their sovereign and those facts may be true and to be believed. But the family of that sovereign do not spend time thinking of what they believe about him or her, they enjoy his or her company. They do believe the facts, unconsciously, because they know the person.

The word 'mature' expresses the term 'perfect man' of the Authorised Version. It refers to the attaining of a purpose; reaching the end for which we were created. The aim is to become human beings as we were designed to be. That, of course, was fulfilled and exemplified in the person of Jesus Christ. God's intention is that each of us shall become like him. In the letter to the Romans, Paul speaks of God working through every event and incident in our lives to bring about the good of conforming us to the likeness of Christ (Rom. 8: 28/9). This is his supreme purpose for each one of us.

14. Every new move of the Spirit in the life of the Church is exciting and refreshing. However, what is novel and spontaneous can become rigid and routine as we seek to capture or preserve it. So the next manifestation can lead some to abandon the well-tried ways of the past simply for something which is new and appears to be exciting.

There is need for maturity in the leaders and a discernment of what is of the Spirit and what is of the flesh. One of the greatest needs of the Church in every age is for its members to have 'stickability'; to persevere in the dry times. There are always those, to whom Paul refers here, who are swayed by the latest fad. There are also men and women who, perhaps in a desire for importance and prestige, seek to win followers to themselves as they propound some strange and heretical teaching. Very often this takes the form of promising some special blessing or healing if people will only do this or that. In many cases this leads to requests for money.

15. The way of the Christian must be always truth and love. Strictly the original does not have the word 'speaking', it is more than that. It is a matter of holding to, or living out the truth in love. These two must be held in balance. It is possible to be so zealous in upholding the truth that we alienate others. A homosexual said, "The only people who reject me are the Christians; they really hate me". On the other hand, it is all too easy to compromise the truth in a desire to be kind and not offend. In Christ the two are held in perfect balance - grace and truth meet together. Instead of being tossed about by different and conflicting doctrines, therefore, we are to move forward into Christ who, being the head, is to direct and control the whole body.

16. It is unhelpful to try to define every word here in its exact meaning because the overall picture is so clear. Just as a body with its differing limbs and organs requires ligaments and muscles to join each to the other, and all these need to be coordinated under the central control of the brain or head, so each individual believer needs to be linked to other believers and under the control of Christ if the Church is to function as his body on earth.

Once again there is the stress on the need for love. Each part of the body is to seek the well-being of every other part. This alone will produce the health of the body as a whole.

17. We have seen already, particularly in chapter 2, that Paul, a Jew, is writing mainly to believers who were Gentiles but are now the people of God. The Jews had the Ten Commandments which, whatever their limitations, provided a standard for behaviour. The Gentiles did not have that standard. Their moral standards were loose. So Paul impresses upon these believers that their change of status as members of the body of Christ must involve a change of behaviour. The word 'insist' has to do with testifying in a court of law, so it means to 'state solemnly'. Perhaps the greatest hindrance to the success of the mission of the Church is that its members do not stand out. We are no different from non believers in our aims, desires, lifestyle and behaviour. So why should others be attracted to join us?

If a person does not believe in God then, in the final analysis, there is no purpose in anything; ultimately everything is meaningless and futile.

18. Not only do such people have no purpose, there is no moral standard outside themselves or, at least, outside that adopted by the community in which they live. They do not have to account to anyone independent of themselves. Therefore there is no final standard of what is right and what is wrong; it is impossible to make judgements which have any final validity. Thus they have existence rather than life. Doing what is right in their own eyes, they become selfish and their decisions and views become rigid.

19. Paul cannot mean that every non-believer indulges in every act that he mentions; and that is patently not so. He is speaking generally and every group, tribe or nation, when it abandons allegiance to God, begins to go downhill. One of the first moral standards to go is in the sexual realm. In a climate of sexual 'freedom', people become insensitive to the hurt their conduct causes others. Family bondings are undermined and destroyed. There are also other areas of life - drinking and love of wealth, where 'freedom' leads to breakdown. Immoral behaviour in many walks of life is no longer shameful in the eyes of society at large. First it becomes acceptable and then actually to be admired. Society (and remember that is simply a large number of individuals) becomes corrupt, with each seeking to possess more and more. The tragedy is that in their desire and greed they no longer care what is happening to them or to the world.

20-21. To understand these two verses it is probably best to summarise their content. Paul has just spoken of the degradation of non-believers who are in the dark. Believers, however, have been taught differently. It is simply that they have learnt about Christ, they have actually come to know him and so learn from him. The opening of v.21 (like the opening of 3:2) is not really expressing doubt, rather it is a form of exhortation – “if you claim you know him, then of course, you will...”

Paul makes a distinction here between ‘Christ’ and ‘Jesus’. Christ is the anointed one; the one expected by the Jews to come from God. It is almost an office or role. That role of the Christ was fulfilled by the human Jesus, and his life was real and is our example.

22-24. Having stated (20) what the believers did not learn about Christ, Paul now reminds them of what they were taught. Conversion is such a radical event that it is as though there are two distinct personalities; the old person, man or nature, and the new. Two people are involved in bringing about this change - the individual and God. The actual work, the creation and recreation, is that of God alone. However, we must cooperate: God does not override our free will. We choose to be born again – to allow God to work his work in us. But that is not the only choice we must make. We are given a new nature but the old is not yet destroyed; we choose in which nature we shall live – the old or the new. Paul refers to this choice in his letter to the Romans; “*Count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus*” (Rom. 6: 11).

The old self is corrupted and it corrupts. The desires of that old self are deceitful because they lead us to believe that if we follow them we shall find happiness and security and fulfilment – but we do not.

The great change in a human being on being born again is that his or her spirit, which until then has been latent or non-operational, has come alive and begins to function. “*Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit*” (Jn. 3:6). Thus a person is now able to receive guidance directly from God because a new pathway is opened up within. The Holy Spirit is able to communicate with a person’s mind through his or her spirit; whereas before we had to receive all our information through the bodily senses of sight, hearing etc. What Paul is saying here is that our understanding was limited and flawed; our ideas need to be renewed through our spirit (‘attitude’ is not the best translation) instructed by the Holy Spirit, working on our minds.

Initially mankind was created in the image of God (Gen. 1: 26/7). Because of sin that image has been marred. However, the new person, man or nature already exists, the ‘blueprint’ is there and that, once again, reflects the image of God. We are to be conformed to that image. Because it already exists we are to “put it on”. Yet it is also a process and everything that happens to us can be used to make us conformed to the image or likeness of his Son (Rom. 8:29).

Strictly, the final phrase is, “*the righteousness and holiness of truth*”. Christ himself is the truth; the final reality. We have been accounted righteous so that we may be righteous – walk in the righteousness of Christ. If we truly belonged to him we have been set apart – separated from the world, but still in it – for God to express himself through us.

25. Having told us to put off the old self and put on the new, Paul now gives some examples of what that means. We are not to lie to each other. We can lie in more ways than speech. We can pretend to be someone we are not; we can allow someone to

continue in a false understanding of something. However, here it does seem that Paul is thinking specifically of speaking lies. It is so easy to bend the truth just a little to put ourselves in a better light. But if the body of Christ is to function properly it is essential that there is mutual trust. The phrase “*speak truthfully to his neighbour*” is taken from Zechariah 8:16. Although Paul makes a minor alteration (not reflected in the NIV translation) putting ‘with his neighbour’ rather than ‘to’ – perhaps with the intention of stressing the bond between believers; we are indeed members of one body.

26-27. The quotation is from Psalm 4:4. There will be times when we will be angry. It is an emotion given by God and it is intended for good. Christ himself had a righteous anger so anger cannot, of itself, be a sinful emotion. The trouble is that, like everything else in our personality, it can become corrupt. A good, but not infallible, guide to the character of our anger is its source. If it is because of injustice done to others and we are not personally affected by it then it may be a right form of anger which motivates us to do something to correct the injustice. Even so, our actions must be under control so that we do not react wrongly. If, however, our anger is because of something done to us, then it is suspect and we need to take special care it does not lead us into sin.

What is important is that anger should not be allowed to smoulder for then it can suddenly blaze up out of control. If we are angry with anyone – especially our husband or wife – it is vital we make up before going to sleep. If we do not there is the danger that the matter will not be dealt with at all and more and more unresolved issues will build up until at last they explode in a totally destructive conflagration. Anger can cause us to lose our self-control and that can allow the devil to gain a foothold.

28. There is a profound psychological wisdom in Paul’s instructions. It isn’t enough to intend to stop doing wrong; that is insufficient motivation for us to succeed. It is also purely negative. There needs to be a positive spur. The wrong behaviour is to be replaced by actively pursuing good. If we have told a lie, we must go back and correct it by telling the truth (25). The thief must not simply stop taking from others but work so that he has something to give others who are genuinely in need.

29. The word translated ‘unwholesome’ is literally ‘rotten’. Some translations take this as ‘bad’ and then make it seem that Paul is talking simply of bad language. It is more than that. In every situation we can, by what we say, seek to make things worse or better; to pull down or to build up. We can encourage self pity, revenge and bitterness or we can direct people into forgiveness and generosity. We can kick those who are down or give them hope and self-worth. Words are powerful for ill or for good.

30. This verse is one which reveals most clearly that the Holy Spirit is not simply an influence but a person. You cannot grieve an influence. There is a stress here in the original on the holiness of the Spirit – “the spirit who is Holy”. He dwells in us and is hurt by everything which is contrary to God’s will for us; every unkind thought or deed. Paul may well be using a custom from the marketplace. A merchant buying a barrel or sack of cereal would impress upon it his large wooden seal. The indentations left upon it would easily identify it as his when later he or his servant came to collect it (and also ensure that no one had interfered with it). At our conversion Christ claims us as his own until he comes for us.

31. Unfortunately it is natural to us in our fallen nature to nurse the hurts and wrongs done, or which we imagine done, to us. They then take root and we become bitter. Rage is the sudden flaring up of angry feelings whereas anger is the ongoing smouldering of

antagonism. It is the latter word used in v. 26 and it is used also of the anger of God where, of course, it refers to the holy, implacable opposition of God to all evil.

Brawling is not, perhaps, the best translation because that may imply physical force, whereas the word refers to the raising of the voice which shouts down another. Slander, of course, is not confined to a legal definition but covers any form of running someone down in what we say of them. Rather than seeking further specific wrongs, Paul sums it all up by forbidding every act which seeks to bring harm to another.

32. The word translated 'kind' carries a wealth of meaning. Here it means easy to get on with – the very opposite of self assertive. It is someone who is always considering the welfare of others. What a delight such people are in any fellowship. Such kindness springs from compassion – thinking of how others feel; understanding what may make them do or say hurtful things; not bearing grudges and, therefore, forgiving them. The criterion for such forgiveness, however, is not making allowances for what may have provoked others (which is finding excuses not forgiveness) but that God has forgiven us in and through Christ.

Chapter 5

1-2. We were made in God's image and in Romans 8:28ff. Paul states that everything that happens to us can be used to make us conformed to the image of Christ who is himself the image of God (Col. 1:15). Barclay translates, "*as well loved children imitate their father*". That is a happy thought but stretches the original. It probably means no more than the fact that children who are dearly loved will respond by seeking to please those who love them. Our example, as ever, is Christ whose whole life was motivated by love and which culminated in his offering of himself to God on the cross. The imagery is drawn from the Old Testament sacrificial system which itself borrowed from pagan rituals the idea that the god was pleased when he smelled the scent of the offering rising to him.

3. Greek culture allowed considerable sexual licence. Chastity and faithful monogamy would cause both surprise and opposition. The Christian understanding of 'one man, one woman for life' as the will of God would be under attack. Our own Western society has fallen back into the old ways. Believers are under intense pressure to conform to the current way of the world. People have always sinned; what has changed is that they now seek to claim that sin is no longer sin, it is acceptable.

The word 'greed' here, in its context, probably carries a sexual meaning such as insatiable desire. God's people are called to be a holy people. We have been set apart by God, not in the sense of goody goodies, but to be free to live as he designed and intended us to live. To fulfil our purpose obviously promotes our greatest joy and well-being. Sometimes the Church implies that there are higher standards for its leaders, its clergy, than for its other members. This is not so; we are all to be holy as God himself is holy. However, it is true that the effect and damage may be far greater when leaders fail, because they have a wider sphere of influence..

"Not even a hint" is a useful translation but it may obscure the idea of actually talking about sexual immorality. In our fallen nature we are more fascinated by other people's failure than their goodness. Similarly, we delight in hearing of sexual perversions rather than purity. It is true that "the thought is father to the deed" and in Philippians 4:8 Paul instructs us to fill our minds with things that are honourable, pure, and lovely etc.

In the world fortunes are made from pornography. That is not the way for believers. Paul continues his theme...

4. It is a fact that normally decent, intelligent people can, in certain circumstances, become coarse and foolish. It occurs at some functions like staff Christmas parties, club dinners and the like. People say things they would normally be ashamed of – or ought to be. They speak in a derogatory and cheap manner of others and make jokes which get a quick laugh but which are sordid rather than truly humorous. Such behaviour is never right or acceptable for the follower of Christ. Following his usual custom, Paul does not leave a vacuum but gives an alternative – thanksgiving. At first sight this seems a strange suggestion and it is difficult to see the connection. However, it is very practical. If we find ourselves in company and situations where the talk is coarse and empty, to speak simply and naturally of things we appreciate and for which we can be thankful, can introduce something good and wholesome.

5. No doubt there were people in Paul's time, as there are today, who treat sexual sin lightly. There were groups known as Gnostics, who held that the body was not all that important; the spiritual was supreme. Thus sexual behaviour was of little account. Paul

is very firm – “*Make no mistake; you can be certain of this*”. No one who behaves in the way he describes has a place in the Kingdom of Heaven, now or in the future; it is as serious as that.

Paul’s description covers all fornication and perversion. As in v. 3, the reference to greed or covetousness in this context probably relates to sexual desire, which is determined to gain its ends. It is interesting that Paul sees such greed as a form of idolatry – the sin which Jews found particularly serious. A desire for anything which becomes intense usurps the place which God alone should have and hence it becomes idolatry.

6-7. If such people are excluded from the Kingdom, what of the essential truth of the gospel – forgiveness and redemption? Of course, these are available; the penitent sinner can be restored. However, an essential part of repentance is the recognition and confession of sin. It is to stand where God stands and see sin for what it is and to adopt the same attitude as he towards it. This must result in action; we turn away from it. If we do not separate ourselves from sin we are under his wrathful condemnation of it.

Most of us recoil from open and coarse promiscuity. The danger comes from pleasant, intelligent people who set forth reasoned arguments to persuade us that loose sexual behaviour and standards are not all that serious and may even be beneficial. But this is deceit and we are not to be associated with such people or indulge in their ways.

8-10. The difference between knowing and not knowing God is often depicted in Scripture as being in light or in darkness. In the light you see how things are and can find your way. The problem about being in darkness, like a person born blind, is that you do not even understand what light is or what is its effect.

Paul goes further than saying that before they became believers his readers were in darkness, they were themselves part of that darkness. Similarly, now that they are in Christ, they are not simply in the light, the light is in them and they are a means of that light being shed into the world.

It is a profound truth of Christian experience that whilst all that is grace (that is redemption and eternal life with all that this implies) has been won for and given to us by Christ, we need to appropriate it. To use a vivid description, we have to cash the cheque. We have to walk, live out our lives, in the light.

In Galatians Paul speaks of the fruit of the Spirit; here, the fruit of light. Light produces growth in plants and the light of Christ should produce growth in us, our characters, the people we are. Goodness and righteousness are obviously similar. Righteousness implies a sense of justice and incorruptibility. Goodness includes something softer as well; a compassion and warmth of an attractive character. The light of Christ exposes all deceit and hidden motive and thus encourages truth and reality.

The wonder of our God is that, whilst he is all-powerful, he does not impose himself. He did not create us robots. He seeks to draw us on, to develop our gifts and personalities. We are to use our spiritual gifts and abilities to find out what delights the Lord. Life has a purpose; it is a journey of discovery.

11. Paul views everything in the light of eternity. Finally everything will be in the light and will be light. So deeds performed in and under the influence of darkness have no eternal meaning or purpose and are, therefore, fruitless. The word ‘expose’ can be

translated as 'rebuke' or 'convict'. The intention, of course, is that these deeds should be seen for what they are. Obviously believers are to avoid them.

12. As in v. 3 Paul forbids talking about such things. How, then, are they to be rebuked and exposed?

13. It seems that Paul is continuing the argument begun in v. 8. By being light themselves and walking the way of Christ, evil will be revealed. In a particular business the deeds of sales representatives who dishonestly claimed inflated expenses were exposed, without a word being said, by one who claimed only what he was due and whose expenses were consistently lower than theirs.

14. When dawn comes we can see the world around us. In western culture we are used to light at the flick of a switch; the streets are illuminated and factories run night and day on a shift system. But when these words were written once darkness came, work and travel ceased until dawn.

Sleep, death and darkness are all terms used to describe the state of people who do not know Christ. But now for the believer life is transformed; he or she sees the purpose behind all creation. It is as though day has dawned. The quotation may well be a hymn or a primitive liturgy used at the baptism of a convert. It may well be based on Isaiah 60: 1 – "Arise, Shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you". But, if so, it has been radically altered for the use of Christians.

15. It is all very well to have the light and to see the truth; the difficulty we all experience is actually to do what we see to be right. In the Old Testament, particularly in the book of Proverbs, wisdom is the crown of virtues. It is astonishing how many highly intelligent people, well educated and with numerous qualifications, appear to lack wisdom. They have knowledge but do not understand how to use it in everyday life. It may be because they have not discovered and determined upon a purpose in life and, having no goal, are undecided about how to act. The Christian is to weigh his actions in the light of the truth he has, foreseeing the probable consequences.

16. NIV is right here to translate 'time' as 'opportunity' because the meaning is not so much to fill every moment with business for God as to seize ('buy up' may be the meaning) every opportunity to commend Christ, not only by word but by deeds. There is the implication of thinking how best to do this – the 'taking care' of the previous verse. This, in turn, leads on to the next verse.

17. In v. 15 Paul has already instructed his readers not to be unwise. Here a different word is used – 'foolish' which implies a moral failure. The safeguard is always to discover God's will and plan and to obey it. If we fulfil his plan we are doing that for which we were created and, therefore, will find the greatest joy and satisfaction.

18. Drunkenness may be due to careless over indulgence. This may lead to serious consequences and obviously is to be avoided. However, it may be that Paul is thinking here of a deliberate intention to get drunk; to "drown one's sorrows". Today he would doubtless extend his remarks to include drug taking. Some people find life unbearable. If a man or woman is experiencing hardship or disappointment they may feel low, but most will pull through if there is hope – the belief that things will not always be like this. It is when there is no hope that people seek for an escape; a few may contemplate suicide, many more turn to drugs or drink. In this state they lose control of their judgement and their powers are dissipated. They will do things of which, in their right

mind, they and their families and friends are ashamed. Paul commends a better way – being filled with the Holy Spirit. He, the Spirit, doesn't suppress our powers and abilities, but brings a new dimension and produces fruit which includes joy. The filling of the Spirit is not a once and for all experience; it is to be repeated constantly. It is to open ourselves to the flow of the Spirit into and through us.

19. It seems that worship in the early Church was far more spontaneous than it is today. In fact, in this verse there is no indication that Paul has in mind a gathering of the congregation; rather it is part of everyday life to enjoy the Lord and spend time with other believers, singing to him. It is interesting that with CD and cassette players in our cars we are returning to what Paul is advocating here. Many believers play tapes of Christian songs as they travel. It is a fact that joy in the heart often results in a song on the lips.

God and his ways should be the currency of conversation amongst Christians, as natural as walking. We should not compartmentalise our faith.

20. Did Paul really write "*for everything*"? Some commentators who doubt that Paul is the author of this letter believe that verses 19/20 are a loose copy of Colossians 3: 16-17 where Paul instructs that we are to do everything in the name of the Lord and give thanks. We can give thanks to God in all circumstances, believing he can bring good out of them. However, when a young parent is knocked down and killed by a drunken driver, surely it is wrong to thank God for that. That would imply that God desires such evil. We will find ourselves thanking God for the work of the devil. Whatever Paul wrote, he would not have intended that. However, it is certainly right to think God in all things; indeed, that is the only sure way to come through them. God does not promise we shall be spared the tribulation of a world which rejects him, but he does promise to be with us in it and to help us overcome as Christ overcame.

21. In our present age the difference between the way of the world and the way of Christ is particularly marked in the realm of relationships and attitude to authority. Everyone in authority seems to be ridiculed; their right to exercise that authority is questioned or, even worse, ignored. Everyone demands his or her own way and, in extreme cases, this leads to violence and terrorism. There is such an emphasis on exercising our rights that the rights of others are ignored.

Here Paul does not tell Christians to submit to those who are set over them (he will do that in the following verses), but it is a truth that submission to authority depends first on mutual submission. The leaders are not to be tyrants; rather they are to consider the welfare of those they lead. This will involve understanding and listening to them, even though it may not always be right to give them their desires. Much of this springs from attitude – the moment a ruler regards his subjects as fools or expendable he becomes a poor ruler.

The reason for such mutual submission is our fear of Christ ('reverence' hardly conveys the strength of the original). We are all under the authority of Christ and one day will have to give account to him. This reason is far removed from the reason for submission in the world – e.g. fear of losing a job, fear of discovery, fear of being belittled or fear of being hurt. Nevertheless, the Church needs to operate as efficiently and reliably as a business: there the workers cooperate because they are paid to do so; Christians are to offer a free will submission to each other.

22. Paul now spells out in greater detail what submission means in various areas of life and he begins with the family. We meet a difficulty in deciding how literally we are to apply Paul's instructions. The first problem is caused by a desire amongst Christians to have a law; we want some clear-cut instructions on how to live our lives. But that is to return to the Old Covenant; we are not under law but under Grace. Christ gave us a new law – love. In fact it wasn't new because it was to encourage mutual love that the law was given. Because of our fallen nature humankind does not love automatically and we need laws to control us. In Christ we have a new, redeemed nature and it should, therefore, be natural to love. In fact, we resurrect our old nature all too often and so Paul sets out guidelines of what the way of love will mean in various circumstances. However, these are a poor substitute for love if we seek to make them into laws. If a husband has to order his wife to submit to him that marriage falls far short of Christian marriage.

There is another problem. Paul is not writing in a vacuum any more than the prophets spoke in a vacuum. They prophesied within and to particular situations. Because God is eternally the same the principles they proclaimed are eternal principles, but the application of those principles may and must change according to different situations. For instance, it is an eternal divine principle that there should be sexual discipline and honour. In Paul's culture for a woman to be unveiled would bring shame and dishonour. So, he advises that in worship women should be veiled (1Cor. 11: 5-6). Our culture is different, and because there is no shame in our eyes if a woman does not wear a hat when she prays, it is setting ourselves back under a law (which is totally meaningless to us) to insist that she should.

However, to argue this does not mean we can abandon an eternal principle because a particular application of that principle is no longer meaningful. The problem in interpreting these verses is to discover what is eternal principle – which needs to be applied in a way that is appropriate to our time and culture – and what is simply Paul working out that principle within his own culture.

In Paul's day women had little value in the world. Admittedly, in Jewish tradition motherhood was regarded highly, but in the Jewish form of Morning Prayer a man would thank God he had not been born a Gentile, a slave or a woman. The Greek and Roman cultures were worse. Christianity brought a revolutionary change in the status of women; Paul could even write (contradicting exactly that prayer of the Jewish male) "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3: 28).

However, if women used their new freedom to embarrass their husbands this would cause concern in the eyes of non-believers and would do nothing to commend the faith. Having said that and recognising the very real need to apply eternal principles in particular ways within particular cultures, there is still an eternal principle here. In a family there must be a head. If the father does not take up that role the children grow up confused about the relationship between men and women. There is a security and attraction about a truly Christian marriage where a wife, by her attitude, shows her respect for her husband and, probably unconsciously, teaches her children to rely on him, and where she and they find security in him: a marriage where the father obviously respects and adores his wife; seeks comfort and advice from her and uses his authority not to force her to do what he wants but, as far as is possible and wise, to ensure that her desires are fulfilled and to do what is best for all the family; a family where the children, with all the normal stresses caused by their growing into adults with independent ideas and hopes, nevertheless obey their parents. Such an ideal cannot be enforced by laws; it

comes only from agape love. Because that is not natural to fallen human beings – even redeemed human beings because they are still influenced by their old nature – Paul lays down these guidelines to show God’s intention and plan for the Christian family.

23-24. Some would see a descending order of authority here from Christ to the husband and through him to the wife. This would lead to the dangerous and heretical understanding that a wife has no direct relationship with Christ but only through her husband.

Furthermore we must resist the temptation to interpret these verses legalistically. Paul is using the relationship between Christ and his Church as an illustration of the relationship that ought to exist between husband and wife. Think of how Christ loved his disciples; the trust he put in them, the responsibility he gave them. Think how they relied on him, trusted him, and respected him. They would do anything for him because he would give (and on the cross did give) everything for them.

25. Paul now turns to the duty of the husband. There is no reference to his demanding obedience from his wife – that was addressed to her. He is told to love his wife and the word used for love is the special Christian word ‘agape’. Most human love depends on it being drawn from us by the object of our love; agape love is not attracted, it is given and driven; it depends solely on the one who gives it. It is an act of will to seek the welfare of someone else even at a cost to ourselves. The yardstick by which the husband’s love is to be measured is the love Christ showed to and for his Church; he gave himself up for her unreservedly.

Scripture speaks of Christ’s self-sacrifice for different groups in different contexts. In John 3:16 it is for the world; here it is for his Church; in Galatians 2:20 it is for the individual believer. Each of these self-givings is true.

26-27. As so often with Paul, once he has referred to Jesus and his work he has to expand upon it. It is as though his wonder and excitement is stirred afresh at any thought of Christ. It may be that he is thinking of how a bride prepares herself for her wedding day to be beautiful for her husband. However, the Church is prepared for her marriage to Christ not by herself but by him. (How much of the beauty of character of a wife is created by the way her husband treats her?)

Almost certainly the washing of the Church refers to baptism; but it is not simply an outward ritual, it is accompanied by the word. Is that the preaching of the Gospel which brought faith leading to the baptism? Or is it the word of confession of faith spoken by the convert? It could be either.

It does seem that Paul’s explanation of Christ’s desire for his Church becomes a momentary digression from his thoughts on the role of a husband in marriage. The reference to ‘stain and wrinkle’ etc. is difficult to apply to a husband’s dealing with his wife. Hopefully each partner in a marriage will bring out the best in the other but this is hardly comparable to the work Christ has accomplished and continues to effect in his Church. Incidentally the terms ‘wrinkle’ is unexpected; what was in Paul’s mind in applying this to the Church? Was he thinking of the heresy which arises when one truth or doctrine is overemphasised at the expense of others? (A wrinkle is too much of a right and good thing in one place.)

28-29. Paul has not yet come to quote Genesis 2:24 that husband and wife are one flesh. He will do that in v. 31; but he is leading up to it. He is not saying that the wife’s body is

literally part of the husband's body, but he does have a very high view of the effect of the marriage bond in the physical as well as social realm. In 1 Corinthians 7:1-5 he explains this in greater detail and actually states that the bodies of husband and wife belong to each other. Here, however, he is thinking more of loving respect by a husband for his wife as a person rather than her physical body. He is saying, "Your wife is as much part of you as your body is part of you. If you hurt your body you hurt yourself. Your relationship with your wife should involve so much self-giving on your part that your own welfare is inseparably bound up with her welfare". That is the case with Christ and his Church. We do not take that fact to heart as we should. On the Damascus Road Jesus told Paul (Saul) that by persecuting the Church he was persecuting him. Surely no one would take that to mean that Christ was suffering physically, as he suffered of the cross, in the physical suffering Paul was inflicting on believers. Nevertheless, the Church can rightly be described as the body of Christ on earth; so closely is he identified with it. Paul goes on immediately to make that very point.

30. Although each of us must have a direct and personal relationship with Christ it is in our unity corporately that we form his body. Each is a member of it.

31. A direct quotation of Genesis 2:24. Here is the divine ideal for marriage. There must be a severance of the previous relationship with parents, which must be recognised by parents and child alike, if a new relationship is to be formed between them. A man's allegiance to his wife must take precedence as must hers to him. The marriage union is to be so complete that the two are to form one flesh. However, the marriage bond exists while we are in the flesh. It is ended by death, for there is no marriage in heaven except that between the Lamb and his bride, the Church. Scripture teaches that there will be recognition and fellowship with our loved ones; but not marriage. Meanwhile, the union between husband and wife is to be full, intimate and exclusive.

32. 'Mystery' does not mean something which it is impossible to understand, but a truth which is hidden and which needs to be explored and mulled over if it is to be revealed. That is true of human marriage; husband and wife need to understand each other and put each other first if the marriage is to develop and blossom. The wonder of such a relationship as it progresses towards God's intention and purpose can only be known as it is experienced. But Paul applies it to the relationship between Christ and the Church. This, also, is to be full, intimate and exclusive. This does not mean believers are to have no dealings with unbelievers any more than that husband and wife should have no other friends. But for each member of the Church his or her relationship with Christ is supreme. Every action and desire is to be viewed in the light of submission to his will and the intention to please him. He has already revealed his eternal love for us.

33. Paul has been developing his instruction that his readers are to submit to one another but he has been slightly diverted by his comparison between Christian marriage and the relationship between Christ and his Church. So he concludes by returning to his theme and stresses the main point that every husband must love his wife in a self-sacrificial manner and the wife must respect the husband. The word 'respect' is hardly strong enough to translate the reverent fear that is implied. Even allowing for the cultural change in the West where the wife is no longer so completely dependent upon her husband, marriages would be far more secure and joyful if Paul's advice were followed more carefully.

Chapter 6

1-3. The laws of God are, of course, for all mankind but we cannot compel unbelievers to adopt them. However, it is essential that Christians live as God intends. Paul continues his explanation of what it means to submit to each other. Children are to honour (here translated 'obey') their parents. This is all part of the divine plan. We all need protection and instruction as children and God has set us in families for this purpose. Children are to respect their parents and this respect is revealed particularly in obedience. It is 'in the Lord' – part of their obedience to God. The words, 'for this is right', do not seem to add much. Paul quotes the commandment which states this. It is the fifth in order but he says it is the first to carry a promise with it. (Some would say the second does, in fact, carry a promise.) In the original commandment given to the Jewish nation it was so that they might live long in the land which God gave them. The land was their specific inheritance (in the original it probably did not refer so much to the individual as to the nation. The stability of family life strengthens a nation). The Ephesians did not live in that land and were not part of the Old Covenant, so Paul amends it to, "long life on the earth".

4. Having spoken to the children, Paul has a word for fathers. In his time and under the influence of Rome, fathers had absolute authority over their children. In today's culture Paul would almost certainly use the word 'parents'. In the parallel passage in Colossians (3:21) he gives a reason; "*lest they become discouraged*". Some parents set such high standards for their children, and then seek to make them attain them by pressure and scolding, that the children grow up feeling that they are a disappointment to their parents because they can never satisfy them. They need encouragement, praise and recognition.

What are the principal desires of parents for their children? a good job? a good marriage? wealth? Paul says the primary aim is that by teaching, counselling and discipline they grow up to know and serve the Lord.

5-8. At the time this was written there were many millions of slaves in the Roman Empire. Many were neither menial nor unintelligent; there were doctors and lawyers amongst them. Some enjoyed excellent relationships with their masters. Nevertheless, they had no rights and everything about their life and welfare depended on the whim of their masters. The instruction Paul gives here is of profound importance as it contains a principle which applies far beyond the specific circumstance of slavery. It can be applied to imprisonment, sickness, handicap, unfairness, injustice and any situation which may cause frustration. This is not to condone any injustice. Where it is possible, every effort should be made to set right what is wrong. However, while that effort is being made and while it is ineffective, how do we handle frustration? Paul tells the slave, "*keep your eyes on the Lord, not on your circumstances*". It may be that his master or mistress was a tyrant – always finding fault and never satisfied. The slave should picture himself as serving the Lord, as indeed he was. He can take pleasure in everything he does because he is presenting it to the Lord – even his attitude and behaviour towards his master. Whether or not his master is watching him his true Lord and Master sees. This will transform the slave's life. In a sense he is set free because his purpose and motive does not depend any more on how his earthly master reacts. Paul tells the slaves that there is a reward they will receive in heaven. This does not conflict with the truth of justification by grace alone (not merit) because he is not referring to salvation – the believing slave has already been granted this – and, in any case, the Lord does not have to give a reward, he is under no compulsion to do so. The slave does not 'earn' it; it is the grace of the Lord to give it. However, says Paul, the Lord chooses to do so and it is certain and sure.

What is more, in this – whether we please the Lord – both master and slave are on an equal footing.

10-11. Paul is marshalling his thoughts as he comes to the close of his letter. His readers are to be strong – more accurately, made strong. The strength they need comes from the Lord and they receive it by being in him – the point made in the very first verse of the letter. The double words “*mighty power*” were similarly used in 1:19.

Paul was a prisoner and would have been in the custody of a Roman soldier – maybe even chained to him. He is about to describe the Christian life as a battle against evil and his thoughts run to the armour of the soldier next to him. He will develop this shortly but first he describes the enemy. It is neither an abstract influence nor simply the absence of good; it is an actual force of evil which emanates from a created being known as the devil.

12. So many of the problems of this world are caused by people, but Paul says that people are only the means through which evil comes. Behind all wrong, hurt and evil in the world lie unseen forces. These are beings, though not human. There is a hierarchy where each group exercises different authority and power. ‘Rulers’ (arche) are princes who ruled over principalities – a specific locality or national territory. In Daniel chapter 7 we read of supernatural beings in the spiritual arena (here called ‘heavenly realms’). There is the Prince of Persia and the Prince of Greece.

‘Authorities (exousia) or powers seem to be those with a freedom of authority, so presumably they are not confined to a particular area. ‘Powers’ (kosmokrator) are literally ‘Rulers of the world’. Obviously these are very senior. It may be that this was the position Satan offered Jesus when he tempted him in the wilderness. The word is plural so cannot refer to Satan and this implies that they serve under him. The list ends with a reference to spiritual hosts of wickedness. These seem to be the troops who serve under all these evil beings appointed to some office of authority.

13. Some people “put on” the armour consciously every day. It can be helpful to remind ourselves of all that God has provided for us but, in fact, surely we never take off this armour.

Christ warned that in the last days lawlessness, disobedience and infidelity would increase. Maybe the “*day of evil*” relates to this. But we all have our own particular days of evil when we seem to be under attack and life is especially difficult. The important thing is that we should not lose our balance but stand firm. The reference to having done everything probably means, “Having accomplished great things”. After his conflict with and victory over the prophets of Baal Elijah ran away. It is after some spiritual success that we can be at our weakest and fall to some temptation: but we are not to fall; we are to stand.

14. Paul now lists items of a soldier’s armour and links each to a Christian attribute. Although each item maybe apposite to its attribute it is unwise to push the association too far. It is the total attributes which are important rather than the particular piece of armour to which it is linked.

The belt was important because it was to this that the rest of the armour was fastened. Commentators make much of the fact that the long robes of the day were a hindrance in physical work, running and fighting. They had to be hitched up and securely fastened if action was not to be impeded. However, if Paul’s model for this description was the

Roman soldier guarding him it is doubtful if this was in his mind, for such a soldier wore a short tunic. 'Truth' is reality and sincerity. It is no use entering a battle if we do not first face the reality of the situation and unless we have a basic integrity. No false boasting of our ability, yet no doubt in the justice of our cause and the strength of God.

'Righteousness' here is not primarily the righteousness imputed to us for our salvation (although we may need to rely on this where our own righteousness falls short), rather it is the righteousness of one who seeks to honour and obey God in a life devoted to him.

15. The word here translated 'readiness' can have two meanings: one is 'preparedness'. Some commentators take this to mean that the Christian is to be ready to go out and spread the good news. Of course, that is true but it probably is not the meaning here. The other way of translating the word is 'foundation'. In its context this seems far more likely. In verse 11 and verse 13 (twice) the emphasis is on being able to stand. The thought of the whole of this passage seems to be the ability of the believer to withstand the onslaught of evil forces rather than that of attack. Recently in some sections of the Church there has been a tendency to spend time and effort in confronting and attacking the devil and the forces of the occult. That was not the strategy of Christ or the early Church. We should concentrate on bringing in the Kingdom. That will certainly bring us into conflict with Satan for his rule is being challenged, but the conflict arises as an incidental to our purpose rather than a deliberate policy to attack him. Armour is designed to protect; it is not itself a weapon of attack.

It is most probable, therefore, that here Paul is thinking of a sure foothold enabling us to remain on our feet. If we know that we are right with God, then we have peace. Satan will try to make us doubt. He will accuse us of our failures. We need to stand firm on the promises of God that we have been accepted. This thought leads naturally to the next piece of the armour.

16. There were two types of shield at that time. The smaller and lighter one for close, active combat and the larger, and heavier one which could protect the whole body; it is the latter in view here. This, again, emphasises Paul's concept of not running after the devil but being able to defend ourselves when he attacks. An enemy might dip his arrows in tow and pitch and set light to them. The heavy shield of wood and leather, unlike a metal one, would allow the arrow to embed and thus extinguish itself.

Satan will do all he can to accuse us and make us doubt. At times of crisis this could cause us to panic. Our thoughts must go at once to the Lord and his promises and we must put our trust totally in him.

17. We have already seen that it is unwise to try to relate each Christian attribute too closely to the particular piece of the armour to which Paul links it. The simile of the armour is simply a happy illustration to convey an overall truth. However, there may be a pertinent aptness in linking salvation to a helmet. The helmet covers the head which controls the rest of the body. There is a meaningful statement in the TEV translation of Scripture, "Be careful how you think; your life is shaped by your thoughts" (Proverbs 4: 23). If Satan can set his doubts and fears in our minds he can render us ineffective. If we doubt that God is, or that he cares about us, we have lost the battle before we begin. When Jesus was tempted by Satan in the wilderness it was not until after he had heard the voice of God assuring him at his baptism, "*You are my Son whom I love and you delight me*". We need to be certain of our salvation – we belong to God, are his children, and he loves us.

The sword refers to the shorter weapon carried by a Roman soldier rather than the longer one; it was more a dagger than a full-length sword. This was used in close hand to hand fighting. The description 'the sword *of the Spirit*' and identifying it as the word of God, could mean that the Spirit is the sword, the word of God; or that the word of God is the sword which the Spirit provides. The latter is the more likely meaning. Jesus used the word of God in his conflict with the devil during his temptation in the wilderness. In encounter with the forces of the occult Scripture is very powerful. These forces seem to recognise its authority.

18. Armour is that which protects the soldier when he is in the battle, but the armour does not win the battle. There has to be the energy of the soldier to engage in the fight. Without pushing the analogy too far, the energy in the Christian's warfare is prayer. It is here that we engage the enemy.

It is important that we understand that prayer is not seeking to get our will done on earth, but God's. He has given mankind dominion over the earth and therefore, astonishingly, he waits for us to seek and ask that his will be done. In order to call down his will, we need to know what that will is. It is the Holy Spirit who reveals that to us; so all our prayer needs to be guided by him; that is, we need to pray in the Spirit rather than in the flesh. If we have to make a differentiation between prayers and requests, the former relates more to communion with God and the latter to supplication or intercession. If it is true that God waits for us to ask him to intervene on earth, how important it is that we are constantly alert to what is needed – especially for the welfare of all believers as, together, we engage in our warfare.

19-20. Having charged his readers to pray for their fellow believers, he now asks for prayer for himself. Most of us, if we were in prison, would probably seek prayer for our freedom; Paul asks for boldness and fearlessness. His overriding concern is that he will faithfully explain the good news which was eternally in the heart and plan of God but has now been effected and revealed by Jesus. Ambassadors are sent by the ruler of one nation to represent them in another. Paul served the King of heaven and was fully aware of the great responsibility laid on him as an ambassador of Christ. Because of his faithfulness he was in prison. Only those who have been in that situation can know the effect this has. Paul asks for prayer that he should continue to speak fearlessly as his role demands.

21-22. Tychicus was close to Paul and a strength and comfort to him. He was with Paul on a number of occasions and, obviously, was with him in Rome when Paul wrote this letter. He is mentioned in Acts 20:4, 2 Timothy 4:12, Titus 3:12 as well as Colossians 4: 7. Tychicus was the one who was to carry the letter to Ephesus and that to Colossae. The latter was clearly addressed to a particular church; this to Ephesus is probably one of a number of identical letters sent to different churches (see note on 1:1). Not only has Paul not made any reference to the particular circumstances of his readers, he makes no reference to his own other than that he is in prison. He leaves it to Tychicus to speak personally about him.

23-24. Paul concludes with a greeting which includes keywords of the Christian Faith. Peace, of which he has spoken so much in this letter – the peace with God which brings peace in the unity of all believers, Jews and Greeks. We are all part of God's family and are, therefore, brothers and sisters. Love, which describes God himself and, together with faith, cements all believers together. Grace – God's free self giving - is for and offered to everyone, but it is only those who respond to him who can receive it. The term

'undying' is in the sense of incorruptible and may, as in some translations, refer to God's grace rather than our love.

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